

# "You Must Follow Our Belief or Else You Can't Receive God": Constructing a Sexual Bi/Theology of Eucharist

By Joseph N. Goh

**Abstract:** Embodied experiences and insights of LGBTQ persons can challenge and contradict grand metanarratives of sacramental theology that exclude and/or censure these persons. Through a theological investigation of the narratives of Vincent, a 26-year old Malaysian, I examine the dynamics of his self-identifying as bisexual and Roman Catholic in relation to his perception of the Eucharist. Drawing from his narratives and aided by the theologisings of Marcella Althaus-Reid, Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff, I explore alternative ways in which the Eucharist can be imagined for LGBTQ Christians.

**Key Terms:** bisexual, Eucharist, queer theology, Malaysia, sacrament, sexual bi/theology

## Queer Upheavals

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This essay is a theological investigation of the narratives of Vincent, a 26-year old student who identifies as a Hakka-Chinese Malaysian, Roman Catholic and bisexual.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, I am examining the dynamics of Vincent's self-identifying as bisexual and Roman Catholic in relation to his perception of the Eucharist. Based on his lived experiences and insights as a case study, I aim to explore possibilities for a sexual bi/theology of Eucharist for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\* and other queer (LGBTQ) Christians. I have selected Vincent's retort, "you must follow our belief, or else you can't receive God," as a pivotal statement for indicating the conflict that he experiences in relation to his perception of the Roman Catholic Church's stand on man-to-man sex and the reception of the

Eucharist. Vincent's articulation that he is not permitted to "receive Eucharist if [he has] not gone to Confession" may indicate an understanding that reflects the *Catechism of the Catholic Church's* stipulation on sin and Eucharist. The *Catechism* states that "anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion . . . without having first received sacramental absolution, unless he has a grave reason for receiving Communion and there is no possibility of going to confession."<sup>2</sup> Although Vincent has access to sacramental Confession, he does not see sexual engagements with men as sinful.

In pursuing this alternative understanding of the Eucharist based on Vincent's narratives, I first provide a background into two realities that affect LGBTQ Malaysian Christians: (i) legalities surrounding same-sex activity; and (ii) mainstream Christian perspectives on LGBTQ sexual

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expressions with a specific focus on the Roman Catholic Church's stance as a case in point. Thereafter, by using a Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology to analyze Vincent's narratives, I develop the notion of a sexual bi/theology. Here, I am aided by queer, liberation feminist Marcella Althaus-Reid's proposal of "Bi/Christ." I conclude by examining more of Vincent's narratives to further inform my development of a sexual bi/theology in relation to the Eucharist. In this regard, I am assisted by feminist theologians Andrea Bieler's and Luise Schottroff's idea of "sacramental permeability [which] means that physical matters . . . can become vehicles that make transparent the Holy One who gives birth to the Eucharistic life."<sup>3</sup> In other words, my theological reflections on Vincent's lived experiences and perspectives suggest other ways in which human-divine connections can be sacramentally imagined for LGBTQ Christians.

The embodied experiences of LGBTQ Christians can interrogate, challenge and contradict the ways in which grand metanarratives of sacramental theology exclude and/or censure these persons. These upheavals are necessary if sacraments are to become avenues of godly connectivity and spiritual nourishment for LGBTQ Christians who include sacramental practices in their worship, rather than implements of painful exclusion and condemnation. This is particularly relevant in the context of practising LGBTQ Christians who are constantly subjected to 'pulpit bullying' that echoes doctrinal pronouncements of their sexualities as "intrinsically disordered"<sup>4</sup> and constitutive of "grave depravity."<sup>5</sup> My intention is not to provide universal solutions to complex theological realities, but to ask questions and offer possibilities by "seeing things in a different light and reclaiming voices and sources that previously had been ignored, silenced, or discarded."<sup>6</sup>

## **Non-Heteronormative Sexualities in Malaysia: Legalities and Mixed Christian Perspectives**

Malaysia is home to 28.3 million inhabitants: 61.3% Muslims, 19.8% Buddhists, 9.2% Chris-

tians, 6.3% Hindus and 3.4% other-religious, non-religious, unknown and practitioners of "traditional" beliefs.<sup>7</sup> Roman Catholics make up 3.1% of the population.<sup>8</sup> The Malaysian Penal Code considers both oral and anal penetrative sex as "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" and subjects the offender to imprisonment and/or flogging.<sup>9</sup> Although this law applies to all Malaysians, its implementation in the sodomy charges against former Malaysian deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim has led to a popular understanding of this law as a reference to man-to-man sexual activities.<sup>10</sup> According to Malaysian scholar Shanon Shah, "as of 2009, only *seven* charges had been brought under Section 377 since 1938."<sup>11</sup> Despite the rare deployment of this Code, its existence suggests a continuing sense of vulnerability for all Malaysians, including LGBTQ persons. Additionally, the Syariah Criminal Offences (Federal Territories) Act 1997 prohibits "sexual relations between male persons,"<sup>12</sup> but is only applicable to Muslims.

As many Malaysians profess to practise some form of belief, political and religious leaders have taken it upon themselves to define the reception and understanding of LGBTQ sexualities. I will briefly illustrate this reality by referring to the banning of the annual sexuality rights festival *Seksualiti Merdeka* in 2011. This festival, which began in 2008, seeks "to advance the social and legal acceptance of sexual diversity in Malaysia through reference to the international arena."<sup>13</sup> In the year that it was banned, the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia Muhyiddin Yassin was reported as decrying the festival as a "deviationist activity and . . . against the tradition, culture and religion practised by the various communities in the country."<sup>14</sup> Christian churches were largely silent on the matter, although Malaysian Roman Catholic bishop and former president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Paul Tan ventured to speak up:

We must be aware and . . . lament . . . we must strive to prevent the mistreatment of gays, lesbians, transgender and transvestites in our society . . . Mistreatment of people of unconventional sexual orientation flies against the dignity of the human person[.]

respect for which is the essence of human rights.<sup>15</sup>

Tan's comments did not specifically touch on the Roman Catholic Church's theological position on LGBTQ persons. In fact, no Malaysian Christian church offered any theological insights on the banning.<sup>16</sup> Instead, the prelate's words articulated the Malaysian Roman Catholic church's pastoral attitudes towards LGBTQ persons. While Tan cautioned against an "unrigorous philosophical selectivity that characterises the concept of human rights in the West"<sup>17</sup> in relation to LGBTQ issues, his position against physical violence towards LGBTQ persons was unequivocally clear.

Tan's statement reflects Roman Catholic pastoral pronouncements on LGBTQ issues. The *Catechism* states that "men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies . . . must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity [and] every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided."<sup>18</sup> I read the call for "compassion and sensitivity" for LGBTQ persons as somewhat condescending, as though LGBTQ persons are unfortunate abnormalities that warrant pity. Moreover, an injunction against "*unjust* discrimination" suggests a defensible formation of '*just* discrimination.'

### "Just Discrimination"

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I argue that my notion of 'just discrimination' can be seen in doctrinal prohibitions that are imposed on LGBTQ persons. These include, for example, the stand against same-sex marriages and the proscription of studying for the priesthood for "those who practise homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called 'gay culture.'"<sup>19</sup> The Roman Catholic church in Malaysia echoes the official church statement that "to choose someone of the same sex for one's sexual activity is to annul the rich symbolism and meaning, not to mention the goals, of the Creator's sexual design."<sup>20</sup> Roman Catholic bishop of Sibiu in the Malaysian state of Sarawak, Joseph Hii, declared that "God made man and woman, and united them to become one flesh, not man with man, and woman with woman."<sup>21</sup>

Through theological arguments for 'just discrimination' in doctrine—that it is so because God made it so—it becomes easy to see how pastoral efforts can be severely curtailed by theological and doctrinal castigations of same-sex sexual expressions.

Although the Roman Catholic church aims to show pastoral care, its 'love the sinner, but hate the sin' premise works against such attempts. Its theological and doctrinal understanding of same-sex sexual expression as "intrinsically disordered . . . contrary to the natural law . . . [closing] the sexual act to the gift of life . . . [and] . . . not [proceeding] from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity"<sup>22</sup> forecloses explorations that can benefit the spiritual lives of LGBTQ Christians. *Theological* prohibitions of same-sex sexual expression that are based on a belief that the "truth about persons being an image of God [has] been obscured by original sin"<sup>23</sup> bear the potential to dilute or even nullify efforts of *pastoral* outreach to LGBTQ Christians. Such approaches evince a theological-pastoral binary that stipulates that one is *either* heteronormatively-inclined and ordered towards theological-pastoral approval, *or* non-heteronormatively-inclined yet pastorally accepted, albeit theologically abjected. Although theology and pastoral care can inform and affect each other in positive ways, I posit that Roman Catholic theological perspectives on non-heteronormative sexualities have not been sufficiently transformed by pastoral insights. The theological-pastoral binary in this matter continues to maintain the doctrinal disapproval of LGBTQ Christians.

## A Sexual Bi/Theology

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Since theological-pastoral binaries can exclude LGBTQ Christians through variegated nuances of abnormalcy and deficiency, I find it necessary to consider other alternatives. Vincent's accounts of his lived experiences as a bisexual-identifying man can help in these considerations. In response to my question on how he identifies himself sexually, Vincent responds that he is "emotionally and physically attracted to both man and woman."

Difference is that I have sex with a man ... we won't accidentally have a child ... But with a woman, we have to have all this safety precaution and use condom. And that would be ... Some form of excitement ... to prevent, er, the girl from getting pregnant ... I will anticipate like one day, I won't have to use condom, that er our sex would be natural ... it will have em an outcome, a child ... But with man, there is no such experience. This is just sex ... if it's er similarities, both emotions involved, but in terms of differences, em, with man there is lack of this.

As a bisexual-identifying man, Vincent distinguishes between “sex with a man” and “with a woman” although he recognises that there are “emotions involved” in both. Sex with women presents “some form of excitement” in preventing “the girl from getting pregnant” through the use of “safety precaution[s]” and “condom[s].” Conversely, Vincent claims “a lack” in sex with men, as it could be “just sex” and does not bear potentialities for progeny. As such, he draws a distinction in sexual relationships between men and women. Yet this distinction, in which a choice of relationship excludes the other, does not suggest a binary in which one choice irrevocably invalidates and precludes the other. Instead, I suggest that Vincent constructs *desirous differentiations* in which sex with a woman is ‘something more he can do.’ In contradistinction with a man-man bonding, a relationship with a woman provides a differently ‘fulfilling,’ foreseeable future in which “sex would be natural” with “an outcome, a child.” As such, the added possibility of bearing children with a woman—the possibility of ‘something more he can do’—produces the notion of “natural” for him.

Although he has made a choice to be in a relationship with a man at this point in his life, Vincent allocates *varying visceral currencies* to sexual connections with men and women. With men, he looks at sexual connections in terms of emotions and the impossibility of pregnancy. With women, he understands that sexual connections can confer possible procreative ends. These allocations, which are processes of Vincent’s sexual self-communication, are crucial in providing the

clarity and practicalities that can inform Vincent’s becoming bisexual. Hence, “becoming bisexual ... takes place by actualizing relational self-determination (i.e., choice of partner, nature of relationship, kind of fidelity).”<sup>24</sup> For Vincent *at this moment in time*, becoming bisexual means *honest sexual self-communication* in making the decision to be in a relationship with a man, and knowing the differences that this relationship entails *without* discounting other possibilities of which he is capable. As such, Vincent harbours ‘*both-and*’ rather than ‘*either-or*’ sexual potentialities.

### Differentiated Yet Inclusive

The visceral dynamics of Vincent’s differentiated yet inclusive sexual capacity yield valuable insights for queer theological reflections. Vincent’s narrative as a man who is attracted to both men and women, can prove helpful in a metaphorical ‘bisexual way’ of understanding theology. In order to elucidate what I postulate, I first proffer a double-pronged premise that human lived experiences and life circumstances can manifest a ceaseless flow of reflexive, honest sexual self-communication, and that this self-communication can be theologically understood as human-divine communication. I submit to the idea that any human-divine communication is, as sacramental theologian Kenan B. Osborne articulates in reference to sacramentality, “an action of God, a blessing, and a subsequent human response.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, in speaking on the Eucharist, Roman Catholic prelate and Asian theologian Luis Antonio Tagle offers another insight:

We have a God who takes the initiative in communicating. Our God talks; our God discloses the Divine plan. Our God discloses Himself so that the communication we are talking about in the context of the Christian faith is first and foremost, an action of God.<sup>26</sup>

In extending Osborne’s and Tagle’s theological propositions, I postulate that this human-divine action-response relationship occurs by virtue of human existence itself, and is so intimate that it creates a seamless collaborative process in human

living. Here, I mean that I am less in favour of a one-sided image of God speaking and human persons listening than I am in that of God and human persons actively conversing, or 'speaking/listening' and 'disclosing/responding' together in embodied experiences. This idea is a way of understanding and explaining the popular rhetoric of God inspiring the subject, or the subject petitioning the divine for guidance, as it proposes that a *human-divine dynamism* is already taking place, with or without an explicit acknowledgement of 'God.'

If Vincent's self-communication can be seen theologically as an intimate human-divine communication, it is possible to see that this human-divine dynamism does not consist of an irrevocable foreclosure of one possibility in favour of another. The reflexive self-communication that leads Vincent in the direction of a current relationship with a man also plays a role in his consideration of future relationships "with women," in accordance with what he "will anticipate ... one day." Although having a current male partner means an honest sexual self-communication that leads to the foregoing of a female partner at this juncture, both possibilities are still within Vincent's grasp. As such, human-divine interactions carry many different possibilities at different points in life that do not necessarily abide by fixed ecclesiastical prescriptions. Vincent's spiritual self-understanding further elucidates this point:

Interviewer: How do you express your religious beliefs as a Catholic?

Vincent: Em, I pray ... I do sign of the cross ... with my Catholic friends, family or during Christmas, if we pray, we pray together ... I go to church, once in a while. Er, sometimes I will want to go for Confession also. But something hinders me ... Somehow I just didn't go (half-laughs) ... It's like ... going for Confession, is the priest going to tell me something I have to subscribe to whatever, and be told, maybe, and er, going for Confession means I agree ... that certain things are sin. And I'm confessing it as sin. And when I confess it as sin, then er means, after Confession, where I'm out clean, no more sin, er I shall not

practice whatever that I myself have see it as sin. So, because of my perception of God and Jesus, as like what I've just described just now, so, em, so it's incongruent with the Confession box. Like ... what is seen as sin by the Church.

Interviewer: What do you see as not a sin that the Church says it's a sin?

Vincent: Er, sex with men ...

Vincent describes his apprehension towards sacramental Confession as "something [which] hinders [him]." His apprehension stems from the possibility of a forcible and unquestioned acquiescence to the dictates of religious authority as personified in a "priest [who is] going to tell [him] something [he has] to subscribe to." Vincent's hesitance "to go for Confession" because "going for Confession means ... [he agrees] that certain things are sin" points to a rejection of ecclesiastical impositions in which he has to submit to the notion that "sex with men" is sinful. This rejection is further reinforced by his perception of Confession as a means by which he is "out clean, no more sin ... [and whereby he will] not practice whatever that [he sees] as sin." For him, to succumb to confessing sexual relations with men as a sin is to relinquish such activities as well as his personal belief that sex with men is *not* a sin.

## Talking Back

Vincent employs a *strategy of talking back* to the authority of ecclesiastical theologising by challenging their claims that same-sex activity is sinful. Such claims transgress his "perception of God and Jesus ... [as] ... incongruent with the Confession box." This perception alludes to his reference to "God and Jesus" as:

Compassionate ... They are not as strict as the Church preaches (chuckles) ... they are more flexible, yeah. They understand us, er what we go through, in life, and they understand er every experiences is unique, and ... they doesn't discriminate us.



As such, Vincent's talking back displays theological counter-narratives in which "God and Jesus" are "are not as strict as the Church preaches." That he unhinges the divine persons from religious institutions is queer, for such an act troubles and confuses the blurring of boundaries in which God and Church are unproblematically conflated. Vincent posits that "God and Jesus" are "more flexible," that "they understand" the intricacies of life and "[don't] discriminate" against those whose sexualities are incongruous with official church stipulations. I suggest that Vincent's talking back, replete with his list of divine magnanimity, emanates from his perception that religious institutions often fall short in their efforts to reflect God whom they aspire to represent, notably in matters of non-heteronormative sexualities. His body epistemologies as a bisexual-identifying man are authoritative in informing him that he can identify and express himself *both* as bisexual *and* Roman Catholic in his relationship with "God and Jesus."

Aquinas' systematic theological exposition on non-heteronormative sexuality, whereby he proclaims "copulation with an undue sex, male with male, or female with female . . . [as] . . . the 'vice of sodomy,'"<sup>27</sup> has coloured much of Christian theology on sexuality through the ages. Aside from condemning same-sex activity as 'unnatural' for being contrary to "right reason,"<sup>28</sup> Aquinas also hails such expressions as the "gravest of all"<sup>29</sup> sinful activities. His argument against what is 'unnatural' leans heavily on what he understands as 'natural,' particularly in his treatment of natural law. For Aquinas, law are interior "rules and measures"<sup>30</sup> of human conduct with a divine origin, as "all things partake somewhat of the eternal law."<sup>31</sup> As such, to act 'naturally' is not only to act befittingly in the human sense, but also to obey a divine mandate.

### *A Bi/Christ*

Yet, Marcella Althaus-Reid would decry the valorisation of this purported 'naturalness' as "the perpetuation of heterosexual categories in theology."<sup>32</sup> This means that what is boasted as 'natural' in theological tenets relies on heteronormative con-

structions as the ultimate, authoritative norm by which all other theological alternatives are judged and found 'unnatural.' For this reason, Althaus-Reid proposes the idea of a "Bi/Christ."<sup>33</sup> The theological concern here does not centre on the sexual desire of Christ. Rather, it points to a Christological consideration that propels "the reality of people's identity outside heterosexuality"<sup>34</sup> and proposes "a pattern of thought for a larger Christ outside binary boundaries."<sup>35</sup> In advocating Bi/Christ, Althaus-Reid roots for Christological thinking that charts directions for "new perceptions of coherence, outside the coherence of binarism,"<sup>36</sup> as "this larger Christ goes beyond 'either this or that,' because there are so many sexual identities to which we do not have names to give."<sup>37</sup> Thus, just as the fluidity of sexual desires demands a recognition that such desires exceed essentialised, monolithic identities that are 'this-and-not-that,' Christological pursuits need not be forcefully dichotomised into 'this-and-not-that,' particularly if such pursuits foster the theological exclusion of non-heteronormative subjectivities. Hence, "the Bi/Christ takes it all into his life,"<sup>38</sup> meaning that alternative Christological methodologies are necessary if theological constructions of Christ are to speak with more contextual relevance to variegated forms of human existence.

I borrow from Althaus-Reid's Bi/Christ methodology, but concentrate less on its Christological dimension. Instead, I aim to develop a *bi/theology*, a means to articulate how human-divine interactions can occur in ways that may not necessarily abide by the binaries of canonical theological systems. Vincent's experiences of faith and life are helpful for theological methods which are the antitheses of 'heteronormative theological methods.' Heteronormative theologies insist on grand metanarratives that seem intolerant of more diverse and inclusive notions to preserve what is perceived as theological 'purity,' particularly notions of God and theo-sexual ethics. Conversely, bi/theological methodologies are queer, in that they unfasten lofty theological notions from their rigid anchorages. Bi/theologising considers 'both-and' options against 'either-or' stipulations, notably for non-heteronormative subjectivities. In this sense, the 'both-and' sense of desire that Vincent embodies in his lived realities

can shed greater light on ways in which theology can embrace non-heteronormative persons more inclusively.

Bi/theology provides an understanding that human-divine interactions are *situated realities that always are in flux*. I suggest that within these dynamics, the debate on whether it is an imposition of 'God's will' in the various aspects of one's life that remains unequivocally static, or whether human persons should reject or embrace 'divine guidance' as an external force becomes moot. Rather, one experiences the ongoing reality of *human-divine life invitations* through honest self/human-divine communications throughout one's lifetime. This means that various options are available at various points in time as a consequence of this intimate human-divine collaboration within one's body epistemologies. Such options are taken up according to what one perceives as the best possibility for oneself at particular moments in life, even if such decisions do not cohere with mainstream theological rhetoric. These human-divine life invitations point towards interminable, open invitations with possibilities of accepting and rejecting life's alternatives at any given time.

In applying these insights to the issue of non-heteronormative subjectivities, I posit that a *sexual bi/theology* calls into question a heteronormatively compulsory "coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire"<sup>39</sup> as non-negotiable for theological approval. It challenges notions that theological constructions of human persons and acts must unequivocally support and rehearse heteronormative norms which support the idea of same-sex activities "as a serious depravity and even presented as the sad consequence of rejecting God."<sup>40</sup> To insist on this arrangement is to overlook the complex 'speak/listen' and 'disclose/respond' dimensions of human-divine collaboration in human sexualities that far exceed heteronormative theological metanarratives. A sexual bi/theology resists the idea that constructions of God and human-divine dynamism must *either* be heteronormative *or* are otherwise invalid. It makes provision for alternative theological thinking that can *both* resist heteronormativity *and* celebrate non-heteronormative sexualities,

while remaining theologically sound. Simply put, a sexual bi/theology suggests that one can express one's gay- or bisexual-identifying with the bestowal of divine approval, rather than divine condemnation.

## Constructing a Sexual Bi/Theology of Eucharist

After having explained my notion of a sexual bi/theology in the previous section, I now proceed with constructing a sexual bi/theology of Eucharist. Here, I commence by examining Vincent's ideas of Confession, which serve as a prelude to how he understands Eucharist, particularly in terms of his sexuality:

Interviewer: Among all the sacraments of the Church, why did you single out Confession and talk about it? ...

Vincent: Because Confession is related to the topic of sin, and sin is also related to how the Church view LGBT ... As for Baptism and Eucharist, the relevance is lower. I see Baptism as a renewal, but after Baptism people still fall into sinful act, and Confession is the ongoing renewal thing. Eucharist is actually discriminating because we shall not receive Eucharist if we have not gone to Confession. So Confession is like a prerequisite for Eucharist.

Vincent reiterates the connection he made earlier between ecclesiastical authority, sacramental Confession, the assigning of sin, and LGBTQ Christians. He adds that although "for Baptism and Eucharist, the relevance is lower" in the context of sin, they are not entirely divorced from it. He sees Baptism "as a renewal" in which "people still fall into sinful act," and Confession as the "ongoing renewal thing" or the medium through which sins can be repeatedly expunged. Vincent's declaration that "Eucharist is actually discriminating" because "Confession is like a prerequisite for Eucharist" is important, because the insistence on Confession

before receiving the Eucharist negatively affects his spiritual perspectives. Vincent continues:

Interviewer: Can you elaborate on what you mean by discriminating? . . .

Vincent: It's discriminating because in order to receive it, we have to follow the rules set by them . . . forced to agree to their belief that homosexual is a sin, as going for Confession would automatically means submitting to their belief on this.

### *Discriminatory Rules*

To reiterate an earlier statement, Vincent's hesitance in availing himself of Confession stems from his conviction that same-sex activity with men is not sinful. He realises that he may not be eligible for the reception of the Eucharist if he does not "follow the rules set by [ecclesiastical authorities]" or "submitting to their belief on [the sinfulness of same-sex activity]" by "going for Confession." Hence, Vincent continues to talk back by claiming that ecclesiastical laws on sexual-sacramental matters are discriminatory, "because in order to receive [the Eucharist], we have to follow the rules set by them." In highlighting how LGBTQ Christians will be "forced to agree to [the ecclesiastical authorities'] belief that homosexual [expression] is a sin" by confessing the sin of same-sex activity prior to receiving the Eucharist, Vincent names *the hegemony of a sexual-sacramental discrimination* that is embedded in Roman Catholic theologies and by extension, doctrine and pastoral praxis. He elaborates further on this discrimination:

Discrimination to me is when one person's standard is not up to the other, and those who are not up to the standard they have set are often being despised . . . when people discriminate you, it's because you are not like them. So, Eucharist is discriminating because it favours those who have followed the Church's rules and belief, which means you have to be part of them, same belief, to receive it. It doesn't make sense because it is analogous to saying, to receive God, you must follow our belief, or else you can't receive God.

Vincent's narrative denotes that because "one person's standard is not up to the other," this person is "often being despised." This means that by using himself/herself as the yardstick of perfection, the one who discriminates also judges the one who is discriminated against and marks him as inferior. The one who judges denies the one who is judged the rights of his/her life particularities and possibilities, and locates him/her in the realm of despicability. Discrimination also re-creates the one who is judged as the Other, "because [the discriminated person is] not like them."

Vincent rejects the discrimination he sees in the use of the Eucharist as leverage to secure adherence to ecclesiastical dictates, whereby one has "to be part of [ecclesiastical authorities], same belief, [in order] to receive [the Eucharist]." The hegemony of a sexual-sacramental discrimination is manifested in theological-pastoral constructions of sin and unworthiness that have led ecclesiastical authorities to *either* "[favour] those who have followed the Church's rules and belief" *or* discriminate against dissidents. This theological-pastoral ethos of disapproval "doesn't make sense" for Vincent, "because it is analogous to saying, to receive God, [one] must follow [their] belief, or else [one] can't receive God." My earlier discussion on discrimination helps to further elucidate the poignancy of this statement in relation to the Eucharist. Vincent struggles with making sense out of the discrimination of heteronormative theological-pastoral constructions that forbid him from receiving the Eucharist unless he contradicts the honest sexual self-communication that connects him to "God and Jesus," and confesses his "sin." Within a *comply-or-be-excluded binary*, the Eucharist can mark Vincent as the inferior and despicable Other because of his dissidence.

### *Unconditional Divine Love*

As a counter-narrative, Vincent offers his insight of Eucharist that can encompass both his identifying as bisexual and Roman Catholic:

How I would like to see Eucharist is . . . everyone is worthy of God no matter how



great your sin is. God loves you. God is always looking for you before you even look for him. We are all one family. Brothers and sisters in Christ. And many more others. However, when one is already a believer, things change. Rules are imposed. There is this thing called, what constitutes a rightful living as a Christian.

Vincent underscores a eucharistic vision of inclusive, unconditional divine love which permeates human lives. That "everyone is worthy of God no matter how great your sin is" points to Vincent's notion of a divine acceptance that envelops a person regardless of that person's sexual desires. Given that Vincent rejects the idea of man-to-man sex as sinful, I suggest that his reference to sin here is directed at ecclesiastical authorities who see non-heteronormative sexual expressions as sinful. Vincent rejects this view by firstly emphasising divine traits of love and acceptance, that "God loves you ... always looking for you before you even look for him" in contrast with ecclesiastical authorities that try to dictate his spiritual life with conditional, dictatorial pronouncements. Second, he highlights the relational aspects of faith. Although he may identify as bisexual, he remains part of the greater community of "one family [of] brothers and sisters in Christ." This assertion, as well as his reference to "many more others" is intriguing. Vincent may be alluding to greater human-divine connectivities outside the borders of Christian membership. He may also be hinting at LGBTQ Christians who are marginalised as they do not adhere to heteronormative regimes of Christian living. In either case, his emphases on divine inclusivity and fullness of belonging form the basis of his eucharistic vision.

Nevertheless, Vincent points out that "when one is already a believer, things change." In other words, ecclesiastical membership can potentially be ecclesiastical exclusion. Speaking within the context of Eucharist and non-heteronormative sexuality, Vincent highlights how "rules are imposed" to accomplish the intended effect of "what constitutes a rightful living as a Christian," even if this effect is contrary to lived experiences. From this perspective, sacramental theology can obstruct the complexities of human-divine dynamism. In detailing sacramen-

tal permeability, Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff explain that:

virtually everything has the potential to reveal the sacramentality of life, yet we need the ability to see it. Thus, sacraments like the Eucharist can be understood as gifts that make God's love and self-giving visible to us. We emphasize potentiality instead of realization because the physical life is also the place where alienation and violence are revealed. [The Eucharist] points to the presence of God among us and in the world. And yet it simultaneously lifts up the hiddenness of God in the body politics related to food, from hunger to eating disorders.<sup>41</sup>

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### *Revealing/Concealing God*

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Bieler and Schottroff show how the Eucharist harbours a twofold potentiality: it can both expose and obscure divine workings. The Eucharist is a site where God in human life can be manifested yet also concealed when sacramental theologising exclude lived experiences on "body politics related to food." I wish to extend their thought by suggesting that the Eucharist bears a twofold potentiality of revealing/concealing God when it is deployed to include/exclude non-heteronormative subjectivities. In Vincent's experience, a eucharistic attitude that focuses on God's love and that "everyone is worthy" of receiving God's love in the Eucharist can reveal human-divine dynamism, just as the insistence on a heteronormative, "rightful living as a Christian" can conceal this same dynamism.

Hence, a sexual bi/theology of Eucharist proposes a space of unconditional, divine and loving inclusivity, as well as fullness of participation and belonging for LGBTQ persons who see their sexualities, faith and sacramental practices as important. A sexual bi/theology of Eucharist bridges the gap between theology and pastoral praxis, and embraces the fluidity, unexpectedness, and unpredictable conventions and multiple possibilities of sexual lives. It provides an inclusive platform for the "speaking/listening" and "disclosing/responding" dynamics of human-divine interactions and collaborations. It rallies against the hegemony of

sexual-sacramental discrimination by suspending the notion of sin and mechanism of exclusion which can cause alienation and destruction to LGBTQ lives. A sexual bi/theology of Eucharist allows LGBTQ Christians to discern, manifest and celebrate the human-divine dynamics that are ceaselessly operating within them, thus enabling these dynamics to grow and flourish.

## Endnotes

1. This paper emanates from a larger socio-theological doctoral project involving recorded interviews with 30 non-heteronormative men whose gender and sexual identities defy the normative in Malaysia which began in 2012. "Vincent" is a pseudonym.
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4. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 2357.
5. *Ibid.*, 2357.
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7. See Department of Statistics, Malaysia, *Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristics 2010*, 2010, [http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/download\\_Population/files/census2010/Taburan\\_Penduduk\\_dan\\_Ciri-ciri\\_Asas\\_Demografi.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/download_Population/files/census2010/Taburan_Penduduk_dan_Ciri-ciri_Asas_Demografi.pdf).
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9. See *Malaysian Penal Code*, 1997, sec. 377A–C, [www.agc.gov.my/Akta/Vol.%2012/Act%20574.pdf](http://www.agc.gov.my/Akta/Vol.%2012/Act%20574.pdf).
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13. Julian C. H. Lee, "Sexuality Rights Activism in Malaysia: The Case of Seksualiti Merdeka," in *Social Activism in Southeast Asia*, ed. Michele Ford (New York: Routledge, 2013), 171.
14. "DPM: Seksualiti Merdeka Not Suitable," *BorneoPost Online* (November 4, 2011), <http://www.theborneopost.com/2011/11/04/dpm-seksualiti-merdeka-not-suitable-notsuitable/>.
15. Paul Tan, as quoted in Terence Netto, "Bishop Takes Nuanced Stance on Seksualiti Merdeka," *Malaysiakini*, November 4, 2011, <http://www.majodi.org/index.php/bishop-paul-tan/bishops-desk/129-bishop-takes-nuanced-stance-on-seksualiti-merdeka>.
16. See Joseph N. Goh, "The Word Was *Not* Made Flesh: Theological Reflections on the Banning of *Seksualiti Merdeka* 2011," *Dialog* 51, no. 2 (2012): 145–154, doi:10.1111/j.1540-6385.2012.00671.x.
17. Netto, "Bishop Takes Nuanced Stance on Seksualiti Merdeka."
18. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2358.
19. Congregation for Catholic Education, "Criteria for the Discernment of Vocation for Persons with Homosexual Tendencies," November 4, 2005, para. 2, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccatheduc\\_doc\\_20051104\\_istruzione\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20051104_istruzione_en.html).
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22. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2357.
23. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons," para. 6.
24. Sharon A. Bong, "Beyond Queer: An Epistemology of Bi Choice," *Journal of Bisexuality* 11, no. 1 (2011): 54, doi:10.1080/15299716.2011.545304.
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26. Luis Antonio Tagle, "Eucharist and Communication: A Theological Reflection," in *Eucharist as Communication*, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers, no. 124, 12<sup>th</sup> Annual FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet (Bangkok, Thailand: FABC Office of Social Communication, 2007), 46, [http://www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/fabc\\_paper\\_124B.pdf](http://www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/fabc_paper_124B.pdf).
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28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*, II–II, Q. 154, 12.
30. *Ibid.*, I–II, Q. 91, 2.
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33. *Ibid.*, 112.
34. *Ibid.*, 117.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*, 119.
37. *Ibid.*, 116.
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40. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics," December 29, 1975, para. VIII, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19751229\\_persona-humana\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19751229_persona-humana_en.html).
41. Bieler and Schottroff, *The Eucharist*, 5.