

## SEARCHED AND KNOWN

### An Autoethno-Theological Reflection on the Sexual Body and Creation in Relation to Psalm 139

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#### Preliminaries

As a gay-identifying, “mostly Christian”<sup>1</sup> Malaysian academic, ordained minister and theologian who resides in Malaysia, my perceptions and articulations of seeking communion with God are often subjected to great upheavals. My daily life in a country that frequently displays socio-cultural and religio-political disapprovals of queer<sup>2</sup> persons further exacerbates the situation. The Malaysian Penal Code and *Syariah* (Islamic) laws in Malaysia criminalize oral and anal sex, thus continuously sweeping in currents of fear and dread among queer Malaysians, chiefly men who identify as gay or bisexual, and *mak nyahs* or male-to-female transgender persons.<sup>3</sup> Such religio-legal laws find allies in numerous mainstream Christian churches in the country that condemn same-sex practices.<sup>4</sup> Thus, my reflections on creation and the sexual body in relation to Psalm 139—which I interpret as a psalm that celebrates creation—are framed by this climate of precariousness and vulnerability.

My reflection also engages with the complications that are present in my daily encounters with the multiple facets of my “humanness” as a sexual person. In quotidian realities, I constantly experience my “personhood [as] an evolving process of becoming,”<sup>5</sup> as being far more impermanent, contingent, and fluid than a unified whole. Similarly—and consequently—my experiences of God often lie outside stable conventions

and predictability. In the pathways of attempting to experience myself as “my own self,” or as Yong Ting Jin puts it, as a “subject self in the experienced reality,”<sup>6</sup> I find myself steeped in a cognizance of my ongoing fragmentation and equivocality. Yet, I feel an unleashing of ironic self-assurance that my unstable and impermanent self-evolution is a necessary, constitutive reality of my interminable existence. My corporeal, intellectual, and spiritual experiences that converge and impact my life journeys in subtle yet disruptive ways leave me in a state that is mired with perplexity and confusion, yet I am convinced that these convolutions are constitutive of this becoming.

My self-evolution—my ongoing createdness—leads me to ponder on the particularities of this very createdness: What does it mean for me to be a creation of God? Furthermore, if I am indeed created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27), in what ways are my multifaceted realities inherited from my creator? As a man who is emotionally, physically, and intellectually attracted to other men, in what ways can my sexuality be seen as a godly inheritance, a reflection of the divine, when the prevailing thought in my country is that I am deviant, aberrant, and sinful? Borrowing from the words of Marcella Althaus-Reid, I seek to understand how I am created in “relat[ion] to loving arts of intimacy”<sup>7</sup> as a man who is capable of connection with other men on various levels. Furthermore, if God saw all that God had made and found it very good (Gen. 1:31), I do not only ask how I reflect this goodness. Rather, I find myself poring over how I actually *embody* this creative engineering of God of which I am the consequence, albeit an unfinished consequence.

In pursuing theological insights on queer sexuality and permitting sexuality to inform theology, I acquiesce to the role of a *gatal* and *miang* theologian. In colloquial *Bahasa Melayu*,<sup>8</sup> *gatal* literally means “itchy,” while *miang* refers to a sexual pervert. Both terms point to someone who is cheeky, sexually indecent, sexually active, who has a high sexual drive and possesses a high libido. By admission, I am a theologian with an itch for locating God in the nether regions, in perverted spaces that are frowned upon as improper, indecent, and unworthy of the sacred by those who see sexuality and faith as discrete, unrelated realities, or who would permit sexuality and faith to converge only in strict heteronormative contexts. I am not engaging in random and gratuitous erotic articulations for shock value within this theological discussion. Rather, the goal

of my reflection in this article is to construct theo-biblical visions of my sexual createdness as a gay-identifying man of faith.

In the ensuing sections, I briefly discuss my use of an autoethno-theological approach, or the integration of autoethnographic, and queer theological and scriptural strategies. I will then employ this integrated approach in the theological meaning-making of my sexual experiences in relation to notions of creator, created, and creation as portrayed in Psalm 139.

### **An autoethno-theological approach**

As a form of qualitative investigation, autoethnography “seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*).”<sup>9</sup> This method of inquiry foregrounds the experiences and insights of the thinking and speaking subject in generating epistemologies. Rather than simplistic “navel gazing or self-disclosing for its own sake,”<sup>10</sup> autoethnography acknowledges the fact that reality is neither objective nor detached from the subject. Instead, the subject *constructs* reality by reflexively and intimately attempting to make sense of his/her own lived reality. Thus, by assigning *meaning* to this reality, the subject attempts “to understand or represent some worldly phenomenon that exceeds the self.”<sup>11</sup> Autoethnography enables the subject to become both insider and outsider in knowledge-making. Autoethnography elides the temptation to construct metanarratives of knowledge. Instead, through autoethnography, the subject understands that knowledge is always partial and situated.<sup>12</sup>

In this article, I adopt the autoethnographic approach of *personal narratives*, which

propose[s] to understand a self or some aspect of a life as it intersects with a cultural context, connect to other participants as co-researchers, and invite readers to enter the author’s world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives.<sup>13</sup>

Through “the difficult process of theorizing from [my] location,”<sup>14</sup> I offer a window into my life as it is embedded within my political, social, and religious contexts. As a sexual person, I become both the agent and “object” of investigation, and my sexual partners become coresearchers.

As a Malaysian living in Malaysia, my use of autoethnography in this article focuses on my own embodied realities and sociocultural ethos as a site of socio-theological resource and investigation, and which I annex to an analytical reading of the scriptures. This process, in turn, becomes an invitation for other sexual persons of faith to ruminate on their own lives.

Writing as queer biblical and theological scholars, Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache insist that “reading from lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender perspectives affect the reading and interpretation of biblical texts.”<sup>15</sup> Hence, queer methodologies of reading the bible garble heteronormative metanarratives in theology and scripture. Theological and biblical readings from the perspective of queer persons underscore the reality that queer bodies “cannot be simplistically consigned to categories of sin and religious violations,”<sup>16</sup> but bear the potentiality of being “sacred, revelatory sites of life, meaning, and love.”<sup>17</sup> Scholars have noted that the rejection of doctrinal, theological, and scriptural condemnations of gender-variant and sexually-diverse persons has led to radical reconstitutions and appropriations of theological themes and biblical interpretations that are affirming and constructive.<sup>18</sup>

By destabilizing “the heteronormative edifice of theological fixities *and* expectations,”<sup>19</sup> many queer persons find that the art of queer critique “imaginatively reconstructs theology, spirituality and church practices in new, inclusive configurations.”<sup>20</sup> Such strategies are crucial in allowing queer people to claim theology and the bible as important sources for spiritual flourishing. In particular, these strategies reject a “homophobic creationism”<sup>21</sup> that entrenches and justifies homonegativity, binegativity, and transnegativity by resorting to creation accounts.

In this regard, I borrow from Robert E. Goss’ and Mona West’s idea of taking back the word, as it acknowledges that

readers bring particular ‘selves’ to the text, which is shaped by a variety of factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, religious affiliation, socioeconomic standing, education, and . . . sexual orientation . . . [that have] produced a biblical hermeneutic that considers the particular social location of flesh-and-blood readers.<sup>22</sup>

This idea also takes as its point of reference the belief that “when we approach the Bible as a friendly text . . . that ‘does no harm,’ the terror of the Scriptures is transformed into the life-giving Word of God.”<sup>23</sup> Hence, this methodology demonstrates boldness among queer persons in claiming a friendly identification with scriptures. It goes beyond polemic or apologetic approaches that challenge and invalidate “gay-bashing” biblical interpretations, or affirming strategies that resolutely declare the scriptures as teeming with queer personages. Instead, this way of understanding the scriptures reinstates the indispensable role of lived experiences as the primary hermeneutics that allow scriptures to be relevant to life.

Such queer remorphings of theology and scripture thus find poignant and powerful resources in sexual experiences and desires, as theological and scriptural enterprises are always grounded in “our experience, our struggles, and our emergent, innovative, and transgressive practice”<sup>24</sup> as queer persons. Nancy Wilson echoes this idea by positing that the lived experiences of queer people form an indispensable component in queer Christian theologizing.<sup>25</sup> Building on this premise of lived experiences as a theological resource, I further suggest that God and sexual persons are inextricably and interminably bound to each other, even if God is not explicitly acknowledged. God is always present in the everyday lives of sexual persons, and sexual persons are always embedded in the life of God.

Therefore, an autoethno-theological approach enables me to engage in a reflective exercise on scripture in relation to my personal experiences, and to *insert* myself into scriptures without fear of harm as a queer person. In so doing, I claim my heritage as a gay-identifying man who adheres to the sacred testimonies of my ancestors found both in the sacred text (scriptures) and actual life stories (worldview and lived experiences of queer persons). As the subsequent section will demonstrate, I utilize my personal sexual experiences as the hermeneutics with which to explore and interpret the themes of creator, created, and creation as presented in Psalm 139.

### **Creation as divine-human lovemaking and knowing (139: 1–6)**

I have never found the notion of a creator God to be a simple or straightforward concept. My thoughts echo the words of Michael Carden who perceives the doctrine of creation as “an apparent simplicity that gives

way to ambiguity and questioning.”<sup>26</sup> The imagery of God as maker, creator, and constructor whose act of creation is divested of human agency leaves me detached, as my idea of the creative process of God contradicts the catechism-styled idea that creation is perfectly devoid of human involvement (“God doesn’t need our help to make anything”). In other words, I am baffled by claims that creation is solely the non-human-related prerogative of God and thus ask: “Are there other ways in which I can understand creation?”

While I agree that creation is an outpouring of divine love, I am often disappointed by ineffective explanations of the relationship between creation and this divine love. My personal comprehension of creation deepens when I reject a disemboweled theology—a philosophical notion that maintains theology on a metaphysical plane and keeps God at a distance—and understand creation as a collaboration between God *and* human beings. I find meaning in the notion of creation when I am able to envision creation as an interplay between the “radicality of God’s passion”<sup>27</sup> and my own sexual experiences.

My vision of creation finds resonance in a queer creational reading of Psalm 139. This testimony to creation and ode to love for God opens with a confession of the intimate role of God in one’s life, a God who is depicted as interested in establishing a connection with human persons:

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.  
 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
 you discern my thoughts from far away.  
 You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted  
 with all my ways. (vs. 1–3)<sup>28</sup>

God is portrayed as one who searches and knows the minute details of the psalmist who allows God to enter into his/her life. A reading of these verses through queer sexual optics provides me with a vision of intimacy between two lovers. One lover rejoices over how the other intuitively discerns his/her thoughts, but possesses a keen aptitude for knowing his/her embodied location, even when he/she is in a compromising position of “lying down.”

My own experiences of *persetubuhan* or intercourse as an expression of human intimacy and a method of lovemaking equip me with crucial body epistemologies in this regard. There is a mutual urge to search and

know, as my lover and I engage in exploring each other's bodies in consuming *asmara* or passion. Every touch becomes electrifying with the eagerness to discover, to taste, to assimilate more fully, to diminish the chasm between the self and the other. A tacit knowledge soon emerges between us as we are caught up in the sexual act, as we learn to discern each other's thoughts and search out each other's paths. We acquaint themselves with each other's ways, gradually learning the positions that afford the most pleasure for each other.

Using *persetubuhan* as an analogy, I posit that creation can be understood more deeply in terms of God reveling in, and engaging in the various expressions of *lovemaking*, rather than the abstract idea of God engaging in the task of *making* the many facets of existence. Creation is a metonym for the deep relationship that God and the created self engage with each other, which is reflected and realized in the diverse ways in which sexual persons share their bodies with each other when they make love. Creation can be understood as an intimacy that is visceral but not vulgar, that avoids violence and genuinely seeks connection, mutuality, and reciprocity.

Jay E. Johnson states that "to consider God's own erotic desire for us would contribute a great deal to whatever content . . . we might want to assign to our own religiously informed and erotically charged searches."<sup>29</sup> Similarly, James B. Nelson avers that the erotic is "God's own passion for connection."<sup>30</sup> Although these are undoubtedly poignant remarks on the nexus between human and divine eroticism, I am interested to know how these imageries of "God's own erotic desire" and "God's own passion" can translate into and be understood in my actual sexual life. I am discontented with just the notion that my erotic desire reflects God's desire for me, or that it is a force of divine love that is unreservedly unleashed on me.

I am inclined to think that human and divine love parallel each other and that the eroticism which we experience resonates in sensation and intensity with the love that is God's own self-dynamic, and vice versa. This trajectory of thought leads me to deeply believe that "God *literally* matters,"<sup>31</sup> that there are more embodied similarities between the sexual act and the notion of creation than many would dare to admit. In other words, when my lovers and I make love, the creative process of God comes to life. God *reveling* in human lovemaking translates into God *revealing* God's self in human lovemaking.

Expanding on this thought, I find myself disagreeing with the notion that lovemaking comes into play only when two persons have entered into some form of commitment or are “in love” with each other. Such a notion, I suggest, is deeply delimiting, as there are multiple ways of experiencing and expressing love. Sexual encounters occur when each of the sexual persons who engages in lovemaking understands the need for self-love and is cognizant of the ethics of other-love. In approaching another/others for sexual engagement, I exercise both self-care and other-care as a sexual person when I see myself as the “cause of joy [who is] perceived, accepted, nurtured.”<sup>32</sup> I enhance my self-love when I am involved and connected with another/others. This in turn effects an interactive exchange of emotions and feelings that deepens the experience of self-love, and which overflows to the persons who are involved in the sexual relationality of the moment.

Thus, the ongoing impetus for sexual persons to embrace each other in emotional, mental, and sexual nakedness is lovemaking. To *make* love is to articulate a self-love that is dissatisfied with itself, and which instead reaches out to another/others for complementarity. Reciprocity and connection are experienced on variegated levels and periods of time, but the willingness to engage in reciprocity and connection is itself an act of “making,” of creating love. In this sense, lovemaking is godly, because it responds to a divine calling whereby I articulate my “innermost being and [the] human quest for meaning”<sup>33</sup> that reflects the bonds between God and sexual persons.

I see creation as a dynamic process within God, in which God’s decision to engage in God’s own self-love and self-care involves sexual persons. Creation is an initiative of God for loving exchanges, a divine beckoning for intimate involvement in human lives. As such, creation can be understood as the lovemaking of God within sexual persons. In sexually connecting, they become cocreators who are in an ongoing process of remorphing and reshaping human lives with God by “creating” more loving connectivity. As such, I suggest that human lovemaking is human “love-creating.” As human persons are intimately connected to God, God creates again and again when sexual persons make love, when sexual persons construct a space for mutually knowing, searching, discerning each other in intimate involvement.



The psalmist expounds on this intimacy with God and reports on a personal experience of the deep knowledge that God has for the human self, and human receptivity to this divine probing:

Even before a word is on my tongue,  
 O Lord, you know it completely.  
 You hem me in, behind and before,  
 and lay your hand upon me.  
 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
 it is so high that I cannot attain it. (vs. 4-6)

God is creative in God's intimate knowledge of the human self. God deliberately seeks to know in order to sustain an interminable flow of the present in which God loves and asks to be loved. Nevertheless, the act of God in knowing sexual persons and the human act of knowing God do not occur in a vacuum that is devoid of bodily experiences. God knows sexual persons in their embodiedness, just as sexual persons encounter God in their bodiliness, because sexual persons cannot be any other than corporeal beings.

While not discounting the significance of *persetubuhan*, I suggest that it is perhaps the hands and lips that convey the most during sexual intimacy. Hands and lips communicate a hope for, and a mark of interest, affection, acceptance and *asmara* in their caressings, graspings, and wherever hands and lips are laid appreciatively upon the body of the other. In this sense, knowledge arises from tactility in an atmosphere where love is constituted in the willingness to connect and share oneself in a reciprocal manner. Knowledge, like love, is never static, nor are its mysteries ever mined to depletion. Seen from this perspective, knowledge is a counterpart to love. When sexual persons connect to each other in zealous attempts to know, search, explore, and understand each other in sexual ways, they plumb a depth within themselves that is raw, uninhibited, and sacred. They unveil the part of themselves that is sacred, for it is in the process of sexual fusion that they reflect a divine-human relationality.

Creation can be understood in this sense as God and sexual persons discovering and knowing each other through human relationships, as God is desirous of relationships with human persons. God's free creativeness is present in erotic relationships when "erotically exploring

persons”<sup>34</sup> bestow connection and relationality on each other. If divine-human discoveries are neither static nor solely introverted, nor are they to be layered on force or violence, they must also resist voyeuristic, intrusive, oppressive preemptive knowledge.

Therefore, as God is desirous of relationships with human persons, I suggest that knowledge is generated—is created—when God senses the willingness of the sexual person to open up to connectedness, mutuality, reciprocity, and love, and when the sexual person experiences God in the reverberations of life, namely, sexual connections with other sexual persons. The creativeness of God can thus be seen in the urge for sexual persons to disclose themselves to each other, particularly during lovemaking. Creation is a divine-human fashioning of epistemologies that stem from and generate further connections and interpenetrations of human mysteries.

#### **Creation as shared, abiding presence**

The psalmist continues by proclaiming the proximity that exists between God and the human person, and the irrevocable company that is enjoyed by both. The following lines suggest that the psalmist relishes the presence of God:

Where can I go from your spirit?  
 Or where can I flee from your presence?  
 If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
 if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
 If I take the wings of the morning  
 and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
 even there your hand shall lead me,  
 and your right hand shall hold me fast. (vs. 7–10)

The urge for connectedness is also the urge for presence. The psalmist rejoices not merely in being known by God, but in the abiding presence of God. The divine presence does not denote an ethereal stalking, but an availability of relationship between the psalmist and God. God’s “right hand” provides security at every turn. There is indeed no concealment for the psalmist who has allowed his/her life to bask in God. The psalmist paints an imagery of God who revels in this exposure, and who

returns this act of love in the creation of uninterrupted moments of accompaniment.

The joy of engaging in sexual activity stems from an abiding presence that is purposefully created in order that lovers may enjoy each other. Moments are constructed and seamlessly exchanged between those who are invested in intimacy. For some, those moments are held until they are released by climax. For others, the shared presence lingers on in the afterglow, which often serves as the avenue for increased bonding and vulnerability, and greater sharings of intimate knowledge. I have found that the moments after climaxing are special capsules of time that afford my lover(s) and me the luxury of investing ourselves only in each other.

As our limbs entwine post-*persetubuhan*, we bind ourselves to each other, risking greater vulnerability yet relishing the comfort and ease it offers when all barriers are down. The afterglow deepens interior barings by a mutual exchange that occurs not only in tenderness and words, but in the holding of the moments that constitute both the lovemaking and the afterglow. It comes as no surprise to me that “body experiences [are] occasions of revelation”<sup>35</sup> that form the basis of human meaning, and by extension, of divine-human relationality.

From a queer sexual theological perspective, creation can be described as the afterglow between God and the sexual person, and the desire of God for this connection to exist between sexual persons. Creation is the evolutionary “discovery” of oneself as a human, sexual person in relation to other sexual beings, and thus an evolutionary “discovery” of God who is perpetually present in one’s life. Creation is thus “the interface between body and spirit[, and] the consequence of the mutual understanding and caring between humans and God”<sup>36</sup> in sexual connections.

Creation is the consent that sexual persons give to each other to enter each other’s bodies and lives, to become increasingly reflexive, illuminated, and veracious. Creation is the act of holding the present in vulnerability and love in an ongoing renewal, in passionate pursuits of discovery, understanding, and meaning-making. Creation occurs when one is present to others in dialog, in word, and in deed. Creation is thus a shared, evolutionary, and ceaseless project between sexual persons, in which both parties grow in increasing awareness and knowledge of each other in loving vulnerability. As God resides within the lives of sexual

persons, I suggest that such dynamics constitute the creative process of God.

The psalmist speaks of the interplay of darkness and light, possibly alluding to the vicissitudes of life. An expansion of possibilities may suggest that the psalmist is also acknowledging that his/her relationship with God does not efface the congruities and contradictions that mark his/her life:

If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and the light around me become night',  
even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.  
For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well. (vs. 11–14)

There are two powerful imageries that surface in these lines. First, despite being aware of the shadowy aspects of life, the psalmist declares a willingness for God to partake in the unraveling of these hidden mysteries in order for the psalmist to unmask himself/herself, in which the psalmist recognizes that “darkness is as light” to God. Second, this openness is expressed in a firm conviction of his/her special relationship with God which is as intimate as that of a mother and her offspring. This intimacy is distinct from, yet evocative of the intimacy between lovers. Then, by naming God as responsible for forming one’s “inward parts” and knitting one in the “mother’s womb,” the psalmist evokes a delicate, loving metaphor of creation from the perspective of the created.

I see creation as “a visceral reading of God in our bodies,”<sup>37</sup> as the intimate act of allowing the complexities of bodily experiences to co-exist, and to constantly bring this interstitial, perpetually unresolved space of becoming in conversation with oneself and with God. From this perspective, reflexive sexual persons can be understood as “integrated body selves”<sup>38</sup> in the sense that they are always steeped in unstable spirals of progression and regression.

As a sexual person, I have experienced fewer frustrations in human interaction than failing to effectively communicate with a sexual partner that leaves either one or both (or more) of us disappointed. Beyond the evident lack of sexual fulfillment, what proves more disconcerting for me is the disconnect that takes place whenever sexual persons inhabit a space of utter vulnerability. It is at this moment that I want most to be searched, to be known, to be acknowledged, and to be held in passionate presence. The reality of being misunderstood and somehow “missed” when I am unguarded and stripped is dark and shadowy, and it affects my selfhood. The shared presence reduces and diminishes me as an unknown, as a failure in a hoped-for mutuality in communication. Conversely, there have been fewer joys in life than for my sexual partners and I to accede to each other’s directions, or to intuitively detect the contours of each other’s bodies in ways that brings the most pleasure to our senses. Reciprocity and mutuality add to the joy of the experience.

There are some moments when my body yearns for intimacy but fails to attain it, and other moments when a serendipitous connection leads to a wildly gratifying experience. What I have discovered is that my body evinces unpredictability and instability in its operations and inclinations. Moreover, the art of making love consists not only in recognizing and capitalizing on erogenous zones, but in a successful and mutual connection between lovers. Yet the mystery of the body holds its own. I continue to be astounded by the presence of my intellectual, emotional, and corporeal facets that have hitherto been, and continue to be hidden from me. The sexual epistemologies of my embodied self continue to reveal themselves, and I am kept in constant expectation. The ambiguity and liminality that my body evince continue to mock at any certainty I may have of my sexual self.

Bodily sensations alone, however, do not constitute the totality of the sexual experience for me. Lovemaking—the conscious act of creating love in which emotions are exchanged and relished—is an intentional activity that expands the pursuit of pleasure and fosters a deep appreciation of the presence and availability of the other. There is a mutual unmasking, vulnerability and risk-taking that enables the present to be experienced as a gift of intimate connection. As such, in self-revelation and reciprocal union, the present is continuously “created” as we construct a shared time and space for each other. In the desire to lengthen the present, the

coming together of sexual persons in utter vulnerability constitutes lovemaking, for it is not only self-love that bridges the distance between personal individuals, but the push to allow this self-love to overflow, be shared, and enter the personal domain of the other.

### Epilogue

The body of the sexual person is an event of both revelation and concealment. Creation is the willingness of the sexual person to be probed, unsettled, destabilized, and unearthed. In the journey of shared discovery and continual mutual presence, the human person interminably encounters the betwixt-and-between of his/her sexual self and is educated in “the deep and intense longing to transcend [him/her]self in communion with another and, in the process, truly find [him/her]self.”<sup>39</sup> Rather than being interpreted merely in light of religious pietism and romanticism, I suggest that God’s creative powers can be understood in concrete, embodied terms. As God is intimately present within human relationships, the forging of sexual intimacies between human persons is one way of understanding and articulating creation. God’s creation is present in the acts of lovemaking and shared presence. God’s act of creation is present when sexual persons seek and know each other. Seen in this light, creation can and does indeed unfold in the lovemaking of sexual persons.

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### Notes

1. Christianity is my primary faith framework, which I supplement with insights from other faiths.
2. In this essay, I use the terms “queer persons,” “queer bodies” and “queer Malaysians” as umbrella terms for persons whose gender- and sexual-identifying and expressions are incongruous with heteronormative expectations.
3. See The Commissioner of Law Revision, Malaysia, *Malaysian Penal Code*, 1997, sec. 377 A-C, accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.agc.gov.my/agcportal/index.php?r=portal2/lom2&id=1689>; The Commissioner of Law Revision, Malaysia, *Syariah Criminal Offences (Federal Territories) Act 1997*, 2006, sec. 2, accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.agc.gov.my/agcportal/index.php?r=portal2/lom2&id=1433>; see also Joseph N. Goh, “Peculiar Politics in Malaysia: A Queer Perspective on Non-Heteronormative Malay-Muslim Men,” in *Ways of Queering, Ways of Seeing*, ed. Jillian E. Cox and Jo Grzelinska (Oxford, UK: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2015), pp. 3–33; and Teh, Yik

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4. Goh, Joseph N., "Reflections on the Play 'The Third Way: Same Sex Attraction and the Catholic Church' at Holy Family Church, Kajang," Blog, *Queer Eye for God's World*, April 11, 2015, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://josephgoh.org/?cat=17>; Chim, Ezra, "'She' Is My BROTHER – Pastor Edmund Smith of Real Love Ministry (RLM) in Malacca," *Christianity Malaysia*, last modified October 16, 2012, accessed April 6, 2014, <http://christianitymalaysia.com/wp/she-brother-pastor-edmund-smith-real-love-ministry-rlm-malacca/>; Goh, Joseph N., "A Response to the Talk 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow: Same-Sex Marriage and LGBT' at the Church of the Risen Christ, Kuala Lumpur," *Queer Eye for God's World*, 2015, accessed December 22, 2015, <http://josephgoh.org/?p=1009>.
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6. Yong, Ting Jin, "Church – A Community of Faith, Struggle and Tradition," in *God's image* 28, no. 2 (2009), p. 49.
7. Althaus-Reid, Marcella, "Queer I Stand: Lifting the Skirts of God," in *The Sexual Theologian: Essays on Sex, God and Politics*, ed. Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood (London: T & T Clark, 2004), p. 99.
8. The official language of Malaysia.
9. Ellis, Carolyn, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12, no. 1 (2011), p. 1. Emphasis in the original.
10. Burnard, P., 2007, "Seeing the Psychiatrist: An Autoethnographic Account," *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* 14(8), p. 808.
11. Butz, David and Kathryn Besio, 2009, "Autoethnography," *Geography Compass* 3(5), p. 1660.
12. Haraway, Donna J., 1988, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14(3), pp. 575–99.
13. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, "Autoethnography," 24.
14. DeLeon, Abraham P., 2010, "How Do I Begin To Tell a Story That Has Not Been Told?: Anarchism, Autoethnography, and the Middle Ground," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 43(4), p. 401.
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