ABSTRACT

This study asked how transgender Anglicans respond to God’s action in the Eucharistic liturgy. Transgender Christians may have different experiences in faith than our cisgender peers, which influences the way in which we respond to God and to God’s action in the liturgy.

Over the course of the study, I interviewed seven transgender Anglicans from three geographic regions (Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States). Using semi-structured interview questions, I spoke to the participants about their experiences in the Eucharistic liturgy and how it related to their sense of God’s action. I then analysed the contents of the interviews to produce nine emerging themes. Finally, I brought these themes into conversation with liturgical theology and Baptismal Ecclesiology.

The main finding of this study was that the study participants had developed an approach to the Eucharistic liturgy and faith in general that was heavily focused on the mystical and relational.

Keywords

Transgender Christians, Transgender Theology, LGBTQ Christians, Gender and Liturgy, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Eucharist, Liturgy, Sacramental Theology, Baptismal Ecclesiology
SUMMARY FOR LAY AUDIENCE

This study considers how transgender Anglicans respond to God’s action in the Eucharistic liturgy; that is, in the primary context of Christian worship. This research question is rooted in several theological principles. First, when we gather to worship as Christians, God is active and God’s action always precedes human response. Second, God’s action in liturgy is eschatological; that is, it is working towards the fulfillment of God’s plans for the world. Third, liturgy, especially the Eucharist (or communion) is one of the ways that Christians are transformed and enfolded into the eschatological promise. Finally, as Christians, we may or may not be responsive to God’s action in liturgy.

Transgender Christians may have different experiences in faith than our cisgender peers, which may influence the way in which we respond to God, including to God’s action in the liturgy. An understanding of how transgender Anglicans respond to God’s action in the Eucharistic liturgy is necessary to support transgender Anglicans as we are being enfolded into that action.

Over the course of the study, I interviewed seven transgender Anglicans from three geographic regions (Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States). Using semi-structured interview questions, I spoke to the participants about their experiences in the Eucharistic liturgy and how their experiences related to their sense of God’s action upon them and interaction with them. I then analysed the contents of the interviews to produce nine emerging themes. Finally, I brought these themes into conversation with existing liturgical theology, the academic study of Christian worship. Primarily, the approach used by this study was Baptismal Ecclesiology, which suggests Christians enter into the worldwide Church (extending through time and space) through the rite of Baptism.

The main finding of this study was that – quite likely in response to the challenges of navigating transgender and Christian identities – the study participants had developed an approach to the Eucharistic liturgy and faith in general that was heavily focused on the mystical and relational.
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CHAPTER 1

1 INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental tenets of Christian liturgical theology is that of God’s action in the liturgy. As Matthew 18:20 says, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”1 When we worship together as Christians, we worship as the Body of Christ, and we are joined to God’s continuing action throughout the world. This is God’s action towards the eschatological – the fullness of time where all things will be restored, healed, and reconciled to God in Jesus Christ.

God is active in, through, and beyond us in the liturgy whether we are perceptive to God’s action or not. Certainly, much of God’s action is unknown and unknowable to us. At the same time, it is good for us to be aware of and receptive to what God is doing so that we can be collaborative with it. In particular, as Christians, it is important for us to be receptive of God’s action in the Eucharist. This is the only repeatable part of our Baptism and helps form us towards our Baptismal identity. In our Baptismal identity, we enjoy God’s eternal claim on us, we are incorporated into the Body of Christ, we become collaborators in God’s vocation to the world, and we are upheld in that obligation through grace. While it is not the only place where God meets us, God’s transformative power is mediated to us through the Eucharistic liturgy.

God reaches out to us in the liturgy in many ways. Depending on our experiences we may be more or less receptive to God’s invitation. Historically, Christian liturgies have been produced predominantly from the perspective of heterosexual cisgender men. As we become more aware of the diversity of the Christian people, we must also be mindful of different experiences in faith, which make different individuals more or less receptive to the different ways that God reaches out to us in the liturgy. The major theological approach of this thesis is Baptismal Ecclesiology, which assumes that we do liturgy as Baptised members of the Body of Christ, in which all Christians respond to the invitation of God. In other words, the response to God’s call in the liturgy is to all Christians.

1 Matthew 18:20
This thesis is based on a study which investigated the experiences of transgender Anglicans in the Eucharistic liturgy. Knowing that transgender individuals have very different experiences in faith, it should come as no surprise that we experience God’s action in the liturgy differently than our cisgender peers. My desire is that the data collected will help the Church to create better liturgies or do liturgies in ways that align better with the realities and experiences of transgender Christians, not to the exclusion of cisgender Christians, but in acknowledgement that all Christians are called to respond to God’s call. This is a matter much deeper than mere inclusion. When some Christians are unable to respond to God’s action’s – not because of what God is doing, but because of human barriers – we are missing part of the dialogue between God and God’s people.

The stakes are high as we live in the period between Christ’s death and resurrection on the cross and his coming again. The eschatological hope is secure in Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension, but we continue to find ourselves in a world with real evil, suffering, and death. God invites all Christians into collaboration with God’s eschatological purposes, responding to the brokenness of this world. The ability to grow into our Baptismal identity is essential to respond to this call, for the good of all creation.
CHAPTER 2

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction: The Scholarly Conversation on Transgender People and the Church

The state of academic discourse around transgender individuals within Christianity is complex; the scholarly conversation on the matter sometimes appears to be running two parallel conversations. Each “thread” of conversation relies on different premises, and each appears to have a foregone, opposing conclusion to the question “Can transgender identity be compatible with Christian identity?” One book which exemplifies this well is Understanding Transgender Identities: Four Views edited by James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy. This book presents four different perspectives offered by five contributors on the subject of transgender identity and Christianity, followed by each contributor respond to the others in an attempt to promote dialogue. While the contributors did engage with one another, there was sometimes little common ground to be found. The disagreement between perspectives was clear:

For some, the experience of transgender identity is understood as a product of the fall and, as such, something to be brought back into alignment with God’s ideal. Others see the experience of transgender persons as part of the fall but emphasize that in a post-Genesis 3 world we are all broken, and ultimately our “fixing” is not likely to be experienced this side of the eschaton. Still others see the diversity of gender identities as part of the unfolding of God’s beautifully diverse creation, not something to be feared or seen as fallen and certainly not something to be fixed.”

Those who say that Christian identity is not compatible with transgender identity have multiple perspectives. Some reject the existence of transgender people in the church entirely, even going so far as to suggest that transgender identity is not real but a “sneaky” way of being in a same-sex relationship. There are also others who have a softer “no,” believing that transgender people only belong in the church insofar as we are all sinners. From this perspective, the existence of transgender people is a regrettable product of the fall and inherently sinful. Martin Davie, in his book Transgender Liturgies: Should the Church of England develop liturgical materials to mark

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gender transition?, makes the claim of “fallenness”⁴ and argues that transgender individuals should be welcomed in churches insofar that it is the duty of churches to welcome sinners.⁵ In a similar vein, Owen Strachan in his chapter “Transition or Transformation: A Moral-Theological Exploration of Christianity and Gender Dysphoria” agrees that transgender individuals are a product of the fall.⁶ However, he believes that the fall is also to blame for the existence of intersex individuals, though he draws the distinction that being intersex, unlike his understanding of transgender identity, “is not a voluntary choice, but is experienced involuntarily from birth.”⁷ Beyond Strachan’s perspective, the approach of Mark A. Yarhouse and Julia Sadusky, in their chapter “The Complexities of Gender Identity,” is more nuanced. While they affirm the existence of transgender individuals, they also indicate that any incongruence, whether or not accompanied by gender dysphoria, is a result of the fall.⁸ They consider transgender identity to be similar to being psychologically intersex and consider both to be treated as an unfortunate reality caused by the fall.⁹ Admittedly, their 2020 book Emerging Gender Identities: Understanding the Diverse Experiences of Today’s Youth places less emphasis on transgender identity as being a product of the fall; however, they still note that “The fall touches everything. It touches our sexuality, the congruence between sex and gender, our self-worth, our capacity to trust instead of doubting God’s love for us, our bodies, and our lives.”¹⁰ The perspective that transgender identity is a product of the fall gives the sense that, at least in some ways, transgender identity is incompatible with Christian identity or God’s intentions for us and for the world.

⁵ Ibid., 75.
https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/west/detail.action?docID=5964173
⁷ Ibid., 81.
https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/west/detail.action?docID=5964173
⁹ Ibid., 125.
Conversely, those who believe that transgender identity is compatible with Christian identity offer theologies of their own. From *Understanding Transgender Identities: Four Views* is the chapter “Holy Creation, Wholly Creative” by Justin Tanis. Tanis was the only transgender contributor to this compilation and is one of the only transgender academics in this field. He believes that gender diversity is a sign of God’s creative power, mimicked in sexual diversity in the natural world.\(^1\) Another author who argues for the compatibility between transgender identity and Christian identity is Tara K. Soughers. Her book *Beyond a Binary God* affirms trans identities through challenging binary worldviews of God’s creation and by promoting the non-binary, Trinitarian nature of God.\(^1\) In many ways, Sougher’s position grows out of the theological approaches of Sarah Coakley, whose Trinitarian approach to theology is used to explore gender in theology, rather than transgender identity specifically.

Beyond Trinitarian theology, others have engaged with this topic through various different theological lenses. Christina Beardsley and Chris Dowd, two UK-based researchers in this field, approach transgender identity through natural law, adapted to the Christian theological context by Thomas Aquinas.\(^1\) Beardsley arguing that, despite natural law being often used against trans people, transgender identity is compatible with natural law, assuming transgender identity and experience are properly understood. In other words, natural law against transgender identity only hold up when one misunderstands or misconstrues transgender identity.

Another common approach is liberation theology. This theological approach, originating in Latin America, is concerned with God’s preferential treatment towards the poor and the oppressed, and holds it as a Christian duty to dismantle systems of oppression.\(^1\) Given the systemic rejection and often real harm that transgender individuals have faced in both the Church and in larger society, it should come as no surprise that suffering is a frequent topic in the narratives of transgender Christians. These experiences of transgender individuals become a foundation for the approach of liberation theology, a methodology which often uses experience as its starting

\(^1\) Dowd and Beardsley, *Trans Affirming Churches*, 24.
point.\textsuperscript{15} Marcella Althaus-Reid, who applies liberation theology to gender and sexuality, assumes that the very act of sharing one’s story as a marginalised individual, is an act of liberation theology because it disrupts the status quo.\textsuperscript{16}

Whether individuals believe that transgender identity and Christian identity are compatible or incompatible, both “sides” of this conversation seem unable to engage with one another, likely because they are working off of entirely different premises. Because of the lack of common ground, the scholarly conversation appears to be stuck on this question, in some sense, which makes it difficult to continue the conversation across differences.

\textbf{2.2 Erroneous Premises}

It became clear to me over the course of conducting research that many of those who answered “no” to the question of whether transgender people belong in the church do not often have a good grasp of what it means to be transgender. Many of these contributors rely on scientific or medical knowledge that is significantly out of date. One might forgive them for making such an error since academic study around transgender individuals and related language in this field has developed rapidly within the past decade, a stark contrast to the field of theology where one can legitimately use texts that are hundreds or thousands of years old.

One example of use of erroneous premises is in \textit{Transgender Liturgies: Should the Church of England develop liturgical materials to mark gender transition?} by Martin Davie. This 2017 study was published in response to the 2015 motion at the Blackburn Diocesan Synod, which called for the House of Bishops of the Church of England to consider whether liturgical materials should be developed to support individuals undergoing gender transition.\textsuperscript{17} In \textit{Transgender Liturgies}, Davie argues that such materials would be inappropriate. However, his rationale is supported by premises and assumptions about transgender people that do not align with the reality of transgender individuals. In particular, he claims: “[T]ransgender people feel that there is an incongruity between who they truly are and the sex of their physical embodiment. This

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 116.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 116; See, for example, the relationship between liturgical theology and postcolonial liberation theology in Cláudio Carvalhaes, \textit{Liturgy in Postcolonial Perspectives: Only One is Holy} (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).
\textsuperscript{17} Davie, \textit{Transgender Liturgies}, 1.
\end{flushright}
causes them acute mental distress which they seek to overcome through declaring their true identity, seeking to live according to that identity and changing their bodies so that they more adequately express that identity.”

The main errors that Davie makes are related to the distress of transgender individuals and a fixation on bodies. The perception that all transgender people feel acute distress about their bodies, and therefore transition medically “fully” (including hormones and top and bottom surgery) is false. This may come out of historical requirements for legal transition. To acquire ID congruent with one’s gender, one was required to undergo “full” medical transition even if it was not wanted. To be eligible for such transition, transgender individuals had to exhibit distress. As a result, historically, only individuals who experienced actual distress or those who could fake distress were considered legitimately transgender. Dowd writes, “From my research I learned that transitioning isn’t primarily a medical procedure but a psychological and spiritual one.” Additionally, Terry Reed, writing on behalf of the UK-based Gender Identity Research and Education Society, notes that

Until quite recently [those claiming gender diverse identities] were ‘diagnosed’ as psychiatric in origin, leading to a medical approach that was paternalistic at best, but ultimately undermined personal autonomy and, for many years, imposed an inflexible linear progression through a medical system that recognised only binary outcomes. Access to the system necessitated making prior social changes which threatened to destabilise the family, social and working lives of trans people.

This also contributed to the myth of regret in medical transition. Distress that could have been resolved by issuing identification congruent with one’s gender required transgender individuals to go through unnecessary and unwanted surgeries. Davie includes anecdotal evidence referencing regret in medical transition. Yarhouse and Sadusky acknowledge that

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18 Ibid., 37.
“detransitioning” is relatively uncommon, but believe that it will be more common in the future due to a decrease in gatekeeping around medical transition.22

Today, many jurisdictions recognise the social construction of sex and no longer require medical transition to correct one’s sex on legal documents. This does not mean jurisdictions reject that some individuals have penises, some have vulvas, and some individuals are intersex. However, the categorisation of these into categories of “male” and “female” remains a social construct. Many transgender individuals feel no desire to medically transition, and the vast majority do not opt for bottom surgery. As Beardsley and Dowd write, “Often portrayed by the media as essential to gender transition, many trans people do not undergo gender confirmation surgery. Even those for whom it is an important milestone see it only as one aspect of the transition journey.”23 This suggests that most of the discomfort that transgender people face has less to do with their actual bodies and more to do with social perception. In fact, for some transgender individuals, all of the discomfort may be associated with social perception. Davie argues, for instance, that transgender identity is associated with higher rates of physical and mental illness, noting that transgender identity should not be valid on the basis that these higher rates of illness remain even if a transgender person has undergone medical transition.24 If anything, this should confirm for us that the nature of distress that transgender individuals experience is rooted in social perception rather than biology. The best thing we can do to eliminate the distress of transgender individuals is to recognise that men, women, and nonbinary people have diverse bodies. Some women have penises, some men have vulvas, and some people are nonbinary, regardless of the appearance of their genitals.

Often, those who argue that transgender identity and Christian identity cannot coexist come dangerously close to arguing that transgender individuals reject having bodies entirely. Because some transgender individuals experience gender dysphoria in their bodies alongside than discomfort from social constructs of gender (though, again, it is a myth that all, or even most transgender individuals experience this in any severe way), there is an assumption that

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23 Dowd, Beardsley, and Tanis, Transfaith, 28.
24 Davie, Transgender Liturgies, 45.
transgender people reject bodies entirely. For instance, from the Roman Catholic perspective, Cloutier and Johnson write

> Once we arrive at this place, we are essentially saying identity is a matter of free expression of an internal sense, and therefore what we are supposed to respect is the individual’s choice of the expression of identity feelings, regardless of his or her embodiment. For a theologian, it is hard to miss the echoes of a kind of gnostic dualism here. Both liberal and conservative Catholics have spent decades trying to rehabilitate the goodness of embodiment from problematic spiritualizations that understood our sexual bodies in particular as suspect sites of corruption requiring rigid regimes of mastery. We are committed to an ultimately sacramental worldview where the body and soul are a unity.\(^\text{25}\)

If it were true that transgender individuals rejected their embodied existence, as Gnostics did, of course it would fall out of line with Christian belief. Matter matters in the Christian faith.\(^\text{26}\) Physicality and bodies matter – in the administration and reception of sacraments, in worship, and in care and concern for the physical wellbeing of our neighbours. However, the argument that transgender people reject physicality or bodies is flawed. We do not, after all, seek out gender confirming surgery to become spirit-beings.

The assumption that transgender individuals reject their embodied selves loses the perspective that transgender individuals do not seek to medically transition to run away from or reject a body, but to gain a body which aligns to who they are. After all, in the modern age, we refer to the surgeries associated with medical transition as gender confirming surgery. Arguments that emphasize transition due to gender dysphoria but do not mention transition due to gender euphoria (the joy in becoming who one is, even if the alternative was not necessarily distressing) miss the bigger picture of transition. Unfortunately, a gross misunderstanding among academics who have contributed to this topic is the inability to separate transgender identity from the experience of gender dysphoria. As Strachan writes, “[W]e gladly and unflinchingly say to the man or woman [sic] who experiences gender dysphoria: you are not your confusion. You are not


‘damaged goods.’”27 Here, Strachan seems to have leapt to the conclusion that those who have claimed transgender identity are, in fact, confused or consider themselves to be “damaged goods.” In his response to Strachan’s chapter, Tanis writes, “Just because our condition may be puzzling to those who do not share it does not mean we ourselves are confused.”28 Gender euphoria is lost entirely in this contribution. In fact, Strachan does not refer to transgender individuals at all during this chapter, instead preferring to talk about individuals who suffer from gender dysphoria. He further comments, “[we are reminded] not to make a disorder, a condition merit
ing serious treatment and care, an identity. … We take it seriously as the church, but we do not make it an identity.”29 Strachan’s comments indicate a conflation between transgender existence and gender dysphoria. For him, transgender individuals cannot exist without gender dysphoria.

2.3 Biblical Interpretation

Some of the research around the intersection between Christian identity and transgender identity has been rooted in scripture and Biblical interpretation. Among these, one of the most often discussed verses is Genesis 1:27 because it, in many interpretations, implies a gender binary or else an essentialist link between gender and genitals. This verse, along with use of the creation story in Genesis 2-3, is often used to argue against the compatibility of transgender identity and Christian identity. In many cases, the verses around gender in the creation stories lead some academics to understand anything outside of the male/female gender binary to be outside of God’s intentions for creation.30 Transgender identity must, therefore, be a product of the fall. Other scholars, such as Deryn Guest in her essay “Troubling the Waters: תָּהוֹם, Transgender, and Reading Genesis Backwards,” provide alternative readings of the creation stories that leave space for transgender identities.31

27 Strachan, Transition or Transformation, 68.
29 Ibid., 84.
30 Ibid., 71.
There is additional disagreement about Deuteronomy 22:5. For some, the prohibition against women wearing “men’s” clothing is a clear prohibition against transgender identity. Others, however, consider this prohibition against cross-dressing, which is a kind of gender expression rather than gender identity.

We gather additional insight when transgender individuals themselves are asked about their views of the Bible. More often than not, the studies conducted with transgender individuals indicated that the participants were less likely to identify with singular verses in the Bible. Instead, the pattern shows a draw to specific individuals in the Bible and their experiences. One transgender person, for instance, indicated a sense of identification with the sick woman who touches the hem of Jesus’ robe. For this person, the experience of being transgender was often one of rejection and feeling unlovable, and connected with the sense of being loved and healed.

For others, the experiences of Job align with their own journey, particularly in the sense that the source of suffering is misunderstood by his friends. One of the interviewees in Dowd’s study links Job’s loss of everything to losses during transition – of her marriage and livelihood, for instance. Still others identify with the Ethiopian Eunuch, whose own experience of gender and sex fell outside the normative male/female binary, but who is still celebrated as a faithful Christian believer. In fact, many who write on theology and transgender identity discuss the particular gender-bending context of eunuchs in the Bible. Finally, some transgender individuals find solace and comfort in the gospel narrative of Jesus. It is important that he extended hospitality to those who had been excluded and advocated on behalf of the marginalised.

2.4 The Non-Academic Conversation

One of my frustrations in this research has been the lack of theologians writing on this matter who are transgender and/or have a background in gender studies or a related field. While contributors to this discourse may be sound theologians and academics, as demonstrated in the

33 Dowd, Beardsley, and Tanis, *Transfaith*, 149.
34 Ibid., 90.
35 Ibid., 112.
36 Ibid., 114.
37 Dowd and Beardsley, *Trans Affirming Churches*, 54.
previous section, without a good knowledge of transgender identity, their contributions don’t follow logically. In a similar vein, many transgender individuals who have contributed to this field lack a background in theology. This can make their contributions more related to human activity than to God. Often, this limits the conversation to matters of inclusion, rather than theological considerations.

Furthermore, the state of the scholarly conversation around transgender Christians has been wrapped up with conversations occurring outside the academic sphere. Discussions around transgender Christians are held alongside those around same-sex marriage/blessings of same-sex couples, which are currently working their way through the Anglican Communion and Christianity as a whole. Often, these conversations have been exhausting, fear-inducing, hate-filled, and dehumanising. It can be difficult to research this topic while maintaining a stance of openness and exploration while the arguments outside academic spheres continue to be charged as they are.

At the same time, practical need is pushing the conversation forward with or without academic contribution. One example of this is the development of trans-specific liturgies in response to transgender Christians seeking to be Baptised “again.”39 Because of the association between one’s given name and Baptism in many cultures, some transgender individuals seek to be Baptised “again” under the assumption, and often fear, that adopting a new given name invalidated their Baptism. However, speaking theologically, we understand Baptism as permanently effectual. One cannot be Baptised again. There are gaps here, both in the way we communicate theologically to the average Christian about Baptism, and in the actual rites that exist in the church. In response to this, many churches, including the Anglican Church, have undergone processes to create liturgies that respond specifically to the experiences and needs of transgender Anglicans. The Anglican Church of Canada was the first in the Anglican Communion to create specific liturgies for gender transition and affirmation.40 Following a period of trial use and feedback, these were approved for use by General Synod in 2023.

40 I was a member of the working group that helped develop these liturgies, which is the basis for the claims made in this paragraph.
2.5 Pastoral Care and Inclusion

Whereas many materials speak to whether trans identities can coexist with Christian identity, even those who have concluded that these two identities can coexist tend to focus on pastoral care and inclusion. While this research is not directly related to liturgy, it is necessary and important work. In fact, one of the most similar studies to the one conducted for this thesis is the doctoral work of Chris Dowd, compiled into the book *Transfaith: A Transgender Pastoral Resource* by Dowd and Beardsley. In an effort to produce resources related to pastoral care for transgender individuals, Dowd interviewed transgender individuals with various backgrounds in Christianity, including some who once considered themselves as Christian but no longer identify this way. One participant identified as an atheist. The inclusion criteria and scope for Dowd’s study were broader. Dowd’s study interviewed thirteen participants. These included individuals across several denominations, as well as some who no longer attended church. The participants were located only in the United Kingdom. The interview questions which were asked revolved around the participants’ experiences as a trans person in Christianity as a whole. Although the goals of the questions differed between Dowd’s study and my study, there was some overlap in the responses, likely due to the open-ended nature of the questions. Dowd found that participants would often share much of their life story with little prompting. I also found this to be true, even when participants were asked more narrow questions about their liturgical experiences. Furthermore, some of the participants in Dowd’s study provided insights into their liturgical experiences. However, because their participants came from different Christian backgrounds, not all can be readily compared to the Anglican liturgical tradition. While the primary purpose of Dowd and Beardsley’s book is to offer pastoral resources for those who provide pastoral care to transgender individuals, one section also includes liturgies.

Other related books include *Trans Affirming Churches: How to Celebrate Gender Variant People and their Loved Ones* and *This is My Body: Hearing the Theology of Transgender Christians*. *Trans Affirming churches* was also produced by Beardsley and Dowd. This book, while containing academic information, is not primarily for the academic sphere. Instead, it

41 Dowd, Beardsley, and Tanis, *Transfaith*, 82.
42 Ibid., 66.
provides a guide for individuals and congregations to better provide pastoral care and build more affirming spaces for transgender people. *This is my Body*, edited by Beardsley and Michelle O’Brien, was a precursor to *Transfaith*. Its contributors were members of the Sibyls, a confidential spirituality group for transgender individuals and allies.\(^4\) As with *Transfaith*, both *This is my Body* and *Trans Affirming Churches* include first-person accounts of transgender Christians on the intersection of their gender and their faith. While these accounts are not, strictly speaking, focused on liturgy and worship, sometimes they meander into this territory and can provide some insight. Furthermore, *Trans Affirming Churches* does provide some suggestions for worship; in particular, it speaks to specific kinds of services including liturgies to mark events in the lives of transgender individuals, services for the Transgender Day of Remembrance, and funerals.\(^5\) All three books are rooted in Dowd and Beardsley’s UK context, though *Transfaith* offers a chapter, written by Justin Tanis, outlining the American context.

Regarding pastoral care, some of the scholarly conversation revolves around encouraging transgender individuals to stop identifying as transgender. In some cases, this involves recommending that transgender people are denied leadership roles in worship and sacraments until they have taken steps to stop identifying as transgender. Davie suggests pastoral care as an alternative to sacramental access, particularly Baptism, unless the individual stops identifying as transgender.

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\text{[P]astoral care for those who are transgender (like pastoral care for anyone else) means helping them to come to a place where either they believe and are baptised, or to a place where they believe and reaffirm the promises made when they were baptised as an infant (in Church of England terms that means being confirmed) … this means that in the case of a transgender person who is a baptised believer the call to put off the old nature and to put on the new one has to mean, among other things, being willing to accept and live out their true, God given, sexual identity. For those going through gender transition this will mean stopping the process and for those who have gone through gender transition this will mean undergoing de-transition and reverting to living according to their birth sex.\(^6\)}
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\(^6\) Davie, *Transgender Liturgies*, 78; 79-80.
Part of the point of pastoral care for Davie is explaining to transgender people the sinful nature of their identity and that following God means to stop being transgender. For those of us who understand transgender identity as something that cannot be changed, this would mean that the transgender individual would stop identifying or presenting as transgender. Effectively, Davie’s pastoral care towards transgender individuals would require us to hide our transgender identity.

Unfortunately, Davie is not alone in his views. In 2021, for instance, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Marquette in Michigan issued a guidance saying that transgender people and individuals in same-sex relationships cannot be Baptised or receive communion. It further says that, while children of same-sex couples can be Baptised, such Baptisms should be celebrated privately. As with Davie, the suggestion is that transgender individuals and those in same-sex relationships should receive pastoral care as an alternative, similar to the pastoral care that those struggling with mental illness receive. It should be noted, however, that the Diocese of Marquette does not bar the mentally ill from sacramental access.

In her book *The Promise of Happiness*, gender studies scholar Sara Ahmed speaks of “happiness scripts” which pressure queer individuals to pretend to be heterosexual and cisgender:

> Happiness scripts could be thought of as straightening devices, ways of aligning bodies with what is already lined up. The points that accumulate as lines can be performatives: a point on a line can be a demand to stay in line. To deviate from the line is to be threatened with unhappiness. The unhappiness of the deviant has a powerful function as a perverse promise (if you do this, you will get that!), as a promise that is simultaneously a threat (so don’t do that!). Happiness scripts are powerful even when we fail or refuse to follow them, even when desires deviate from their lines. In this way, the scripts speak a certain truth: deviation can involve unhappiness. Happiness scripts encourage us to avoid the unhappy consequences of deviation by making those consequences explicit. The “whole world,” it might seem, depends on subjects being directed in the right way, toward the right kind of things. To deviate is always to risk a world even if you don’t always lose the world you risk.

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47 Ibid., 80.
In a Christian context, where the ultimate good or ultimate happiness is understood as following the will of God, the pressure of this happiness script presumably intensifies. Transgender Christians are pressured into sacrificing both desire and personal happiness because the loss that is threatened is one’s relationship with God. The “whole world” that might be lost is God’s reality. In this view, queerness does not exist within the Christian cosmology. Therefore, queer Christians face immense pressure to “become” straight in order to access the ultimate happiness, which is belongingness to God. One of the study participants speaks to this in chapter 4, where she learned to die to her “false self” instead of her “real self”. This does not mean deviating from the will of God. Rather, transgender individuals learn to understand the will of God differently, where the Christian cosmology includes transgender identity.

Those pastoral care providers employing these “straightening devices” on queer Christians also face pressure from happiness scripts. To follow these scripts allows them to avoid unhappiness and discomfort; a Christian cosmology where only cisgender and heterosexual people exist can be more comfortable for individuals who provide pastoral care to subscribe to and reinforce.

2.6 Liturgical Experiences of Marginalised Genders and Sexualities

One of the only academic sources of information on the liturgical experiences of transgender individuals is Ellen Clark-King’s article “The Divine Call to be Myself: Anglican Transgender Women and Prayer.” As with Beardsley and Dowd’s study, Clark-King relied on interviews with transgender individuals. In this study, six transgender Anglican women from The United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada were interviewed. The interviews primarily focused on the participants’ transition journeys. An important result of these interviews included honesty and the ability to bring one’s full self to prayer. Clark-King further discovered that, for many of her interviewees, the process of transition often mimicked a process of a dark night of the soul, with God feeling absent prior to transition, leading to a breaking point and a deeper relationship with God post-transition. Reflecting on these interviews, Clark-King makes two suggestions for Anglican liturgies to meet transgender women – the use of more relational language in

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51 Ibid., 332
52 Ibid., 334.
prayer, especially for God, and a refocus on embodied prayer and physicality.\textsuperscript{53} The latter suggestion directly contradicts the idea that transgender individuals prefer their spiritual selves to their embodied selves, or that we reject our physical bodies.

While there may be a dearth of research into the specific experiences of transgender individuals, there is research relating to the unique experiences in liturgy of those from other groups who are marginalised based on their gender or sexuality. For instance, Sarah Coakley’s article “The Woman at the Altar: Cosmological Disturbance or Gender Subversion?” speaks to her own experiences as a woman celebrating the Eucharist. This is, of course, a role traditionally reserved for cisgender men. One example she gives was in the celebration of East-facing Eucharist, with one’s back to the congregation: “I had expected to find this offensive as a feminist, but oddly … I found it impinged on the gender implications of the rite with surprisingly positive effect.”\textsuperscript{54} She goes on to explain that, standing facing the same direction as the people, she found herself better embodying the more feminine “offering” stance that a priest enacts during the Eucharistic action.\textsuperscript{55} This is not to say that all female celebrants should do Eucharist east-facing, or that male priests do not embody this stance while celebrating. Instead, it demonstrates that gendered ambiguity of the role of the priest, regardless of their individual gender, and that they may enact gender differently depending on the physicality they employ while celebrating.

The important point here is that, based on the current body of knowledge, the experience of one’s gender and being embodied in one’s gender can influence one’s experience and perception of liturgy.

\textbf{2.7 The Gap the Present Study Seeks to Fill}

In a sense then, this emerging field in theology explores theology around trans identity, pastoral care, and Biblical interpretation. There have been some considerations surrounding the appropriateness of trans-specific liturgies, sacramental access for transgender individuals, and transgender individuals taking on leadership roles in worship. While some churches have begun producing trans-specific liturgies as well as modifying existing liturgies to be more inclusive,

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 337.
\textsuperscript{54} Sarah Coakley, “The Woman at the Altar: Cosmological Disturbance or Gender Subversion?” \textit{Anglican Theological Review} 86, no. 1 (2004): 79.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 89.
they are often making liturgical decisions without data or an academic basis. As little information exists on transgender people in the Church, regardless of sect, much less exists related to transgender people and liturgy, particularly within the Anglican context. From the beginning of my research for this thesis, I knew that I would have to collect my own data.

This study begins from the premise that transgender identity is compatible with Christian identity. While this may not be the consensus in the field, it was important to assume it as fact so that the study would not be stuck on the question. This enabled me to study the liturgical experiences of transgender individuals without questioning their validity. We assume that God is actively working in the liturgy; we also assume that God is actively working through transgender Christians in their identities, not against us. The goal of this study is not to convince others of this, but to provide information for those who have already come to this conclusion. It is for the church that is trying to write liturgies for gender transition, for the Bishop seeking to make liturgical practice in their diocese speak better to transgender individuals, or for the worship committee attempting to plan a pride worship service. It is for all liturgical leaders who want to go deeper than the level of inclusion, and make space for what God does in and beyond the liturgy, and in our transgender siblings.
3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theological Approaches

The primary theological approach of this study is Baptismal Ecclesiology, which presumes that we become members of the Body of Christ in our Baptism. Our Baptism changes us in ways that cannot be perceived on a human level. These changes are irreversible – there is nothing that we or anyone else can do to undo God’s adoption of us in our Baptism. Baptismal Ecclesiology treats Baptism as a process rather than an event. All sacraments are rooted in our Baptism.

Eucharist is particularly important in Baptismal Ecclesiology. In the early church, the Eucharist was understood as the work of all the Baptised, rather than an action done by the celebrant on behalf of the laity.\footnote{Maxwell E. Johnson, \textit{The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and their Interpretation} (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 84. See also Louis Weil, \textit{Sacraments and Liturgy: The Outward Signs} (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1983), 62-63.} Louis Weil explains this in his article “Baptismal Ecclesiology: Uncovering a Paradigm”, saying, “A baptismal ecclesiology is not reductionist in that it seeks to deny or eliminate the legitimate role of ordained leadership in the church, but rather affirms that the church is founded upon the sacrament of baptism; the fundamental sacraments of Christian identity (baptism and eucharist), are the visible signs shared by all members of the church, whether ordained or lay.”\footnote{Louis Weil, “Baptismal Ecclesiology: Uncovering a Paradigm” in \textit{Equipping the Saints: Ordination in Anglicanism Today} eds. Ronald L. Dowling and David R. Holeton (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2006), 29-30.} Baptism fundamentally changes one’s relationship to the Eucharist, both on mystical and tangible levels. The early church had a multiplicity of Baptismal practices, often varying in terms of preparatory rites, practices around anointing, and the person administering the Baptism. However, historical descriptions, such as those of Tertullian and Justin Martyr, point to a normative core structure of Baptism. A new Christian, having been Baptised in water and anointed by the bishop, would enter the church to participate in the Eucharistic action for the first time.\footnote{Johnson, \textit{The Rites of Christian Initiation}, 75.} Prior to Baptism, they would have been dismissed alongside other catechumens before the intercessory prayers.\footnote{Ibid., 73.} As such, Baptismal Ecclesiology
understands the Eucharist as the only repeatable part of our Baptism. We grow into our Baptism, and one of the primary ways we do this is through our participation in the Eucharistic action.

Baptismal Ecclesiology moves us away from the understanding of Baptism as “fire insurance” and towards a more dynamic, relational understanding of Baptism. Baptism changes us in our relationship to the world, the Church, and Christ. Through our Baptism, we do not participate in liturgy on a superficial level, but we worship as participants in the life of God. As we belong to the Body of Christ in our Baptism, so are we beholden to all others who are Baptised into Christ, and they are beholden to us. We irrevocably belong to one another and to God. As the World Council of Churches noted in their 1982 document Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry, “Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other, and with the Church of every time and place.” Baptismal Ecclesiology promotes Baptism as effectual not only on the individual who is Baptised but affecting the whole Body of Christ.

This study relies on the theological premise that God is active in the sacraments as well as in our worship. Here, “worship” is understood differently than “liturgy.” Primarily, the conception of worship is rooted in that of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, whom I consider to be one of the forerunners of Baptismal Ecclesiology. Liturgy is what we do when we gather as Christians to praise God (normally in a church, but not necessarily). Worship is the "eternal vocation" set before all the Baptised - something which is already occurring at the heart of the Trinity that dwells within us. The eternal worship of God is also the eschatological promise. We will one day worship God amidst the communion of saints eternally in that city of which he is the light. At the same time, we are already doing this because of the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Trinity.

This thesis understands that one of the ways in which Baptism and worship are correlated is eschatological. God’s work in liturgy and sacrament is working towards the fulfillment of God’s plans in the world. In our Baptism, we are incorporated into God’s purposes of salvation, reconciliation, and restoration. The implications of Baptism are more consequential than one’s

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61 Ibid., 99.
63 Larson-Miller, Sacramentality Renewed, 142.
personal salvation. Instead, each one of us, in our Baptism, becomes incorporated into God’s vocation to all of creation. St. Elizabeth of the Trinity spoke of the Baptised as becoming the eternal praise of God in the Kingdom of Heaven.\textsuperscript{65} She understood this to be an already-occurring reality in the souls of the Baptised, describing the already-not yet reality where the Kingdom of Heaven is already reigning at the same time as God is continually forming us towards that reality.\textsuperscript{66} Liturgy, especially the Eucharist, is one of the primary ways in which Christians are transformed and enfolded into that eschatological reality.

In worship, God’s action always precedes human response. As Christians, we may or may not be responsive to God’s action in specific components of the liturgy. God acts in many ways, and individuals may be more responsive or less responsive. An individual may not respond to the same things or in the same way as other Christians.

This study also relies on feminist and queer theology because these theological approaches recognise the diversity in experience and the relationship between experience and how we respond to God. While there is limited research on transgender Christians’ experiences, especially in the specific area of liturgy, there is research on the experiences of cisgender women. In particular, as women began to be admitted for ordination, there was documentation about the experiences of women serving as priests. For instance, one can see this in Sarah Coakley’s paper, “The Woman at the Altar: Cosmological Disturbance or Gender Subversion”, which was mentioned in chapter 2. She describes her own experiences in learning to celebrate the Eucharist: “How to modulate one’s gestures, whether to use manual acts (and if so, what sort), how to dispose one’s body in prayer, whether to elevate the elements, where in one’s voice to pitch one’s chanting: all these questions assumed for me levels of significance, both theological and in relation to my own sense of self as a woman.”\textsuperscript{67}

Coakley’s paper interprets her own experiences through the theologies of Mary Douglas and Hans Urs Von Balthasar, seeking to unravel the relationships between gender, performance, liturgical participation, the Church, Christ, and the Trinity. From the insights of this paper, we

\textsuperscript{65} Elizabeth of the Trinity, “Heaven in Faith” 111.
\textsuperscript{67} Coakley, The Woman at the Altar, 78.
can surmise that the way we “do” gender is inherently related to the way we do liturgy. Our liturgical practice, embodied in our sense of gender, influences our sense of self, our relationship to our worshipping community, and to the Church (that is, the Body of Christ) as a whole.

### 3.2 Interviews

This study collected information on transgender Anglicans’ experiences in the Eucharistic liturgy through semi-structured interviews. Seven participants were interviewed in total.

#### 3.2.1 Study Recruitment

Participants for this study were recruited through closed Facebook groups directed towards transgender or LGBTQ Anglicans/Episcopalians, as well as through my own personal contacts. Recruitment also used snowball sampling, asking those who received the recruitment message to pass it along to others who may be eligible. While participation was open to individuals from any country (excluding those countries where being outing as transgender could cause significant harm), recruitment materials were primarily directed at individuals from Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. All participants ended up being from these three countries. Of the seven participants, two were known to me prior to their participation in this study.

#### 3.2.2 Exclusion and Inclusion Criteria

There were five inclusion criteria and three exclusion criteria.

**Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusion Criteria</th>
<th>Exclusion Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants must be transgender.</td>
<td>Participants must not live in a country where it is illegal to be LGBTQ/transgender or where being transgender is socially unacceptable and entails considerable risk.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participants must be an active member of a church in the Anglican Communion.</td>
<td>Participants must not be dependent (financially or otherwise) on someone who is likely to react poorly if they are outing as transgender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants must be Baptised.</td>
<td>Participants must not belong to a faith community where being outed is likely to cause exclusion and/or spiritual harm.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants must be able to communicate in English.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Participants must be the age of majority in their country/region</td>
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Inclusion criterion 1 was the most difficult to define. Broadly speaking, this study defined “transgender” as those whose gender differs from their sex assigned at birth. However, not all individuals who are considered transgender for the purposes of this study would use the word “transgender” to describe themselves. For instance, not all nonbinary and genderqueer people consider themselves to be transgender, with some reserving that term for those who are not cisgender, but still fall within the gender binary of either “male” or “female.” On the other hand, some binary transgender individuals no longer consider themselves to be transgender or do not readily use the term, having socially or medically transitioned. In recognition of this, the information and consent form asked potential participants to confirm that they were “transgender and/or a gender different from their sex assigned at birth.”

In their article “Transgender-Inclusive Measures of Sex/Gender for Population Surveys”, Greta R. Bauer, Jessica Braimoh, Ayden I. Sheim, and Christoffer Dharma recommend the use of a two-step question (i.e., asking both gender and sex assigned at birth) on broad population surveys to determine whether respondents were transgender. However, due to the sensitive nature of asking participants sex assigned at birth, I was hesitant to add this to the demographic questions in the interview. Ultimately, I determined it was not necessary. All participants in this study were transgender, and the demographic questions were not linked to individual responses. Because of this, the responses of transmasculine and transfeminine participants did not need to be separated, and there was no concern about the responses of cisgender individuals being mixed.

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69 Ibid., 25.
70 Ibid., 1.
in accidentally. Furthermore, the format of a semi-structured interview, rather than a survey, to gather data provided opportunity for the interview participant to seek clarification around the questions in real time, and for the interviewer to seek clarification around the responses.

The main purpose of the demographic questions was to determine how well the results of this study could be generalised to all transgender Anglicans, regardless of specific gender identification or background. Instead of asking directly about sex assigned at birth, I was able to determine whether participants were transmasculine or transfeminine in a few different ways. First, participants often volunteered this information in their interview, either by directly identifying themselves as transmasculine or transfeminine or by speaking of living as a boy, girl, man, or woman prior to transition. Besides this, anyone who identified their gender as “male”, “man”, or “transgender man” without any other qualifying or modifying terminology was automatically categorised as transmasculine. Those who used the terms “female”, “woman”, or “transgender women” without qualification were categorised as transfeminine. In this way, I was able to categorise all but one participant as either transfeminine or transmasculine.

There are also historical reasons why those whose gender differs from their sex assigned at birth may not consider themselves “trans enough” to use the word “transgender” to describe themselves. Historically – and continuing in many parts of the world – there have been significant legal and medical barriers preventing trans people from being taken seriously in their identities. Until the latter half of the 20th century, sex reassignment surgery was limited to “normalise” the bodies of babies born with ambiguous genitalia – often without their awareness or consent.71 Here, I use the term “sex reassignment surgery” rather than “gender affirming surgery” in recognition of the fact that, for many intersex individuals, these procedures were neither related to their experience of gender, nor were they affirming. At that point, transgender persons who were endosex – that is, not intersex – would be forced to pretend to be intersex to seek appropriate medical care. As sex reassignment surgery became available to endosex transgender people, the narrative shifted to one of transgender people being trapped in the “wrong body.”72 Until the past decade, in most parts of the west, transgender people were required to undergo genital surgery to change their

72 Ibid., 1073
legal sex.\textsuperscript{73} Often, with or without the requirement for genital surgery, barriers to legal recognition may include the requirement for hormones congruent with one’s gender, the requirement to live as one’s gender for a set period, and other medical documentation.\textsuperscript{74} This would also have been a requirement for those who wished to marry a heterosexual partner in countries and regions that prohibited same-sex marriage. Until very recently, to be legally considered one’s gender or to marry one’s partner, transgender individuals often had to pretend to experience gender dysphoria in order undergo medical interventions which were not necessarily wanted. Today we recognise that many transgender individuals are not interested in “complete” medical or social transition, if they are interested in medical or social transition at all.\textsuperscript{75} Many do not experience gender dysphoria or experience it strongly but see medical or social transition as a matter of bringing their body or gender expression into congruence with their identity. Others are unable to seek gender affirming surgery or other forms of medical transition due to disability. This contradicts the historical social and medical precedents around transgender identity, which propose that one is only legitimately transgender if they experience gender dysphoria, live their gender full-time and long-term, and desire “complete” medical transition, including hormones and genital surgery.

This is important to emphasise because two participants in this study expressed concerns that they may not be “trans enough” to meet the inclusion criteria. One was concerned because they had only recently begun identifying as “something other than cisgender” a few years ago. The other was unsure she met the inclusion criteria because she had no desire to transition socially or medically, and felt no dysphoria when people used she/her pronouns or feminine language to refer to her, though she felt equally comfortable with people using any other pronouns or masculine terminology. The main concerns of these two individuals were around the recentness of their gender identification, their lack of gender dysphoria, and their disinterest in social or medical transition. They believed that these excluded them from claiming the term “transgender” to define themselves. After conversation, both the interviewer and the participants agreed that

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{75} Bauer, Braimoh, Scheim, and Dharma, “Transgender-Inclusive Measures of Sex/Gender for Population Surveys,” 19.
their participation in the study was valid. One expressed relief at being considered validly transgender.

For inclusion criterion 2, “active” was defined as “attending a Eucharistic service in-person at least once per month OR would normally attend a Eucharistic service in-person once a month if COVID restrictions/concerns were not in place.” The inclusion/exclusion criteria were developed at a time when uncertainty around the COVID-19 pandemic was still a reality. In my recruitment, I wanted to ensure that participants had an ongoing relationship with the Eucharistic liturgy. At the same time, I was wary of excluding people whose regions had stronger restrictions against COVID-19 or who were avoiding in-person worship due to personal health concerns surrounding COVID-19. However, by the time the interviews were conducted, most COVID-19 restrictions had been lifted in the countries where participants were recruited. As a result, all study participants were current, ongoing participants in Anglican and/or Episcopalian Eucharistic services. Online worship is outside the scope of this study; however, some participants spoke about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as doing communion outdoors.

Inclusion criterion 3 required that participants were Baptised, though not necessarily in an Anglican setting. This criterion was rooted in the premise that the eucharistic action is done by all the Baptised, not merely the celebrant. If Baptism is the foundation of our relationship to the Eucharist and to our participation in the Eucharistic liturgy, asking non-Baptised individuals about their experiences in the Eucharistic liturgy makes little sense.

Inclusion criterion 4 was practical. The interviews were conducted in English, meaning participants had to be able to communicate in English.

Exclusion criteria 1-3 and inclusion criterion 5 were put in place to manage potential risks to participants who participated in this study.

3.2.3 Interview Format and Questions

The interviews took place between January and May 2023. Participants were invited to participate in an interview over Microsoft Teams. The information and consent form indicated that the interviews would take approximately 30 minutes, depending on the amount of
information the participant wanted to share. However, interviews averaged about 48 minutes, with the shortest being 26 minutes and the longest being 1 hour 10 minutes.

A copy of the questions emailed to participants prior to the interview is included below. These questions were asked in the same order during the interviews themselves, though participants occasionally answered them in a different order if they felt two were related or if the conversation took that direction. One participant prepared her responses in advance and shared this without prompting from the questions. At the end of that interview, I went over the questions with her again in case she felt she had more to add.

Table 2: Interview Questions

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<th>Interview Questions</th>
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**Demographic Questions**

How old are you?
What country do you live in?
Do you live in a rural, suburban, or urban area?
What is your race and/or ethnicity?
What is your gender?
Are you ordained or belong to a monastic community?

**Pronouns**

What pronouns should we use to refer to you? Would you like us to use different pronouns or no pronouns to refer to you in published materials?

**Part 1**

How does the Eucharistic Liturgy change you?

You might consider how the Eucharistic liturgy changes you:

As an individual
As a Christian
As a transgender or gender diverse person
In your relationship to God
In your relationship to your worshipping community
In your relationship to Christians throughout the world

**Part 2**

Where do you feel God’s presence or God reaching out to you in the Eucharistic Liturgy?
Some areas you might consider are:

- The gathering or dismissal
- Readings or the Gospel
- The sermon
- Hymns, psalms, or other music
- Prayers
- Confession and Absolution
- The Peace
- The Eucharistic Prayers
- Partaking in Communion (i.e. receiving the bread and wine)

Why do you think these aspects of the eucharistic liturgy enable you to be responsive to God?

Part 3

In the Eucharistic liturgy, what draws you to God?

You might consider:

- Places (within the church, particular churches or worshipping communities, styles of architecture, smaller or larger spaces, etc.)
- Times (Of day, of the liturgical year, etc.)
- Postures of prayer (sitting, standing, etc.)
- Sights, sounds, smells, touch, taste

Why do you think these elements draw you to God?

End of Interview. Thank you!

The demographic questions were included to help in determining how generalizable the study results could be among transgender Anglicans of different identities and backgrounds. I asked interview participants about their pronouns to ensure I was referring to them in the way they wanted in the study results. Here, the question asking about ordination and belongingness to a monastic community was used to determine a few things. First, it was concerned with the participants’ regular liturgical participation. The assumption was that the primary liturgical experience of laypeople would be through the (likely weekly) Eucharistic liturgy, while postulants, clergy, and religious would be engaging with the offices on a daily basis and the Eucharist at least once a week. The second information that responses to this question offered was one’s sacramental relationship to worship. Sacraments change us in our very being. Just as Baptism enables us to do communion alongside the whole people of God, so does ordination
change the way we do communion as members of the Body of Christ. This is not about a changing role in the liturgy but a changed being in relationship to the liturgical action. A priest who does not celebrate at a eucharistic service does not suddenly become a layperson. In a similar vein, one who is Baptised but does not physically take communion still does communion since they are Baptised into the Body of Christ. For the purposes of this study, then, postulants and members of religious communities who have not been ordained are also counted as “laypeople.”

The questions included in Part 1 were based on the theological principle of Baptismal Ecclesiology that God continues to form us in our Baptism through the Eucharistic action. The Part 1 questions were attempting to gauge the study participants’ sense of the change enacted upon them in the Eucharist. The changes that the participants were invited to consider were both personal (as an individual, as a Christian, as a gender diverse person), and relational (in relationship to God, their worshipping community, to Christians throughout the world).

The questions in Part 2 asked participants to reflect on the specific parts of the Eucharistic service. While we as Christians believe that God is active in all parts of liturgical worship, different people may be receptive and responsive to God’s action in different parts of the Eucharistic service. These questions were posed to the participants to better identify which parts of the Eucharistic service transgender Anglicans were most aware of and responsive to God’s action, and to understand why.

The questions in Part 3 asked participants to reflect on other aspects of the Eucharistic liturgy, beyond the order of service. The Part 3 questions asked participants to reflect on time and space as well as sensory stimuli. The premise here was that we may be responsive to God’s action on us not only by what we do in the Eucharistic action, but also through how, when, and where we do it.

3.3 Analysis of Interviews

The demographic questions were disaggregated from the responses given in parts 1-3 of the interviews to protect participant confidentiality. Parts 1-3 of the interviews were analysed by themes that appeared across multiple interviews, beginning with those that occurred most
frequently. When there was disagreement around these themes between different interviews, it was noted.

The themes resulting from the interviews were then brought into dialogue with the existing scholarly conversation. Primarily, this meant analysing the results in light of Baptismal Ecclesiology and sacramental theology. While limited, there is also some academic research on the experiences of transgender Christians in worship, such as the work of Christina Beardsley and Chris Dowd. This research was brought into dialogue with the study results. More general research on the experiences of Christian women and LGBTQ Christians in worship was also considered.

While the themes which emerged from this study may have been influenced by the prompts that were used to guide the interview questions, it is unlikely that these altered participants’ responses. Participants were instructed not to answer all prompts, but to choose those which they felt were most important to them. Participants were given the interview questions with the prompts prior to the interview, making it less likely that they would be biased by the ordering and choose the first or last prompt on the list. Furthermore, some themes which emerged were unrelated to the prompts. Finally, one participant rejected the prompts of Part 3 entirely, saying “I think almost all those things are almost completely irrelevant” (Participant C).

3.4 Biases

To begin, it is important that I acknowledge my own biases as the researcher. I am a Canadian, transgender, nonbinary Anglican, and a postulant for ordination to the priesthood. I am transmasculine, white, and of European heritage, all of which gives me some level of privilege compared to many other transgender individuals. My family and I went to the Roman Catholic Church until I was eight years old, when we began attending the Anglican Church. Given my background and identity, it should not be surprising that some of the participants’ responses were very similar to my own experiences and beliefs. On the other hand, some responses were entirely different.

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76 Namely, their three books: Transfaith, This is My Body, and Trans Affirming Churches.
The use of inclusion criterion 2, requiring that participants attend a Eucharistic service at least once a month, likely created a bias towards clergy and postulants. Several transgender laypeople who expressed interest in participating were excluded from doing so solely because they did not meet criterion 2. However, there do not appear to be many differences in the responses provided by laypeople who were not postulants, laypeople who were postulants, and clergy. The greatest differences appeared to be that postulants and clergy were able to explain themselves more succinctly and with more clarity. Laypeople who weren’t postulants were as able at naming what was important to them, but struggled more in naming why it was important. They also tended to use the liturgical texts as a guide during the interviews. For instance, one lay participant googled the exact wording of a Eucharistic prayer in the middle of the interview so that they could talk about it. Despite this, I believe lay (non-postulant) participants provided as much depth as clergy; they simply had not been trained to talk about it like a postulant or cleric would be.

All study participants identified themselves as white/having European ancestry. While the Anglican Church has its historical roots in England, the Anglican Communion as a whole should not be misconstrued as primarily white or European. There are significant populations of Anglicans in Africa, Asia, and South America. However, the majority of Anglicans who are not white belong to countries where being transgender is either illegal or socially unacceptable, meaning transgender individuals from these countries would be automatically excluded from the study. At the same time, Indigenous Anglicans make up a significant portion of the Anglican Church of Canada, and there is a growing number of Latinx Episcopalians in the American Church. Either the recruitment strategies of this study failed to reach these individuals, or they opted not to participate. Being a minority within a minority, participating in the study may have entailed greater risk for transgender People of Colour, particularly a greater risk of being identified.

The ability to conduct interviews in Spanish and Portuguese would have likely bolstered the diversity represented in the participant group. There are sizable Latinx Spanish-speaking Episcopalian communities in the United States and a well-established Latinx Spanish-speaking transgender Anglican community in Canada. Furthermore, at this time, the Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil remains the only province of the Anglican Communion in the global south that allows same-sex marriage within the church.
Though I did not directly ask participants about their background with Christianity, all participants but one indicated that they had been raised in the Christian faith. While some had spent time de-churched, only one had come to Christianity as an un-churched adult. Among those raised in the Christian faith, one was a former Pentecostal, four were former Roman Catholics, and three were cradle Anglicans. One of the cradle Anglicans had spent some time in the Roman Catholic Church prior to returning to the Anglican church and so is included in both groups here. It is possible that unchurched transgender individuals are unlikely to become Christian later in life. It is unclear whether transgender Anglicans are more likely to come from the Roman Catholic Church than other denominations, or else if former Roman Catholics were more willing to be interviewed on the subject matter of this study. At this point, there are no data to back up any of these theories – they are merely suggestions that could explain the denominational background of participants.

While participants were not directly asked, over the course of the interviews, 3 of the study participants self-identified as having a disability and/or being neurodivergent.

3.5 Conclusion

The study that forms the basis of this thesis is rooted in the conception that God is active. At the same time, there are limits to our understanding of God’s action. This thesis aims to understand both God’s action as best we can and to understand how we might facilitate response to God’s action for transgender Anglicans in the Eucharistic liturgy. To do this, I will bring the responses of the transgender Anglicans who were interviewed into conversation with existing liturgical theology. While the study participants backgrounds may not be representative of all transgender Anglicans throughout the world, it is my hope that their responses may offer insights which we did not have before.
CHAPTER 4

4 STUDY

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the study results. The first section provides demographic information on the participants to give a sense of how well the results can be generalised. The second section summarises the interview responses of the participants. The final section provides information on the ten themes that emerged in the study, offering insights from similar studies and other research where appropriate.

4.1 Demographics

The following is a breakdown of the demographic information of study participants.

4.1.1 Age

Table 3: Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80+</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.2 Residence

Table 4: Country of Residence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Area of Residence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.3 Race/Ethnicity

All participants identified themselves as white/having European heritage.
For the purposes of this study, the term “transfeminine” is being used as a synonymous, but more respectful, way to refer to someone who was assigned male at birth (AMAB). Likewise, “transmasculine” is being used synonymously with the term “assigned female at birth” (AFAB).

In this study, neither “transmasculine” nor “transfeminine” is being employed to describe gender presentation or gender expression. Presumably, sex assigned at birth influenced participants’ socialisation as either male or female growing up. It is important to have a sense of the participants’ gender of socialisation because this has implications for their experiences, particularly in navigating gender and faith.

**Table 6: Gender of Socialisation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transfeminine</th>
<th>Transmasculine</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here, the term “binary gender” is used to refer to those participants who referred to themselves exclusively as “male/man/transgender man/trans male” (etc.) or “female/woman/transgender woman/trans female” (etc.). Those participants who understood their gender to be elsewhere on the gender spectrum were included in the “nonbinary” category. The words “binary” and “nonbinary” may not necessarily be the words that the individual participants would use to self-identify. As with gender of socialisation, this was important to include as it can influence participants’ experiences.

**Table 7: Binary or Nonbinary Gender Identification**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Binary Gender</th>
<th>Nonbinary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The words that participants used to describe their gender included:*  
Agender  
Female  
I don’t know**
Non-binary
Trans female
Trans male
Transgender
Queer woman**

*Some participants used multiple terms to describe their gender.

**The individuals who ultimately chose these terms to describe their gender struggled somewhat with this question. Each first described their gender by indicating that they knew they were not cisgender, but were not sure which terms applied most appropriately.

4.1.5 Status as Ordained and/or Belonging to a Monastic Community

The following refers to status as ordained and/or belonging to a monastic community to determine the participants’ social context of worship. As such, participants who were postulants or members of a monastic community but not ordained were not also counted as laypeople.

Table 9: Participants’ Social Context of Worship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priest</th>
<th>Deacon</th>
<th>Postulant for Ordination</th>
<th>Layperson</th>
<th>Belongs to a Monastic Community</th>
<th>Postulant of a Monastic Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next table refers to the participants’ sacramental status. While the above table recognises that the worship experiences of postulants and those belonging to monastic communities will be different from laypeople who are not pursuing ordination or seeking to take monastic vows, the table below recognises that a change occurs in ordination. Therefore, in this table, postulants and members of monastic communities who were not ordained were counted as laypeople.

Table 10: Participants’ Sacramental Context of Worship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priest</th>
<th>Deacon</th>
<th>Layperson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4.2 Interview Results

4.2.1 Responses to Part 1: How does the Eucharistic Liturgy change you?

Participant A spoke primarily about the changes that occurred after he was ordained to the priesthood, prior to his transition. Presenting to the congregation not just as a woman, but with the intersecting identities of being a priest and being seen as a woman caused Participant A discomfort. He experienced lots of positive reception as a “female” priest because of the novelty of women’s ordination. (While women have been ordained in the American Episcopal Church for around fifty years, women’s ordination is still not a reality in many parts of the Anglican Communion and in other denominations. Indeed, mainstream culture still associates the priesthood with maleness). Though Participant A recognised the importance of representation, the celebratory attitude of people whom Participant A encountered caused him personal discomfort:

*I was uncomfortable with people projecting their happiness in experiencing a woman priest. I wasn’t that.* (Participant A)

In a sense, then, Participant A’s transition from a layperson to an ordained minister of the church became a crux of awareness around his gender. Furthermore, discomforts he originally experienced in celebrating the Eucharist “as a woman” were significantly lessened once he transitioned and began celebrating the Eucharist “as a man.” This is not to say that this was the only reason for Participant A’s transition, but he spoke of it as a defining period of awareness of his gender identity. Participant A also stressed that he was not uncomfortable with women celebrating the Eucharist in general, but that it was important for him to celebrate the Eucharist as his authentic self, without pretending to be something he was not.

Participant A also spoke about how, as a priest, saying the invitation to the table after the Eucharistic prayer, changed his perception and participation in God’s action towards the marginalised, particularly those who have been harmed by the church. Speaking God’s invitation to the table for Participant A made him aware of God reaching out to all, despite their “issues” – included those whom he knew had an issue with him as a transgender priest.
Participant B made a connection between participation in the Eucharist and her sense of vocation. Like Participant A, participation in the Eucharist was also a driving factor behind them identifying as their gender. However, unlike Participant A, whose identification as trans came through the rejection of being perceived as a female priest, Participant B identified with the gender subversion that was already happening in the liturgy. Participant B also noted the difficulty in being trans and Anglican in relationship to the worldwide Anglican Communion, where one is inhibited by constantly being perceived as trans.

Participant C was unsure how the Eucharistic liturgy changed her, or whether it changed her for better or for worse. Participant C expressed a lot of uncertainty around her beliefs because she had only recently become Anglican. Participant C, having encountered significant transphobia in her previous church/denomination, was in a period of questioning the beliefs of her former denomination and working through whether she still held those beliefs. This was a recurring subject throughout her interview. For instance, Participant C spoke about how she used to believe that in the Eucharist as a means of sanctification for the individual who participates. At the time of the interview, she expressed that she was unsure whether she still believed this. She spoke the possibility that participants in the Eucharist must want to be changed for change to occur. Participant C further commented that, for periods in her life, the structure of liturgy and Christian identity allowed her a sense of control over her identity as transgender. She tried to be the best Christian possible to manage her discomfort around being transgender (and the accompanying social pressures).

*The whole trans experience that for many of us is deeply spiritual. It's about this dying to your false self. I was dying to the wrong self. I thought when I was bearing my cross courageously, I was dying to myself, but the trouble is, [I was not dying to my false self]. The self I should have been dying to was my false self but that was actually my true self I was dying to* (Participant C).

The ability to participate in liturgy while integrating her two “selves” (as Christian and transgender), rather than using liturgical participation as a way to control or hide her transgender identity, has made a significant difference for Participant C. Her comments suggest that she has become more confident and secure in herself, and is able to experience true gender euphoria.
Participant D linked Eucharistic participation to incarnational theology. For him, participation in the Eucharist meant going beyond being just generally spiritual to developing identity as a Christian. Participant D understood the Eucharist as a tangible connection between God becoming physically human, which set a precedent for them not just identifying as a Christian but behaving as one.

Similar to Participant B, Participant E spoke of the Eucharistic liturgy as a springboard for their discernment throughout their life. As a child, it was the basis for identifying that they were called to ordination (a call which they eventually followed through). It also led them to discern a call to monasticism in lieu of ordination while they did not consider ordination possible because of their gender, though their discernment here lead them in a different direction. Participant E also spoke about the Eucharist as orienting towards community and communion within the church, both locally and throughout the world:

> As a Christian, it draws me closer to the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us. You know, everyone, since the Last Supper, who has received bread and wine and recalled the story of Jesus. I love how it connects both to the contemporary church and to one’s own congregation and community, but also to every Christian who’s ever celebrated Eucharist or who’s taken communion. (Participant E)

Participant F spoke about the experience of the Eucharistic liturgy in terms of more thinking versus more feeling experiences. Recognising that many people experience it differently, she mused that, while most of the time she is inclined more to the thinking side of things, her feeling side comes out when she is very still in prayer. She also spoke of attending the Sunday liturgy as a way to “recharge her batteries” to better equip her to engage in outward-facing ministry and life in general the rest of the week.

Participant G talked about how participation in the Eucharistic liturgy oriented them towards the mystical. For them, the Eucharist opens participants to the spousal mysticism tradition, which they believe in turn would help us treat one another better, such as through reducing misogyny. Participant G spoke about the Eucharist being a source of unity in the church. In a sense, participating in it makes one a focal point of that unity, particularly if one is the celebrant.
Participant G described God’s action in the Eucharist in changing us into the people God wants us to become, whether we are aware of it or not:

    And even if I don't feel the heebie jeebies ... there's still something that happens that I rely on from week to week. I am going to become, in negotiation with God, who God wants me to be because I am participating liturgy and participating Eucharist.

Finally, Participant G indicated that participating in the Eucharist gave them not only an awareness of, but the ability to sense the presence of the Body of Christ (Participant G used the language “Cloud of Witnesses” and “Communion of Saints”).

4.2.2 Responses to Part 2: Where do you feel God's presence or God reaching out to you in the Eucharistic liturgy?

Because the responses to the following questions were less open-ended than the first question, I was able to code the participants’ responses. This section lists responses in each part of the interviews by the frequency with which the responses appeared. The number given after the response indicates the number of participants who mentioned the response. Where participants gave a more specific response, it is listed below along with the number of participants who mentioned it. For instance, one response reads “Receiving communion (5), including receiving communion from others (1).” This indicates that 5 participants mentioned receiving communion, and among these five participants, one participant specifically mentioned receiving communion from others. Responses that emerged from three or more participants are in bold.

Table 11: Aspects that help participants sense God's presence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses to Part 2 included:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Receiving communion (5), including:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- receiving communion from others (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Eucharistic prayers (5), including:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the elevation (2),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the Lord’s Prayer (2),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the Sanctus (2),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the vessels (1),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the Epiclesis (1),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the fraction (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Music (3)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some participants also indicated that certain aspects of the liturgy hindered their ability to sense God’s presence. While participants were not specifically asked this, and not all participants shared aspects that caused hindrance, it felt important to include those that did. It should be noted that many of the items on this list came from a single participant, and seemed to relate to her struggle with literal scripture interpretation. Even so, some responses common to other participants emerged. Aspects which participants indicated hindered their ability to feel God’s presence included:

Table 12: Aspects that hinder participants' ability to sense God's presence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The sermon (4), including:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- When the wrong balance is struck with the political versus maintaining the status quo (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- When it goes on too long (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readings (2), including:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Readings that are misogynist, homophobic, racist, or otherwise problematic (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receiving Communion (1), including:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- When it becomes routine / mechanical (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prayers (1), including:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- When they go on too long (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Petition/intercessory prayer, because it feels weird to ask God for things when God already knows (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Confession (1) |
The Creed (1), including:
  - Mention of the resurrection of the Body (1)

The Eucharistic prayer (1), including:
  - The concept of transubstantiation (1)

4.2.3 Responses to Part 3: In the Eucharistic liturgy, what draws you to God?

The responses to Part 3 were coded in the same way as responses to Part 2. Aspects of the liturgy that drew participants to God included:

Table 13: Aspects that draw participants to God

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Having Responsibilities (4), including:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- serving at the altar (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- preaching (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- distributing communion (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- greeting (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- reading (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Changing postures for different parts of the liturgy (4) |

| Emphasis on the countercultural (4) |

| Emphasis on mystery/mysticism (3) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silence or a chance to listen/not do anything (3), including:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- stillness in prayer (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grounding in history and tradition (2), including:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- the physical space (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the style of worship (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The smell of an old church, especially the wood (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liturgical year (2), including:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Ash Wednesday (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the colours (1),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the rhythm/cycle (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| A beautiful space/beautiful décor (2) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prostration (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kneeling (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller space/smaller community (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worshipping communally (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These considerations (i.e., those provided on the list), are irrelevant (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place set apart for worship (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The taste of Communion wine (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incense (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As with Part 2, some Participants Responding to Part 3 gave examples of aspects of worship that did not draw them to God. These included:

**Table 14: Aspects that do not draw participants to God**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wrong postures of prayer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not kneeling</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The congregation needing instructions for different postures</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No windows in churches</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being too visible in worship</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most external things in worship are irrelevant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distractions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worship that feels too mechanical</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stifling the Holy Spirit</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.3 Emerging Themes**

Recurring themes that came up in the interviews included receiving communion, the Eucharistic prayers, music, the sermon, leadership roles in the service, changing postures of prayer, emphasis on the countercultural, emphasis on mystery/mysticism, and silence/stillness. While these were the direct responses from participants that came up the most frequently, they were often brought into conversation with other topics. Because of this, the themes that will be discussed here may be a bit broader. First, I will discuss Participants’ comments around their experiences of the Eucharistic prayers and receiving communion. Second, music will be discussed within the context of mystery and mysticism. After this, we will turn to the significant conflict participants expressed surrounding the sermon and scripture. Next, leadership roles in the service will be discussed within the broader theme of gender subversion in liturgy. Beyond this, I will talk about the physicality of worship and postures of prayer. Next, I will discuss participants’ comments on a countercultural stance to worship. Finally, we will turn to prayer, silence, and stillness.

Because there were some similar comments that came up regarding confession and Ash Wednesday, I have also added the theme of “Sin.” Another category that did not come up directly as a response to one of the questions but was touched on by multiple participants is “Childhood Experiences in Liturgy / Upbringing.”

**4.3.1 Eucharistic Prayers and Receiving Communion**

Overall, the Eucharistic action (that is, the part of the Eucharistic liturgy centred around the table and around bread and wine) spoke to the study Participants as a unifying force. Some
participants were quick to point out the communal nature of the Eucharistic action; as something that must be done amongst others and cannot be done alone, it speaks for itself as a relational act.

*I am very glad that I have learned “us/we/our” language in the Eucharist. That's important to me.* (Participant G)

At the same time, participants were all too aware of division and conflict within the Church and within the wider world, particularly divisions that conflict that they themselves had experienced regarding their gender. Some had lost relationships while coming out as trans. Others had found themselves no longer welcome or less accepted in their worshipping community. For many participants, the Eucharistic action was a space where these divisions could be set aside. This was not to say that the Eucharist functioned as an escape from hardship for the participants. Instead, it seemed to be an acknowledgement that recognised God was active, and that God was acting towards unification even when, in our limited human capacity we have found ourselves in a gridlock of conflict with no way forward. Though the Participants did not necessarily use the word “eschatology” word to describe it, the orientation of many Participants towards the Eucharistic action was eschatological. Participating in the Eucharist means surrendering the broken state of things to God, in a sure and certain hope that God’s purposes to repair the brokenness would win out in the fullness of time.

*My reflection is, you trust God to do what God is going to do when you're praying the [Eucharistic] prayer—you just make yourself available. That's how I interpret it. I want to be that sort of person if I ever get to stand behind the altar. Because that's what the Eucharist does—the Eucharist is for forming friends of God.* (Participant G)

Two participants tied the unifying side of the Eucharistic action to a sense of mystery. While the theme of mystery and mysticism will be explored further in the next section, these participants specifically tied their sense of mysticism with the Eucharistic prayers or receiving communion. One spoke of the consecration, and explained how different “sides” of her were engaged by different parts of the Eucharistic Liturgy:

*During the Liturgy of the Word and the preaching, I'm highly engaged with social and political and theological questions. I'm thinking; I'm being academic. And that goes away*
in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. But there is a time for the intellectual and political concerns, and there’s time for just staring divinity in the face.

To me, like the most presence [of God] is the consecration. All of the Eucharistic prayer, but specifically the elevation. And if I get to administer the chalice, that's like – I generally describe that feeling of holiness, holiness as sort of density. That the moment, it feels dense, like the air feels dense. … I mean, God's always present. It feels a little facetious to say God is present because he’s always present. … But the different bits of the Mass, you're not really thinking of yourself always. I'm not really thinking of myself in the moment of consecration. That's not meant to be about yourself. You're entirely outside of yourself, and entirely focused on the consecration. (Participant B)

For Participant B, the ability to step outside oneself and to step away from intellectual and political concerns was dependent on the sense of mystery that she experienced during the Eucharistic prayer. The way she spoke of it indicated that the sense of mystery allowed her space to unburden herself from the problems in the world, instead turning to and trusting in God’s activity towards the eschatological hope. The perspective of the participants was generally that the Eucharistic action drew them out of themselves to enter into relationship with God and with others in the Church. This did not mean having to step outside of their identity or stop being transgender. Instead, it seemed to be more a matter of their gender no longer being treated as a problem to be solved.

The other participant who spoke on this matter gave an account of a mystical experience which occurred while they approached to receive communion. This was one of their first liturgical experiences in an Anglican setting, and also a time when they were beginning the process of discerning around their gender.

This sensation was almost like there was a wind, an electrical current that came from my front, across my face, almost down through the top of my head. … I’m like, “Okay, stand,” as in, “Stand in the anointing.” Because sometimes you don't want to ‘fall out’. You want to stand because there's something to give away. But I was shocked, because I was new to actually accepting my queerness. And I'm like, “Oh! You [addressing the Holy Spirit] really do take queer-affirming Christians seriously. … And the Holy Spirit
whispers to me, “You’re home.” It was like I experienced it as a conversation, literally just, “Pssst! You’re home.” ... And then I go forward as I have five or six times before. The priest sees my [pride] bracelet. He doesn't know me from Adam, so to speak, and he sees my bracelet and he gets this cheeky grin on his face. And he looks me right in the eye and says, “The Body of Christ broken for you,” and he puts it in my hand. (Participant G)

4.3.2 Mystery and mysticism

As with Participant B, whose orientation towards the mystical in the Eucharistic prayer was discussed in the previous section, several participants spoke of mystery and mysticism in their own experiences of the Eucharistic liturgy.

*I think what is so annoying to me about the churches that are transphobic is that Christianity is super weird and like mystical and bloody. It's just crazy. If you met an alien and described Christianity to them, they would be like, what? It doesn't make any sense, so I feel like all of the sensory stuff, you could even say like sensual stuff, in the Eucharist or in the mass ... I guess I already said this, but it's there to draw you into a different state of mind, or a different experience of your body. It feels like it's meant to get you into that mystical or spiritual space.* (Participant D)

*For me, I definitely place myself in the spousal mysticism tradition. And I didn't know that at first. So when I go to the Eucharist, the love of my life, in some sense, is giving me himself. And I think that's profound because I have a burning desire to be a priest. The reason why I know this is because I have a burning desire to facilitate the Eucharist. For me, that's also such a profound thing, that I am a focal point for the unity of the church.* (Participant G)

In this case, “mysticism” is being used to indicate the participants’ experiencing an awareness of God’s action in the Eucharistic liturgy, which is normally not perceptible to us. Beyond a theological explanation about what God is doing, the mystical is the participants’ sense of connection to what God is doing. This may or may not include sensory experiences beyond the norm. For many of the participants, it was a sense of being in a different mental space than they would in their everyday life. Participants used words like “a different level” [of consciousness] and “the heebie jeebies.”
While mystery and mysticism was a common theme for several participants, one participant noted that this was not congruent with her own experiences. She suggested that part of the reason she never experienced that was because of what she was taught about communion while growing up (the theme of upbringing/childhood experiences will be explored more fully in a subsequent section):

> I can remember my mother saying to me, “When you take communion, don't expect anything strange or wonderful to happen.” And maybe she shouldn't have said that to me. I don't know. I don't know with that. And it's not a question of one's right, one's wrong. It's just different. (Participant F)

The emphasis on the theme of mysticism by several participants may seem unusual. To this end, I would like to offer two theories. First, there is the possibility that transgender individuals, having already come to terms with existing in a liminal space because of their gender, have come to find that entering into a liminal space in the religious sphere comes more naturally than it might for their cisgender peers. This would be congruent with similar theories as to why so many of the medieval Christian mystics were women. In her book Women and Mystical Experience in the Medieval Ages, Frances Beer suggests that three female medieval mystics – Julian of Norwich, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Hildegard of Bingen – navigated a male dominated world and ecclesial structure through mystical experience. She writes, “Each of these three women based her mystical account on an intensely personal series of spiritual experiences, which utterly altered her subsequent life, and which were evidently powerful enough to counteract the sense of inferiority … that contemporary society sought to impose.”77 She adds, “[Their] liberation seems to be related to their mysticism, their transcendent perspective allowing them to see beyond the social structures – whether ecclesiastical or secular – that ordinarily ensured women’s submission.”78 These three mystics, and the vast majority of medieval female mystics, belonged to some kind of monastic tradition. Having rejected marriage, motherhood, and domesticity, they were living in a liminal gendered space in their context.

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78 Ibid., 10.
The second theory I would like to present surrounding transgender individuals and mysticism is that of self-selection. Transgender Christians who have opted to continue to practice their faith had to take their spiritual development seriously or else stop being Christian. Transgender Christians face significant pressure both from within the Church (to justify their transgender identity) and from secular spaces (to justify either or both their Christian identity and transgender identity), when many would indicate that the two identities as Christian and transgender are incompatible. The work to integrate one’s identities as transgender and Christian is a spiritual journey, encouraging spiritual development and deepening one’s relationship with God. Transgender individuals generally do not have luxury of being half-hearted Christians or of participating in Christian life solely for cultural reasons. By and large, transgender Christians who cannot navigate deep spiritual development simply leave the church (therefore self-selecting “out”). In other words, the confluence of Christian and transgender identities may create a bias towards mysticism.

One participant mentioned that they believe queer people are better at understanding the mystical elements within the Eucharistic action. When asked to elaborate, they suggested that the trials they had to endure brought them closer to God. They explained

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I \text{ have been scorched by the Fire at the heart of the [Christian] tradition. I met Jesus, and I met the Holy Spirit. I meet them [in the Eucharist].} \] (Participant G)

Another participant expressed the sense that queer people in general, not just transgender individuals, were drawn to the mystical side of religious practice. They believed that this was also true of queer individuals belonging to other faith traditions. They connected this to queer people already existing outside of mainstream culture, which will be discussed further in a later section.

Three participants mentioned how music heightened their sense of mystery. One participant described music as an offering to God, where they feel able to reach out to God and are able to feel God reaching back. Another participant spoke of the ability of music to engage them on a deeper sensory level. Still another Participant spoke about how music brought them to Christianity in the first place.
The music is obviously, that goes to a different level in our limbic system and that kind of thing. But again, those are the moments that can be transformative. (Participant A)

4.3.3 Scripture and Sermons

There were significant mixed feelings about the scripture readings and the sermons from the majority of the participants. While many participants indicated that they struggled sometimes to find God’s presence in sermons compared to in the Eucharistic action, Participant C felt the opposite. For her, the ability to feel a presence of God in a sermon was dependent on the quality of the sermon and the listener, but experiencing God’s presence in this way was more straightforward than accessing God’s presence in the Eucharist.

I have a very sort of difficult relationship with Scripture. As a trained historian I have difficulty balancing [that] this is a historical source and I will analyze it as a historical source [with] the approach to scripture [where] this is God speaking to us. (Participant B)

I kind of go back and forth on the readings, because some of them, sometimes I feel like, oh, this is just, actually, quite offensive and violent and harmful. I feel like maybe we need to think about which readings we want to continue speaking aloud in a worship space. (Participant D)

For me, that's not like “the thing” in worship that resonates most. But the feedback I get on my sermons is that for a lot of people, they do hear [God’s] voice through my words, and what comes up in the hearts from listening is important to them. But for me, when I’m in worship? Not so much. (Participant E)

I wish I had been taught to take scripture more playfully. I think it would help me even to this day, because the very fixed, “Do your devotions or you’re going to shrink, your relationship with God will suffer, if you don’t sit for 15 minutes a day with the Bible. That's a little bit toxic, but the reason why I say this is “God is interested in dealing with you,” is what they taught me. (Participant G)

Many of the comments of participants revolved around how the liturgy of the Word can be a source of division, particularly if a bad balance was struck. Many had been harmed by sermons
preached against transgender or LGBTQ individuals. Others struggled with scripture read in a way that promotes sexism or racism. One participant was in a space on her faith journey where she was struggling with scriptural literalism. Because she could not understand scripture in a literalist sense, she felt including references to scripture in the liturgy was problematic.

4.3.4 Gender Subversion in Liturgy

Four individuals indicated that taking on various leadership roles in liturgy drew them closer to God, although one indicated that not having to lead allowed him to connect more easily with God. (This particular individual was a priest, so perhaps the difference in perspective should not be surprising). Part of the draw of leading worship was the ability to lead in a way that embodied or performed their gender:

*I'm now kind of curious about what others see. What new people see. Because I think I pass pretty easily. I know that there's a couple of people in my congregation that may not be super great with how much I bring up trans stuff when it comes to preaching and things, but I always want to make sure that nobody is surprised by me. I don't ever want somebody to think one thing and then be like, “Wait, what? You're trans?”* (Participant A)

*The [Roman] Catholic Church talks about gay people as “intrinsically disordered.” And their understanding of women who want to be ordained is similar, that it's something - because they view vocation as a very deep intrinsic thing, and ordination is a very deep intrinsic thing that changes you. Wanting to be ordained is essentially theorised as a type of queerness ... my attachment to my gender has always been weaker than my attachment to the altar. And those things are tangled up and inextricable in themselves from each other because I knew I had a vocation before I knew I was queer.* (Participant B)

*Obviously it depends with different congregations. Like my previous parish was very queer - women, and very trans. And that was excellent, but the nuances were much more alive there because there was someone to see them essentially. In the context I'm in right now, there isn't anyone to see it. It doesn't feel bad. It feels a little flatter.* (Participant B)
In some conceptions I am the bride of Christ, standing behind the altar, and in some conceptions I am Christ standing behind the altar, in some sort of mystical sense. And so that’s sort of genderfuck, if I do say so myself. (Participant G)

This is not to say that the study participants considered liturgy to be mere performance of some kind of theatre. Instead, their comments were marked by seriousness and a desire for authenticity. For them, it is not only a matter of leading, but leading as a transgender individual. There was a desire among the participants to make visible God’s reality – that God calls transgender individuals into leadership, whether lay or ordained – into a sphere that has often rejected this reality. Another side of this was to make apparent the gender subversion that already occurs in liturgical practice, even if all leaders are cisgender, heterosexual men. The desire to lead in worship occurred not despite the participants’ transgender identity. Rather, most saw the two as intrinsically related. Liturgical participation, and especially liturgical leadership, for the participants meant navigating gendered presentation – balancing ways in which the individual feels that they are engaging in worship as their authentic self with the potential consequences of disrupting the status quo. In other words, this meant choosing to either lean into the gender subversion that God is already up to in themselves and in the liturgy, or else to align with this-world expectations around gender. Depending on the context, this may lead trans individuals to sacrifice authenticity in worship for the comfort on others. This is in line with Dowd’s research. He writes, “[T]rans folk often micromanaged their behaviours so that they did not draw attention to themselves. … [T]hey accepted a ban on leadership and public facing ministry in churches. … [T]hey held a separate service once a month to celebrate their identities so as not to overwhelm the larger congregation with ‘their issues’.”79

Consistent with Dowd’s comment, one participant mentioned the following regarding leadership opportunities for her at her former congregation:

[T]here was some suggestion before I transitioned that I could be a what we call Eucharistic Minister – somebody who helps to give out Holy Communion. When I transitioned for some reason that was just forgotten about. (Participant C).

79 Dowd, “Five Thing Cis Folk Don’t Know About Trans Folk,” 104.
At the same time, the experiences of transgender Christians’ gender subversion in worship, and particularly in liturgical leadership, connect to a broader history of gendered frameworks being disrupted in Christian worship. Though relatively recent when taken alongside the whole Christian history, scholars have begun to investigate the gendered implications of women serving in leadership roles in the church, particularly as clergy. In Chapter 2 we encountered the input of Sarah Coakley on this matter. However, gender subversion has always occurred in Christian worship, particularly when taken alongside matters of celibacy and monasticism. The role of the priest has always taken on a role that subverts gender. While the Church has been traditionally understood as feminine, it was also understood as the Body of Christ, which was masculine. The priest – generally male, though there is some evidence of women functioning as presbyters in the early church – took on both feminine and masculine roles, in both representing God to the people and in representing the people to God. The gender subversion does not end with the predominantly male priesthood. In some contexts of the early church, only unmarried or widowed women could take on leadership roles in liturgical settings because being a wife was considered inseparable from womanhood (i.e., being a wife was essential to the social construct of womanhood in that context). The Carthaginian virgins, for instance, were considered not to be women, even by themselves. Effectively, this meant that only “queer” women could lead liturgy. Here, the word “queer” is used loosely to indicate individuals falling outside the social construct of gender in their context and should not be construed with the modern construct of queer. Effectively, though, liturgical leadership in Christian worship has always subverted gender. While it has not been studied or considered as thoroughly, when we consider that all are active participants of liturgy, even those not in leadership positions, it should not be far-fetched to consider that all liturgical participation disrupts gendered constructs. We should not dismiss the possibility that God’s very action in the liturgy disrupts human constructs of gender. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, “[T]here is no longer male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This is not to say that liturgy erases gender, but that God’s action in the liturgy changes gender, just as anything else would not escape change in coming into contact with God.

80 Coakley, “The Woman at the Altar,” 85-86.
83 Galatians 3:28.
4.3.5 Physicality of Worship and Postures of Prayer

*Prayer is different. It is a different, physical experience for me, whether I'm kneeling or standing (Participant A).*

The study participants generally spoke of the physicality of worship as grounding. For some, this sense of grounding came through a specific posture taken during worship. For others, it was the repetition of posture and gesture that occurs at each service. Still others found that the use of different postures to denote different parts of worship allowed participants to feel rooted. The connection between a specific posture and different facets of prayer allowed these participants to enter fully into the specific liturgical moment or action.

*I feel an openness and a connection to God very profoundly if I'm prostrate. ... But I also think that, being prostrate is both literally very grounding because your whole body is on the ground, and incredibly vulnerable because you have no idea who's around you.* (Participant A)

*There is a kind of kneeling that you can do in a pew that you can't really do when you're freestanding, just kneeling on the floor. I sort of hunch myself over and put my arms in the pew in front of me and sort of hunch myself over and make a little dark space. That has a very silencing effect on my mind. My body knows that hunching myself over and making that little dark, inward looking space [means] that's the time for contemplation.* (Participant B)

*For me, it's having the connection between what I'm doing with my body and the ritual ... there is this sense of repetition, of “I have been doing this the same way as long as I can remember in the presence of God.” And it's never just standing still, or sitting still and letting it wash over me. For me, it feels that there's something about combining the intellectual with the physical that elevates it.* (Participant E)

While some participants also spoke of being still in prayer as important, this should not contradict the importance of the physicality of worship to which participants generally subscribed. Both physicality and stillness were emphasised by several participants, indicating that the contrast between the two provided a means to enter into different “sides” of worship.
There was disagreement between some participants about which postures were most meaningful during different parts of the liturgy. In the end, though, there was agreement – except from one participant – that postures were meaningful. For the participants, the different postures communicated a sense of connection to what the community was doing together, a sense of openness to what God was doing, and a sense of division between that time and place and their everyday life. Many participants also spoke of their personal prayer life, and how posture of prayer was similar or different when one was alone versus amongst others. Some spoke of communal action as elevating the sense of importance. Some spoke of taking on certain postures or gestures (such as closing eyes) to avoid distraction around other people. Some participants spoke of not engaging in postures or gestures around others that they normally would do in private. Sometimes it was a matter of feeling too awkward when visible to others, or else the action not working well in their church space (for instance, sitting in a pew might restrict one’s options).

The significant conversation around physicality in worship should challenge the notion that transgender individuals reject bodies or are a modern form of Gnosticism. If anything, the participants comments reflected a strong understanding of how embodiment and liturgical participation interact.

4.3.6 Emphasis on the Countercultural

One participant identified a link between the countercultural and mainstream hostile attitudes towards transgender individuals. In short, for this participant, churches should not try to mimic mainstream culture to make church more “familiar” or “accessible” because mainstream culture is already unsafe and suboptimal for transgender individuals. On the other hand, the more countercultural worship is, the more transgender people can be reminded that our existence in God is different from our existence in a culture and world that often rejects us.

*What I like about traditional liturgy? Well, one of the things I like is that it's so weird and out of touch. It's so like bizarre and old-timey. It has basically nothing to do with modern life and that's what I like about it. ... We're doing all these weird rituals because they connect us to God and that's the only reason we're doing it.*

*Interviewer: But for you, it sounds like almost, the more out of touch the worship is with
the modern world, the more real it feels to you?

Yeah. (Participant D)

For another participant, it was important that the space of worship denote its “otherness.” For them, it was important that worship be clearly distinct from everyday life. This participant was not as concerned that worship occurs inside a church, specifically – though they admitted, it helped – but were concerned that the time and space for worship was set apart in some way.

One participant spoke of the struggle between believing in the Christian narrative and living in a culture that rejects large religious narratives, particularly when they include God’s continuing action in the world.

It's hard to be a Christian in this culture because modernism says, “Only science can tell you what’s real,” and postmodernism often says, “There’s no larger story, and if you say so, you’re arrogant.” That voice says to me, “Do you actually believe the bodily resurrection of Jesus? Do you actually believe that he's going to return? Do you actually believe that Love is going to win and that all things will be reconciled in Christ?” And I'm like, “Maybe I'm slow. Maybe I haven't taken everything into account—but yes, I really do.” (Participant G)

For this participant, it mattered that God’s action was continuing. It mattered that they could trust an eschatological hope. There was an incongruence between their belief and experience with the suggestion that Christianity was just a matter of being a good person while ignoring the miraculous claims of the faith or the eschatological reality. A cultural Christianity was not enough; only a countercultural Christianity could survive contact with their identity as Christian and transgender.

4.3.7 Prayer, Silence, and Stillness

Interviewer: What do you think that allows you to be responsive to God when you don't have responsibility?

Because I can listen better. I'm not thinking of the next thing. (Participant A)

Several participants spoke of the need for silence, or the need to not do anything as foundational to their prayer life and connection to God. In some cases, this meant not taking on any leadership
responsibilities for worship. In other cases, it meant the ability to be physically still and undisturbed to enter into prayer. Some participants spoke of the desire to lead at times and the desire for stillness and a lack of responsibility at other times. Rather than being contradictory, what these participants expressed seemed to be more a desire for balance in liturgical participation.

In those few moments in the service [when not leading], assuming nothing else is going on, I think I can listen better because the theater chatter isn't as strong in my head. The rest of me can listen better. (Participant A)

My own personal prayer is much more to do with meditation. With this, being in the presence of God with being open to God. Not just asking God for stuff. I don't think that's what we're supposed to do. ...Yeah, more what we call apophatic prayer, where you're not trying to verbalize and conceptualize things. Because that can only take you so far, and after a while it gets in the way. You know, Buddhists can teach us a lot about that. We can learn from them about meditation and about how through meditation and it can help us to have a more direct connection with God. (Participant C)

In Trans Affirming Churches, Beardsley and Dowd discuss the importance of making space in worship. They talk about the practices such as meditation and Lectio Divina that give people space to grow, change their hearts and minds, and experience true contrition around issues such as homophobia and transphobia.84 While Beardsley and Dowd present this primarily as something that cisgender members of a congregation can engage in to make spaces safer for transgender individuals, the evidence from my study suggests that transgender individuals would also benefit directly from engaging in such practice. Space for silence and reflection can promote growth and healing, both with one another and with God. It leaves an openness to God’s direction for us in our lives.

In contrast, one participant found the “wrong” kind of silence and stillness in worship difficult. They believed that the difficulty was primarily due to their neurodivergence. Mediation, in particular, was a struggle. Engaging in a regular prayer life which revolved around silence and

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84 Dowd, Beardsley, and Tanis, Trans Affirming Churches, 120-121.
stillness in prayer was something that they found they were not very consistent about, but they expressed a desire to improve in this regard. For them, the Eucharistic liturgy felt much more natural because of the embodied aspect.

4.3.8 Childhood Experiences in Liturgy / Upbringing

I have a very vivid memory of being about seven or eight years old and walking off the altar one Sunday and telling my mom, “I'm going to be a priest because I can do a better job than that guy.” (Participant E)

As the participants reflected on the aspects and components of the Eucharistic liturgy where they were more able to sense God’s presence, the majority of them noted how childhood experiences had influenced their perceptions. For some, aspects that resonated were explicitly taught to them by their parents, teachers, priest, or other mentors. For others, meaning was communicated directly through their liturgical participation as children.

I also feel I grew up in the very Episcopal way of: you sit to learn, you kneel to pray, and you stand to praise. ... [Prayer] is a different, physical experience for me, whether I'm kneeling or standing. I think that that's a long-term [habit from childhood experience]. (Participant A)

I became an altar server because my mom had 4 kids in six years and, by herself, was taking us to church, and we were always late. And I hated it because we ended up standing in the back and I couldn't see what the priest was doing. So when they called for altar servers, I volunteered because I knew we would have to get to church at least on time and I would have a front row seat to what the priest was doing. (Participant E)

The postures of prayer where I feel like I'm drawn to God, when I feel God there with me – a lot of it is what I learned as a kid, the particularities of the priest who taught me how to be an altar server. (Participant E)

As a child, a young person, I used to go to what was called the 8 o’clock communion, which is a completely said service, and there was no sermon. So I was very used to a liturgy, I suppose, in the formative years of my life, where there wasn't a sermon. (Participant F)
The way that many participants learned to worship growing up gave participants a standard for them in terms of what was expected or important in worship, even as adults. This was a major factor for many of the participants in what helped or hindered their sense of connection to God. Liturgical experiences that “clashed” with their experiences growing up were spoken of as a distraction. One participant went so far as to mention the wine tasting “off” for them if it was not port, because they drank port as their first experience of taking wine at church. This is not to say that this participant felt that the use of other wine was wrong or sacramentally invalid. It is more to make the point that even very small things that the participants engaged with in the formative years, particularly sensory things, had a substantial influence on the participants’ liturgical experiences.

It is interesting to note the contrast between the participants quoted above and the one participant who grew up unchurched. Instead of speaking about childhood experiences, they spoke about the period where they were formed into Christian identity as an adult. In particular, he spoke about encountering the liturgical practices of different denominations before becoming part of the Anglican tradition. They also spoke about learning to take on leadership roles in liturgy, such as his training to become a verger. In sum, the period of formation into the Christian faith held significant weight to the participants, regardless of their age when this occurred.

4.3.9 Sin

Interviewer: Is there any particular circumstances when you're with other people communally during the Eucharist, where you feel [connection to God and to other Christians] very strongly?

Yeah, definitely. Confession. (Participant D)

The topic of sin came up in a few different areas. First, participants spoke of confession and absolution in the Eucharistic liturgy. Two mentioned confession and absolution as part of the Eucharistic action where they felt God’s presence. However, one of the participants found the confession and absolution drew her away from God. This particular participant expressed that she struggled with the practice of confession and absolution in liturgy because she did not believe in a literal interpretation of Genesis 2-3. This is not to say than other participants believed in a literal interpretation of Genesis 2-3, but for the other participants, there appeared to
be no incongruence between a nonliteral reading of that particular passage and their own participation in confession and absolution. Second, Ash Wednesday was mentioned by two separate participants. Throughout all of the other interviews, this was the only date specifically mentioned by participants. Finally, there was significant conversation around sin and shortcoming on systemic levels, both in the church and in the wider world.

*I feel like confession is so interesting because, on the one hand, I feel like it's been abused. There's a lot of spiritual abuse especially towards queer people as far as being forced to confess to things that people perceived to be wrong. But on the other hand, I think that there's a lot of importance in confession because we do fuck up and hurt people and there are lots of things that the church should be confessing and repenting about as an institution.* (Participant D)

*The confession makes me feel close to God and that God is close to me, because I'm not apologizing to people for doing things that disappoint them. I am not God. I will always disappoint somebody. I will always disappoint God. God will still love me, but I'm not apologizing to another human and saying, 'I confess that I have sinned and I require your absolution.' Which I do occasionally, as part of apologizing to people. But in confession I feel a lack of judgment and it feels safe to have that moment in the gathered community, especially all saying the confession together, recognizing that all of us as humans are not God, and that we are all going to fall short.* (Participant E)

*The invitation to confession ... I get it, that by and large we come up short in terms of when we try and be good, but I do have difficulty with the obsession that seems to be with our sinfulness.* (Participant F)

It is clear that transgender individuals are no strangers to the experience of sin. While many contributors on this topic would speak of transgender identity as “fallen” and a source of sin, the primary experience of participants of sinfulness was in the attitudes and treatment they received from the world around them – and their response to it. Rejection, particularly at the hands of the church or other Christians was something most participants had experienced. Some spoke of the journey of learning patience and expressed grief over a church that moved far too slowly. Many of the participants spoke of learning to love even those who hated them or who did not
understand them. Some spoke of processes of healing relationships that had been broken – through no fault of their own – when they came out. Some participants spoke of letting broken relationships go and learning to love themselves again, or else being surprised by the acceptance of those they feared would not accept them as they were. For the majority of participants, the processes of learning to offer and seek forgiveness were inseparable. Speaking to his study, Chris Dowd offers a similar insight: “One of the striking findings of my research was the almost universality of forgiveness. Many of the interviewees spoke about a process of forgiving themselves and also forgiving others for the hurts incurred in the past. Many of the interviewees had recognized that the only way to completely free themselves of their pasts was through both extending and receiving forgiveness.\(^{85}\)

There was a desire for concepts of sin, confession, and absolution to be used delicately in worship. On the one hand, ignoring the existence of evil and sin entirely would not go over well with most of the participants. Their own lived experiences made sin and evil a very present reality. On the other hand, there was an awareness of the spiritual trauma in naming one’s existence as transgender as sinful or forcing transgender individuals to repent for their gender identity. Every participant was extremely mindful of their own shortcomings and sinfulness, simply because of the work they had put into their Christian development. None felt the need to name their gender identity among their sins.

### 4.4 Conclusion

I have explored the responses provided by the interview participants in this study, organised into nine emerging themes. Where applicable, these responses have been compared to the responses of other transgender Christians in previous research, such as the doctoral work of Chris Dowd. In the next chapter, I will begin to interpret what these responses could mean using existing liturgical theology.

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\(^{85}\) Dowd, “Five Things Cis Folk Don’t Know About Trans Folk,” 103.
CHAPTER 5

5 LITURGICAL THEOLOGY AND BAPTISMAL ECCLESIOLOGY

This chapter brings the study results into conversation with existing liturgical theology, in particular, the underlying theology of Baptismal Ecclesiology. The four topics covered in this chapter are: (1) Christian life as rooted in Baptism, (2) catechesis and Christian formation, (3) liturgical worship as worship done by the whole Body of Christ, and (4) the mystical reality of liturgical worship. To conclude, we turn to a section on Christian Identity and Christian cosmology, which seeks to weave the previous four topics together.

5.1 Rooted in Our Baptism

One of the primary tenets of Baptismal Ecclesiology is that all sacraments – and indeed – all facets of our Christian identity – flow from our Baptism. From the early Church, the water of Baptism was correlated to death and rebirth. While this was the primary theology of the early Church in North Africa and possibly Rome, the theology of Syria and Egypt placed more emphasis on Jesus’ Baptism in the Jordan. This, of course, influences the rites themselves and the prebaptismal rites. Maxwell Johnson writes in his book *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, “In the East, we might say, the prebaptismal rites are oriented toward the reception of the Holy Spirit, while in the West the prebaptismal rites are oriented toward the expulsion of evil spirits.”

Baptism, then, was understood not only as a human rite but as a permanent change on the spiritual level. It also changes us in relationship to other Christians as we enter into the royal priesthood of the church. The Baptismal liturgy in the *Book of Alternative services* – the primary rite used to celebrate Baptism in the Anglican Church of Canada – reads, “We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood.” This fundamentally links our Baptism to the sacramental life of the church, particularly the Eucharist. When considered through the lens of Baptismal Ecclesiology, we understand participation in the Eucharist not as a reward for having been

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Baptised, but as the only repeatable part of our Baptism. In the early church, one’s first encounter with the Eucharist occurred after they had been Baptised, anointed, and entered into the church building to participate in the Eucharistic action as a member of the royal priesthood of the church before receiving bread and wine. The orientation was fundamentally towards something that one does, communally, based on the change which has occurred in their Baptism. It was less oriented towards receiving the elements, especially in an individualistic sense. The earliest practice of the Eucharist went so far as to turn out those who were not Baptised after scripture reading and preaching took place in the service.\textsuperscript{89} Both receiving and doing communion were linked to the Baptismal act. There was a clear connection between Eucharistic participation and growth into one’s Baptism.

This is not to say that we should necessarily go back to these practices. The modern context is not that of the early church. Turning out unbaptised people after the sermon – particularly in an age where we are coming to terms with religious trauma caused by Christianity, and where people can easily watch a Eucharistic service on Youtube – is more likely to cause harm than restore lost connotations between Baptism and Eucharist. The reality is that we live in a time where, for so long, Baptism has been associated with salvation from personal damnation in the afterlife. Because of this, failing to invite unbaptised individuals to receive the bread and wine can come off as a judgement against the unbaptised or a belief that those who are not Baptised will not be saved. One of the study participants connected the inability to invite everyone to receive the bread and wine with the exclusion he experienced in the church as a trans person. This does not correspond well with the theology that Baptism is effectual.\textsuperscript{90} At the same time, I believe it is important to recognise how the experiences of those who have faced exclusion in the church is intersecting with a general loss of awareness of Baptismal theology in our church communities. It should be noted that, based on this study, it appears that most transgender Anglicans were raised as Christians and were Baptised as infants or children. They would therefore not personally be affected by this. Their main concern, instead, appears to be the

\textsuperscript{89} Johnson, \textit{The Rites of Christian Initiation}, 73.

\textsuperscript{90} Inviting the unbaptised to receive communion is also not a position upheld by the canons of the Anglican Church, which state that the admitting only the Baptised to communion is the norm. This is rooted in the theology that it is the Baptised who make up the Church, and the Church (throughout the world and throughout time) in turn does the Eucharistic action. In other words, the Body of Christ makes the Body of Christ. Ignoring this moves the Eucharistic action to something that is merely received rather than a self-offering.
exclusion of others. Those who prepare and lead worship must learn to approach this with
gentleness and delicacy, without disposing of the theology that says we are members of the Body
of Christ through Baptism. After all, if we are no longer members of the Body of Christ through
Baptism – a permanent enfolding into God’s household, through God’s own effective action –
we open ourselves to the possibility that human beings may decide who is cut off from the Body
of Christ, including by reason of their gender or sexuality.

The study participants made it clear that we cannot treat church as a social club where one’s
membership can be revoked. When Baptism is understood as only a human rite, which can be
reversed, rather than a permanent irreversible change brought upon by God, we run into
problems for the transgender Christians. We have seen in previous chapters how many Christians
consider it appropriate to bar transgender Christians from things which are obligations rooted in
their Baptism, such as Eucharistic participation.

Because of all this, we cannot understand Baptism as primarily salvific of the individual after
death, but irrelevant to this life. Neither can we understand it as symbolic in the popular sense of
the word, where it is presented as ineffectual. Baptismal Ecclesiology can offer us a way
forward. Baptismal Ecclesiology understands that the effects of Baptism reach beyond the
immediate context in which Baptism occurs, and beyond the individual who is Baptised. We are
incorporated into the Body of Christ with all of Christendom throughout time and space. The
Church is changed with each individual who is Baptised. In her article “Baptismal Ecclesiology
without Baptism?”, Lizette Larson-Miller comments on the irrevocable relationship between the
Baptised and worship:

Participation [in worship] in its deepest sense is not an option, for not to do so would be to deny
our very selves. Knowing that this participation is dynamic – never done – and that we are never
done, it is also important to recognize that participation and ecclesiology are ultimately
eschatological realities. … It is through this common participation in Christ, begun in the waters
of Baptism, that we do church, a dynamic activity that leads to only one purpose, only one
“product”: the fullness of the reign of God.91

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91 Lizette Larson-Miller, “Baptismal Ecclesiology without Baptism?” in Drenched in Grace: Essays in Baptismal
Ecclesiology Inspired by the Work and Ministry of Louis Weil, ed. Lizette Larson-Miller (Eugene, OR: Pickwick
We, as the Church, are incorporated into God’s eschatological reality, where we are drawn into God’s mission to the world. This is most evident when we participate in the Eucharist as the People of God, where we are formed into God’s intentions for the eschatological hope, while the eschatological reality simultaneously collides with our reality.

We must then ask, how do we restore the theology of the early church surrounding Baptism and Eucharist? How do we re-establish that Baptism and Eucharist are inherently linked, to the point that Eucharistic participation is understood as, in some sense, a continuation of our Baptism, and a means of growth into what God has already solidified in the death and resurrection of Christ (a death and resurrection which we enter into in our Baptism)? How do we communicate that Eucharist is something “done” – rather than received – and it is a communal action, not individualist, done by the whole People of God? How do we explain that all things we do as Christians, whether in a liturgical setting or outside of it, is rooted in our Baptism?

The reality is that the modern church has lost much of this theology surrounding Baptism and Eucharist. The liturgical movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s sought to restore some of this. However, this was not necessarily well communicated on the congregational level, particularly as many parishes continue to operate on the model that Christian formation stops after confirmation, or at the very least places the onus of Christian formation on the individual once they reach adulthood. At the same time, the participants of this study were able to apparently intuit much this theology around Baptism and Eucharist. Those that were clergy or postulants were able to articulate it using more theological terms, but those participants who were laypeople were still able to describe it in their own words. They spoke about connectedness to other Christians in the Eucharist and its unifying sense. They spoke about the Eucharist as a fundamentally communal act, and stressed importance not on receiving as an individual, but in doing communion as a community, with several participant stressing the importance of receiving communion from someone else. They spoke about the connections between doing communion and outward-facing mission towards the world. This insight echoes Louis-Marie Chauvet’s arch of scripture, liturgy, and ethics, wherein the Church as a whole fosters relationship between all three, guiding us to the eschatological reality, through our belief in the risen Christ. He writes:

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[Le schéma] s’agit d’un cercle ouvert : ouvert sur le Royaume qui la déborde de toute part ; ouvert sur le Monde au milieu duquel elle a charge d’être « sacrament » du Royaume … D’une part être chrétien, c’est être d’Église, parce que c’est, au minimum, reprendre à son compte la confession pascale : « Jesus est le Christ », confession qui fait l’Église et qui se visibilise pour chacun dans le bapâtsme. Mais d’autre part, si être chrétien c’est entrer dans un groupe bien défini, c’est aussi se déprendre de tout particularisme pour s’ouvrir à l’universel.93

In other words, Eucharistic participation allows us to glimpse the reality of God’s Kingdom, but the sacrament only exists insofar as the work of God is not complete. Jesus is raised from the dead and has ascended into Heaven; it is this absence that compels Christians to leave the Eucharistic table, the glimpse of God’s Kingdom, and turn outwards towards the whole world, which has not yet been reconciled and restored.

Most prominently, participants spoke about their continual growth into their Christian identity. If transgender Christians can intuit this theology around Eucharist, it likely speaks to their unique journeys in faith. This opens up questions about what the rest of the church can learn from transgender Christians as we seek to reestablish lost connotations between Baptism and Eucharist, particularly as we learn how to exist in a world where cultural Christianity is no longer the norm.

The Baptismal reality is one of change. As John Macquarrie writes in A Guide to the Sacraments, “Although Baptism is a decisive moment … and although it is complete in and of itself, gathering up all the riches of Christian initiation, it is at the same time a beginning, the point of entry into Christianity.” Transformation, therefore, is both a staple of Christian identity and transgender identity. This is not to say that we are becoming something else. Certainly, we became a new creation in our Baptism, but our growth into our Christian identity after our Baptism is not to become something more than our Baptism – our growth is oriented towards

93Louis-Marie Chauvet, Symbole et Sacrement (Paris: Les éditions du cerf, 1988), 186. See also the translation in Louis-Marie Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 180-181: “We are dealing with an open circle – open to the reign which always exceeds the Church; open to the World, in the middle of which it is charged with being the “sacrament” of this reign … On the one hand, to be Christian is to be part of the Church because at a minimum it is to make one’s own the Easter proclamation “Jesus is the Christ,” a confession which constitutes the Church and becomes visible in each person’s baptism. But, if to be a Christian is to enter into a well-defined group, it is also to free oneself from every parochialism in order to open oneself to the universal.”

94 Macquarrie, A Guide to the Sacraments, 76.
becoming who we already are in our Baptism. We might look at gender transition in much the same lens. Transgender people do not become something else when we transition; transition is a process of becoming who we already are. The Christian transgender person understands this as becoming who we already are in God. In her paper “God-Language in Public and Private Prayer: A Place for Integrating Gender, Sexuality, and Faith”, Nicola Slee cautions against integration of identity unless it is dynamic and eschatologically oriented. She writes, “Rather than moving towards the goal of some fixed, unchanging, settled identity, we may rather imagine human identity as a constantly changing and shifting eschatological process of embodied becoming, mirroring the eschatological becoming of a God whose name is no name but ‘I will be what I will be’.” If the eschatological reality has already been secured in the death and resurrection of Christ, then we are becoming what we already are. For Slee, integration of one’s spiritual life and life as embodied in one’s gender is not only something that can be accomplished by prayer, but allows for prayer that is cooperative with God’s action. Our liturgical practices not only exist in the already-not yet reality between Christ’s victory over death and his coming again; all our identities, particularly our Baptismal identity, exist in the already-not yet reality.

5.2 Catechesis and Christian Formation

The Early Church took catechesis, the period of formation prior to one’s Baptism, very seriously. This period, known as the catechumenate, prepared adults for Baptism through use of rites and instruction in the faith and Christian living over an extended period. Speaking of the Early Church catechumen process, Johnson writes:

[In] early Syria and Egypt, the catechumenate does not appear to be highly structured or formalized. In the early West, however, the catechumenal process seems to be quite formal and quite structured with rather detailed and specific instructions for catechumens and sponsors alike and with the possibility that it took three years to complete. Nevertheless, in both East and West, the overall purpose of the catechumenate appears to be that of formation in Christian living, of forming disciples of Christ, rather than training in doctrinal content.

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96 Ibid., 229.
98 Johnson, The Rites of Christian Initiation, 87.
In a sense then, we might understand the Early Church’s approach to catechesis as related to development of Christian identity, and a process of integration of Christian identity into the whole of one’s life and being. Emphasis also fell on the obligations one assumed through Baptism. On this matter, Macquarrie says, “The majority of those being baptized were adults, many of them converts from other faiths, and they had undergone basic training in Christian doctrine, worship and ethics. The churches, on their side, had made it clear that Baptism is no mere formality but makes demands on those who seek it.”99 The catechesis period normatively ended with Baptism and anointing outside the church building, culminating with them entering the church to take their place among the Baptised and do communion for the first time among them.100 When infant Baptism became the norm in the fourth century, prebaptismal rites continued, but lost their connection to formation into Christian life, since, as John the Deacon notes, “all these things are done even to infants, who by reason of their age understand nothing.”101 In this, the role of sponsors (now including parents) became important not to form catechumens for Christian life prior to Baptism, but to help Christians grow into their Baptismal identity after Baptism. Since the formation was occurring after Baptism and the prebaptismal rites continued to operate prior to Baptism, the rites lost their connection to this process. These rites were further compressed during the medieval period, likely because they were no longer oriented towards adult catechumens but rather towards infant Baptismal candidates and their parents responding on their behalf.102 Eventually, the prebaptismal rites were compressed to the point where they were conducted in at the same time as Baptism. This service was detached from Easter (or even the Paschal character of Sunday), and was generally held in a private service outside the church door only a few days after the infant was born.103

In the Christian west, the practice of confirmation emerged as a separate rite from Baptism; while initially confirmation occurred at any age based on the availability of a bishop, eventually confirmation at the age of seven or older became the normative pattern.104 The adult

100 Johnson, The Rites of Christian Initiation, 75.
101 Ibid., 132.
102 Ibid., 186.
103 Ibid., 231-232.
104 Ibid., 219; 221.
catechumenate did not completely disappear, however; its presence continued in various forms in missionary contexts.  

Catechesis changed yet again with the reformation. Some branches of the reformation, namely anabaptists, reclaimed adult Baptism as the normative pattern, but this did not mean restoration of the early church’s catechumenal process with its prebaptismal rites. Instead, the concept of “believer’s Baptism” was introduced, with emphasis on the public profession of an individual’s faith rather than a rite wherein God’s action produces an effectual change. Those traditions that continued to Baptise infants as the norm catechized older children after Baptism, generally prior to confirmation or their reception of first communion. However, this was often characterised by instruction rather than ritual. In the Anglican context, we can see our inheritance of this in our own Prayer Book tradition, which includes a section on the catechism. This was a far cry from the instruction through ritual which was commonplace in the early church.

The context around Christian initiation has changed again in the modern era. We can no longer assume that those in our churches grew up Christian, have even a basic knowledge of the Christian faith, or have had a continuous relationship with Christianity throughout their lives. This may be particularly true of transgender individuals; many of the study participants had gone through periods of time where they were inactive in church communities. We also must be aware of our context where we are moving towards post-cultural Christianity. This reality is evident from the statistics presented in Brain Clarke and Stuart MacDonald’s book Leaving Christianity: Changing Allegiances in Canada. Not only has the number of Canadians who do not identify with any religion risen to nearly 25%, compared to well under 1% of the population in 1961, but a significant portion of those with no religion – particularly among younger generations – have grown up in a family without religious affiliation. Calrke and MacDonald outline the significance of this: “[F]rom the viewpoint of organized religion, there is no parental religion for

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105 Ibid., 285.
106 Ibid., 267-268.
107 Ibid., 272.
108 See The Book of Common Prayer (Canada), 544-555; The Book of Common Prayer (American), 844-862; The Book of Common Prayer (Church of England), 295-301. Generally the question and answer format of this section, its placement immediately before the rite for confirmation, and/or its rubrics indicate the intention the catechism be used to instruct and examine young people prior to confirmation.
them to return to as they get older. While the parents, guardians, or other older relatives of that generation may at one stage in their lives have attended church or Sunday School, in many cases these youth have never attended, aside from weddings or funerals.\textsuperscript{110}

Despite this changing religious landscape in the modern world, formation continues to operate in the midst of presumed Christian cultural dominance. Conversely, our contexts more greatly echoes that of the early Church, where Christian identity could not be presumed as the norm; yet, we carry the added baggage of a history of alignment to powers of colonialism, sexism, anti-queer sentiment, and other forms of oppression. As an example of the gaps in catechesis in this context, two study participants linked the passing of the peace to coffee hour. They held positive associations with this; presuming the passing of the peace as primarily a social act, they describe it as being important to show that the church was welcoming to everyone. Sadly, with the loss of the Baptismal and eschatological connotations with passing the peace, the action was reduced in power to mere \textit{welcoming} rather than an act collaborative with the transformative work of God.

What must also be stated is the importance of formation towards Christian identity, particularly in childhood. We must assume that there are transgender children in our churches – even if they are not aware of their transgender identity and may not be for some time – because of the sheer fact that there are transgender adults in our churches. Transgender individuals do not generally come to church as unchurched adults, having had no prior contact with Christianity. Only one participant in this study grew up unchurched, and I believe it is safe to say that they were an anomaly. As it becomes less normative for Christians to have grown up in the Christian faith, we might conclude that the future church will have fewer transgender members, assuming a continuation of this pattern whereby unchurched transgender individuals are less likely to seek to become Christian. We must ask ourselves what this means for Church and its contribution to the work that God is doing eschatologically. In this, I believe it is important to consider the experiences of the one participant who grew up unchurched. This participant, who came to Christianity as an adult, attached deep meaning to their experiences while being formed into the Christian faith. In particular, this person found themself drawn to Christianity because of its countercultural stance. The beliefs held by Christians that counteracted postmodern sensibilities,

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 171.
alongside worship for the sake of worship were both deeply meaningful to this participant. It matters that the faith carries meaning, and that our beliefs actually hold weight. It matters that the Church has a theology, rather than simply doing what happens to be acceptable or normative in a culture, time, and place.

At the same time, we need to recognise a history of problematic theology. We can no longer treat Baptism as an event that acts as an event solely focused on the removal of original sin from the individual because it ignores the growth we undertake towards our Baptismal identity throughout our lives. It was clear that the study participants had undertaken significant spiritual growth (though they likely had little choice in the matter as they wrestled with their transgender identity and Christian identity). Liturgical worship that is mindful of the experiences of transgender Christians would do well to be centred around the continual formation of all Christians towards our Baptismal identity. A community that centres its worship this way would be better equipped to support transgender members as they navigate periods of intense spiritual formation. It would also do communities well to understand that there is no “end” in this process, and have this reflected in their liturgical expression. Deep spiritual growth that transgender individuals undergo may happen when they are inactive in a Christian community. A community that recognises and celebrates that growth is important. A community that can facilitate further growth when the individual has rejoined communal Christian worship is essential.

In this, we must always be mindful of the difference between forming a candidate for Baptism and formation of those already Baptised towards their Baptismal identity. Most of the study participants had grown up within the church, though some had stopped actively participating in Christian communities for periods of time. Though they were inactive for periods of time, God’s hold on them in their Baptism never stopped. Upon reentering life in Christian community, transgender individuals may seek to be “rebaptised.” In this case, reaffirming Baptismal vows would be the most appropriate response. Liturgical worship should stress God’s activity outside of church communities, affirming that God continues to form individuals to their Baptismal identity even while they are not active members of the church. In a sense, I believe transgender Christians may be more able to understand this. Just as we do not stop being our gender during periods of time when it may not be safe or practical to live authentically, so we continue to be Christian even outside of organised Christianity. At the same time, it is much more affirming of
these identities – and more aligned to God’s intentions for us – when we are able and willing to live authentically, both as Christians and as transgender individuals. Baptismal Ecclesiology assumes the norm for Christian existence is communal with other Christians.

For transgender individuals who come to Christianity after already being aware of their transgender identity, it is appropriate that the catechumenal process integrate one’s preparation for Baptism with their transgender identity.

5.3 Worship as the Whole Body

Liturgical theology tells us that when we worship as Christians, we worship as the whole body of Christ. Worship – including sacramental worship – is not done by a priest on behalf of laypeople. Though an individual presides during the Eucharistic action, we all do communion as members of the Body of Christ.

All worship is done by the Body of Christ; is also outward facing; that is, worship is done for the sake of the world. While good liturgical theology supports worship as the whole people of God, the word *leitourgia*, when taken in its historical roots, it might be translated as “the work on behalf of the people.” Prior to its Christian context, *leitourgia* was used to describe a civil service.\(^{111}\) When we participate in liturgy, we are participating in God’s vocation to the world. In his book *Sacraments and Liturgy*, Louis Weil writes, “The corporate nature of the Church reflects the belief that God has formed a people to witness to him in the world. In other words, salvation is not a gift to individuals but to a people. … [T]he Church [is] scattered all over the face of the earth and at the same time united in Christ, who is himself the primary witness and essential sacrament of God’s presence in the world.”\(^{112}\)

Liturgy, therefore, is not work that we do for ourselves as individuals or even for our own communities. Instead, we are joined to the work that God is doing both in the Church and in the whole world. In other words, we worship together as the Whole Body, as a service to the world. We do this in anticipation of and collaboration with God’s eschatological action.

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\(^{112}\) Weil, *Sacraments and Liturgy*, 65.
Emphasis on worship as the whole Body of Christ is important for transgender Christians. Worshipping as a community was emphasized in different ways by the participants. Some felt a strong sense of connection to those in their immediate church community; others described liturgical worship as connecting them to the Body of Christ, the Communion of Saints, or to Christians who came before them. Many participants spoke positively about a sense of contributing to their church communities through taking on leadership roles in worship.

The notion that transgender individuals should not contribute to worship in visible leadership roles is does not make sense. Baptismal Ecclesiology tells us that, whether or not we have taken on a visible leadership role, we all do worship. While Christians continue to have free will and may chose not to attend church, the whole Body of Christ participates in the worship of God because of the change which occurred in our Baptism. St. Elizabeth of the Trinity – whom I see as an early writer on Baptismal Ecclesiology – speaks of this as the “eternal vocation” of the Baptised. Transgender Christians cannot stop worshipping God any more than those who believe transgender and Christian identities are incompatible can stop us from worshipping God. We worship God as part of God’s reality, even when we cannot perceive this as human beings. Similarly, it makes little sense to prevent transgender Christians from receiving communion. We who have been grafted into the Body of Christ have all participated in doing communion; we have all entered into God’s mystical reality in the Eucharistic action and God has acted through us. If we have all made communion together, it makes little sense to say some cannot receive it while others can. We have been changed in our Baptism, and we are joined to God’s reality. To say that transgender individuals cannot receive communion or participate in roles of liturgical leadership (assuming they have been duly trained and commissioned – nobody is arguing for liturgical chaos here!) is to prioritise a reality of human perception over what God is actually doing.

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113 Regular liturgical participation is also part of our Baptismal vows. See The Book of Common Prayer According to the Use of The Episcopal Church (Cincinnati, OH: Forward Movement, 1979), 555, and The Book of Common Prayer of the Anglican Church of Canada (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1962), 159.

114 There is both scriptural evidence (see Matthew 18:18) and institutional direction (see the American Episcopal Book of Common Prayer’s rubrics regarding persons “living a notoriously evil life” on page 409) that suggests there are certain circumstances where humans may have the authority to deny communion to their fellow Christians. At the same time, individuals assuming such authority must always be cognizant that none of us is privy to God’s reality.
Worshipping as the Whole Body of Christ is not only the reality we belong to as Christians. It is also a very practical means by which diverse members of the Body of Christ can be receptive to God’s action. Beardsley and Dowd speak about worshipping as the Whole Body as a way to address the issues that come up for transgender individuals – including the study participants – around how scripture is used in liturgy. They write, “Our worship frequently has one dominant voice. It is often that of either the professional clergyperson or a worship leader who is deemed to be sufficiently trained to be able to impart wisdom. It may also be a worship band or choir with songs that speak of a specific type of experience of God or theology.”

The dynamic where one person is “active” in worship and everyone else is “passive” can cause harm, or at the very least, create a very flat experience in worship. Reading of scripture can lack nuance when it is only read from one perspective, and the theological stance of worship misses pieces from the rest of the Body of Christ when it only comes from one member. It is for this same reason that it is normative in the Anglican Church that liturgies are reviewed by committees on the parish, diocesan, or national levels before they are put to general use. One person can miss the uniqueness of the Whole Body. Collaboratively, there is less risk of this, particularly if voices that have traditionally gone unheard are included in this process. Dowd and Beardsley suggest that those preparing worship “encourage people to tell their stories as part of the liturgy. This may be done in ways such as people giving testimony or writing a prayer that is used in worship. … The principle is simple: getting people to contribute something of themselves will ensure that they are not passive spectators but active participants.”

In his book *On Liturgical Theology*, Aidan Kavanagh offers a similar commentary. He notes that the setup of many churches promotes a misperception that liturgy is a relationship of “one to many.” He comments, “Some worship spaces, such as the preaching hall with prominent pulpit as the main focal point with ranks of pews in front of it, imply that Christian worship is based on a social relationship of one to many, of a learned ordained person to a congregation of unordained and probably unlearned people.” Weil speaks of something similar in his book *Liturgical Sense: The Logic of Rite*. Historically, while the clergy performed the liturgy on behalf of the laity, the laity engaged in individual, private acts. This was not liturgy of the Whole Body,

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116 Ibid., 119.
but “multiple private acts of Christian piety occurring simultaneously."\textsuperscript{118} This was true of both Roman Catholic contexts, where the Eucharistic prayer was prayed inaudibly by the priest as members of the congregation engaged in their own private devotions, and in Protestant contexts, where the congregation generally listened passively to the preacher in a one-way relationship.\textsuperscript{119}

By contrast, Kavanagh explains that liturgical worship is a relationship of “many to many” where all participants are contributing to and receiving relationship from all other participants. Kavanagh speaks of the unifying aspect of this: “Repetition and rhythm become patterns which secure the mutuality of the group, aiding individuals to relate, cohere, become one with a totality of presences which is greater than its parts.”\textsuperscript{120} This should not be mistaken for humans creating their own meaning in liturgical practice; instead, it should be understood as God offering meaning to us through a milieu that is accessible to us.

Kavanagh’s insight here aligns with those of the study participants. Many recognised the Eucharistic action as unitive, even as participants faced the reality of serious disagreement (particularly surrounding gender identity) in the wider church. Relationship and community were important, and participants described the Eucharistic action as enabling them to let go of their individualism and join to something greater than themselves. Several participants connected their ability to enter into this space in liturgy with repetition, particularly of posture and gesture they had learned during periods of Christian formation. Participants also spoke of the importance of movement through different postures as part of their action in liturgy. Action together communally and action alongside different parts of the liturgy communicated and reinforced that all who are gathered for the liturgy were actively doing liturgy, rather than merely passively receiving liturgy, even if they had no specific liturgical leadership role. In his book \textit{Called to Participate}, Mark Searle explains how liturgy is collective: “Unlike a movie or theater audience [in liturgy] even the most passive assembly is not entirely passive. They will be engaged in some sort of performance, even if it is sometimes not strictly of a piece with the main performance or consistently in step with it … There are marked differences in roles, scripted and unscripted, that

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{120} Kavanaugh, \textit{On Liturgical Theology}, 137.
people play, but the liturgy is the play and interplay of all the roles.”121 Searle notes in this section how liturgical participation among the congregation – including singing hymns, saying responses, and collectively taking on postures such as standing and sitting – contribute to the sense that the liturgy is a collaborative, participatory undertaking rather than something we passively consume.

Active participation, then, is not only a good idea to ensure that marginalised individuals feel represented. We do not merely listen to worship, “follow along” with it, or receive something from it. Even if we are not in a particular leadership role we are actively doing worship because this is who we are and what we have become in our Baptism. The early church, well rooted in the notion of worship as the Whole Body, recognised worship primarily as something that was done, not heard, read, or said.122 Searle speaks of the participation of the Baptised in liturgy as an offering of our whole selves, reflecting (and entering into) Christ’s ultimate and complete sacrifice on the cross. He notes: “That is our participation in the paschal mystery of Christ’s obedience unto death.”123 Because we belong to the Body of Christ and worship as the Body Christ, all our worship is fundamentally rooted in the mysteries of Christ. This brings us to the next section.

5.4 The Mystical Reality

In a sermon preached to the newly Baptised, St. Augustine says

You are the body of Christ, member for member. If you, therefore, are Christ’s body and members, it is your own mystery that is placed on the Lord's table! It is your own mystery that you are receiving! You are saying "Amen" to what you are: your response is a personal signature, affirming your faith. When you hear "The body of Christ", you reply "Amen." Be a member of Christ's body, then, so that your "Amen" may ring true! …. Be what you see; receive what you are.124

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122 Ibid., 28.
123 Ibid., 28.
We enter into a mystery in our Baptism. We reenter that mystery through the Eucharist. This is a mystery that spans beyond time and space. Every time the Eucharist is celebrated, was celebrated, or will be celebrated throughout the world, we celebrate it with all others who belong to the Body of Christ. In a sense, what Augustine is describing is the mystical reality where the Body of Christ makes the Body of Christ.

Several participants of the study expressed an awareness of this. Some expressed this in the unitive power of the Eucharistic action, while others specifically used the language of the Body of Christ and/or the Communion of Saints. Many of the participants seemed to access a mysticism that allowed an awareness of being with the Communion of Saints during the Eucharistic action. Many also expressed a closeness to God within this mysticism. Effectively, this is what we believe that God doing in the Eucharist. We believe that the Eucharistic action is eschatologically oriented. We, alongside all Christians, are being enfolded into the heart of the Triune God, and into God’s action towards the restoration and reconciliation of all things in the fullness of time.

Often, particularly in the modern world, we as Christians find ourselves fixated on the human aspects of the Eucharistic action. Since the Enlightenment era, it has become common for even those who consider themselves Christian and are active members of their churches to reject mystery or the effectuality of sacraments. The idea that God continues to be active in the world – or ever was active, has been brought into question. Instead, attention is given to the human aspect. In less extreme views, we might speak of liturgical participation making us into more ethical people (albeit without God’s action upon us). In more extreme terms, we might speak of worship in terms of what we get out of it, approaching liturgical practice and sacrament through a consumerist lens. As Macquarrie writes, “This is the point at which sacramental theology spills over into the market place. Bread is not a mere commodity; things are not mere bits of matter … [W]e learn [this] above all from Jesus Christ, the bread of God which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” When we fail to understand this, we are at risk of losing the sense of the mystery that occurs when the Eucharist is celebrated and the bigger picture of all that God is doing.

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A piece of the mystery of the Eucharistic celebration is God’s action. This includes God’s action upon us and upon the world. The transgender participants in the study – and presumably, most transgender individuals – are aware of the brokenness in the world and in the church. The human side of things falls short because of the marginalisation they have experienced. It is generally not enough, then, for transgender individuals to believe in a religion that is merely human, that God is no longer active in the world (or never was), that sacraments only contain the meaning humans assign to them, or that the eschatological orientation of the Christian faith is not compatible with modern sensibilities. Those transgender individuals who have managed to stay in the Church despite the hardship all seem to subscribe to the idea that something more is happening, even if they experience uncertainty around this or cannot quite articulate it. Disillusionment with the capacity of humankind to create a better world by ourselves seems to have fueled an understanding of a need for God. Belief in God comes more easily because the alternative is brokenness. Belief in the eschatological reality, where God reconciles all things, is a sure and certain hope in the face of human beings who continue to get it wrong.

The task to reconcile all things is enormous. When we approach religion through the modern perspective that God is inactive, the weight to fix the world rests entirely on human beings. That is a daunting task for anyone, but particularly for those who are marginalised. When we are able to recognise God’s action, the work does not go away, but we are able to rely on God even as we fall short. Transgender individuals who have remained in the Christian faith seem to have reclaimed this sense of God’s action in the Eucharist by developing a theology of sacramental mysticism and approaching life in the church through this lens. This appears to be, in some ways, both a survival mechanism and a way to heal. It also aligns well with a theology that promotes growth into our Baptismal calling.

A piece of the mystery of the Eucharistic celebration is that we do not know, in fullness, what God is doing. This can come with some discomfort. One study participant noted how bizarre it is that many Christians subscribe as believers to mysteries we do not understand, yet reject transgender identity on the basis that they do not understand it, or consider it to be unnatural. Making peace with the fact that we will never understand God’s action in fullness could help Christians make peace with our lack of understand of those who are “other.” Liturgical worship should make clear the central mystery of our faith as something not to be feared, solved, or
resolved; but the mysteries we enter in faith as beautiful, natural, healthy, and spirit-led. This creates space for the Kingdom project. We do not know God in fullness; neither do we know our neighbour in fullness. We must trust that this will not hinder the coming of God’s Kingdom.

A piece of the mystery of the Eucharistic celebration is the already-not yet. When we engage in liturgical worship, we are doing so in between Christ’s incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension and Christ’s coming again, where the Kingdom of Heaven reigns and all things are reconciled to God in Jesus Christ. Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity describes this as the “eternal now” where we are not merely remembering Christ’s original coming or awaiting his second coming. Instead, Christ is continually coming. Saint Elizabeth understands the continual praise of the Triune God; indeed, becoming the praise of God, as our eternal vocation. All creation will continually praise God as the eschatological reality. However, this is not a far-off reality. Saint Elizabeth understands that the Kingdom of Heaven is already reigning inside the Triune God, which dwells in the hearts of Christians. Through our Baptism, we enter into the eschatological reality. This does not stop the existence of real sin and evil, but gives us the ability to minister to a world in the midst of real evil. The already-reigning Kingdom makes it possible for us to enter into God’s transformative work.

The already-reigning Kingdom, the eternal worship, came become present to us in liturgical worship, particularly in the Eucharistic action. The Eucharistic action does not only occur between events in time; it brings us into a space which might more accurately be described as external to time, or where all time is unfolding simultaneously. Dom Gregory Dix considers the word ‘memory’ to be inadequate to describe what occurs in the Eucharistic action: “[w]hat the church ‘remembers’ in the eucharist is partly beyond history- the ascension, the sitting at the right hand of the Father and the second coming.”

In her book *Sacramentality Renewed*, Lizette Larson-Miller describes the tension between “real presence” and “real absence.” Larson-Miller suggests that real presence describing only God’s presence in the Eucharistic elements is limiting. Instead, we can more broadly understand God’s real presence as God’s participation in us, a participation which mirrors God’s participation in

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127 Elizabeth of the Trinity, “Heaven in Faith,” 100.
128 Elizabeth of the Trinity, “Heaven in Faith,” 111.
the world throughout time and creation.\textsuperscript{130} The real presence makes communion inherently relational, where we as participants do not receive an object but encounter the living God in relationship. Many of the study participants found this relational or encounter aspect central to their own experiences in Eucharistic liturgy.

Larson-Miller links the real absence to God’s movement towards the eschatological. While we encounter God in the Eucharist, we continue to exist in a space of incompleteness. God is not finished working on us and on the world. This incompleteness is necessary for us to be enfolded into the coming of God’s Kingdom – both as people who will enjoy the fullness of God’s reign, but also as people who are invited into the work of making God’s Kingdom come.

As we understand the eschatological orientation of the Eucharist, it is important to understand this on everyday relational level, rather than only through the macro level. If God’s work is to reconcile all things in the fullness of time, and we are a part of that work, our personal reconciliation to others is bound up in our reconciliation to God. While it may be impossible to restore all relationship in this life, part of our work as Christians is to reconcile where we can. The study participants understood forgiving others, seeking forgiveness, and indeed, learning to forgive oneself as fundamentally interrelated.

Neither sin nor salvation is individual. We may have individual sins, but this is interrelated to the pervasiveness of sin and evil in the world. The treatment of sin as individual and existing in vacuum was problematic to the study participants. This is not to say that participants wished to shirk responsibility, but that they were much more oriented towards a conception of sin that understands how much we all – the whole of creation – need God. This is, unfortunately, a place where that the Canadian \textit{Book of Alternative Services} (BAS) fell short. While it removes the Canadian \textit{Book of Common Prayer}’s language of “miserable offenders”\textsuperscript{131} (perhaps rightly), the BAS often fails to speak of sin and evil as comprehensive and persistent, something which we both participate in and fall victim to. This leaves an understanding of sin which is individualist.

\textsuperscript{130} Larson-Miller, \textit{Sacramentality Renewed}, 82.
\textsuperscript{131} \textit{The Book of Common Prayer of the Anglican Church of Canada} (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1962), 4. This is the version used by Canadians if they use the BCP rite at all, but this language around sin began much earlier, with the 1549 \textit{Book of Common Prayer}. 78
and reminiscent of Pelagianism, which can often blame individuals for sins committed against
them.

5.5 Christian Identity and Christian Cosmology

Throughout most of Christian history, Christians have subscribed to the overarching narrative of
the Christian story. This is the story of God’s abundant creation, but sin and evil corrupting that
creation. Instead of abandoning us to this reality, God became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through
his death and resurrection, Jesus has triumphed over the powers of sin and evil, and secured the
eschatological promise. We live in the intermittent time between the accomplishment of the
triumph over evil and the fulfillment of this triumph. God continues to be active in the world and
in us towards this eschatological fulfillment.

Modern Christianity often loses this narrative, but the study results and the theology explored in
this chapter suggests that we need to seriously reclaim the Christian identity and worship as
reliant on this overarching narrative. Transgender individuals find solace, strength, and meaning
in their identity as created by God. We are aware of the presence of real evil and sin – it cannot
be ignored given the experiences of transgender individuals. The incarnation of Christ was
important to many of the study participants, who made a link between Christ taking on flesh and
their own sense of embodiment in their gender, particularly in worship. This was related
primarily to Christ identifying with us as embodied beings. While some links were made with the
suffering we endure in our bodies, the primary emphasis of the study participants seemed to have
more with Christ understanding the gender euphoria we experience in embodying and expressing
our gender. Finally, the countercultural narrative, the sense that the brokenness of this world is
not a permanent state, and the incorporation into something greater than oneself were all
important beliefs which allowed participants to be responsive to God’s action in them. Finally,
the principle that the onus is not on fallible humans to resolve the brokenness of the world, but
on an infallible God (who draws us as human beings to assist in this work), allows transgender
Christians to believe in the possibility where we – alongside all things – are reconciled to God
and to all things in Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{132} Without the overarching narrative of Christian cosmology,
identity as transgender and as Christian both become meaningless.

\textsuperscript{132} 2 Corinthians 5:17-19
Historically, this narrative has been retold, replicated, and integrated into Christian identity through the liturgy. In the earliest forms of Christian liturgy, this took place in the Sunday Eucharist, which was celebrated as a “mini Easter” – both an echo of where we have come and an orientation where we are going. The Eucharist, fundamentally, is both anamnetic and eschatological. Moving past the postmodern sensibility where the celebration of the Eucharist only exists in the time and space where it is celebrated, and reclaiming a sense of the Eucharist stretching throughout time in the Christian cosmology is important.

As the liturgy of the Church developed, we began to operate within the Pascal cycle, and finally, within the time of the liturgical year. Both these bring forward the Christian cosmology into the reality of those who participate in the liturgy. In the study, some participants spoke of the movement through the liturgical calendar as providing meaning to their Christian identity and engagement with the Christian narrative. Two participants spoke of Ash Wednesday as providing meaning to the place of sin and reconciliation in both their personal narrative and the Christian narrative. One thing that was not mentioned but is of particular importance is the Triduum, culminating with the Easter Vigil. The Triduum originated around the fourth century, combining both the commemoration of Christ’s death on the cross and his passage from death to life in a single service which spans three days.\textsuperscript{133} Liturgical time operates in this service by both compressing and transcending time, marking the death and resurrection of Jesus alongside God’s action throughout time from creation to the fullness of time. This liturgy communicates what it is: Christ’s death and resurrection took place across all time and creation, eternally reconciling all things to God.

The Triduum also traditionally communicates the fundamental link between the Christian cosmology and our own identity. We do not merely engage with the Christian story in liturgy, we become this narrative from creation to new creation in our Baptism. Easter Vigil, traditionally the day when catechumens were Baptised, continues to be a principle Baptismal feast, and is a time when the whole Christian people are encouraged to renew their Baptismal vows. The Anglican Church of Canada’s document “Becoming the Story We Tell” says that, for Christians to follow the calling of our Baptism – to become who we are in our Baptism, “we need to re-

enter the deep drama at the heart of the biblical story." They relate this to the journey of the liturgical year, ending with the Easter season. Effectively, then, what we are seeking is liturgy that orients us towards what God is already doing; liturgy that is movement towards restoration.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have established the link between Baptismal identity and Pascal identity – the source and summit of our being as Christians. I have spoken of how God’s action in liturgy functions to unite us as Christians to that Pascal identity. For transgender Anglicans, unification to our Pascal identity means unification in our gender as well as in our particular experiences as transgender Christians. At the same time, there is a particular strength, urgency, and solace in identifying with our Pascal identity, particularly in the Eucharistic liturgy. We are very aware – likely more so than our cisgender peers – that we both offer and receive our whole selves from God.

CHAPTER 6

6 Next Steps and New Directions

In this chapter, I will explore some possible directions of future research based on this study, as well as some of the gaps in the research conducted.

6.1 Demographic Gaps

Though the number of participants in this study was about the same as the two similar studies that exist, it is evident that the low number of participants in this study leaves space for inconclusiveness. A particular shortcoming was the lack of participants who identified as any other race or ethnicity besides white/having European heritage. As we work to decolonise the Anglican Church and come to terms with its history and continuing involvement with empire, it is extremely important that every effort is made to include BIPOC voices in any research that is done within Anglican contexts.

It should be noted that some BIPOC individuals did express an interest in participating in the study, though none of those who expressed interest ended up following through with an interview. These potential participants were not asked why they chose not to participate, but one could speculate any number of reasons – an increased danger for participating as BIPOC and transgender, an increased likelihood of being identified as a participant, or an increased burden in having to represent folks at an intersection of two marginalised identities.

The small number of participants also makes it difficult to understand how the responses of the participants relate to demographic data, particularly as protecting the participants’ identities meant disaggregating their demographic data. Say, for example, that two participants had mentioned Easter Vigil as important to them. These two hypothetical participants had the same gender, age group, and country of residence – all demographic information that they did not share with any of the other participants. It would be impossible to tell whether the importance of Easter Vigil was due to the participants’ gender, age, country of residence, a combination thereof, or merely a coincidence.

Beyond this, we must consider how the responses of the study participants compare to others in the church. There was no control group in this study. Any comparisons made were admittedly
broad strokes comparisons to the rest of the church. For instance, three participants, or 43%, spoke of mystical experiences in the eucharistic liturgy. We can draw the conclusion that transgender Anglicans are more likely to have mystical experiences only if we assume that fewer than 43% of Anglicans in general have mystical experiences. It also assumes that the study participants were representative of all other transgender Anglicans in this regard.

6.2 Spiritual Development and Transgender Identity

I believe that more research needs to be done regarding the spiritual development of transgender individuals. The theory presented in chapter 4 regarding transgender Christians suggested that those who have stayed in the church self-select: those who have the ability to participate in spiritual development and take it seriously appear to remain in the church. This theory warrants further investigation. I do not believe that transgender individuals are more spiritual than their cisgender counterparts; however, the study data indicate that transgender individuals had high levels of spiritual development. This suggests that those transgender individuals self-select, with those who have engaged in deeper spiritual development staying in the church and others leaving. The result is that transgender individuals who have stayed in the church are more likely to have engaged in deeper spiritual development than their cisgender counterparts.

Were I to repeat this study, I would likely have had participants also complete “My Way of Love”, a spiritual development inventory produced by the American Episcopal Church. This inventory categorises spiritual development in four stages: exploring, growing, deepening, and centred. This spiritual development inventory is based off the research of RenewalWorks, an organisation that helps develop the spiritual vitality of parishes. Their research suggests the following breakdown of spiritual development stages among Episcopalians: exploring (18%), growing (55%), deepening (23%), and centred (4%).135 Questions in “My Way of Love” cover belief, engagement in Christian life (prayer, bible, worship, etc), justice. While it is impossible to know retroactively the results that study participants would have received, it is interesting to note that the topics covered by the questions were all topics that most participants had considered with some depth. The one hangup for participants generally may have been the struggles they indicated they experienced in engaging with scripture. Collecting specific data on transgender

individuals’ stage of spiritual development, and then comparing these data to that of the wider church, could provide insight not only into the intersection of transgender identity and Christian identity, but into spiritual development in general.

6.3 A Theology of Sacramental Mysticism

Finally, I believe that this study points to the importance of developing a theology of sacramental mysticism. By a “theology of sacramental mysticism” I mean the ability of those who participate in the sacraments to set aside the human aspects of the sacramental life of the church – institution, legality, bureaucracy, consumerism, and the idea of Christianity belonging to mainstream culture. Once these facets are set aside, the Christian can approach the Baptismal font and the altar primarily with a sense of relationship – both to the Body of Christ throughout time and space and to the Triune God, whose activity in the sacramental life of the church is eschatological. The limited information gathered in this study appears to indicate that most transgender individuals who have stayed in the church have, of their own accord, developed a theology of sacramental mysticism. I suspect that this is a survival mechanism. The illusions of the human aspects of the sacramental life of the church could not stand against their identity as transgender Christians because of the real challenges and harm that they faced.136

There are many who have been hurt by the church, yet many of these have remained in the church. There are our Indigenous siblings, who have been harmed by the historical and ongoing allegiance of the church to colonial and imperial powers. There are women and LGBTQ+ people who have been harmed by an institution that often continues to uphold and align itself with notions of sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. There are those who have faced abuse at the hands of spiritual leaders. I believe that these individuals who have been harmed by the church, yet who have continued to remain in the church, may be approaching the sacramental life of the church similarly to the transgender individuals who participated in this study, through the (possibly unintentional) development of a sacramental mysticism. Further research will be required to confirm or disprove this.

136 See Avery Dulles, Models of the Church (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974). Transgender individuals appear to reject the model of “Church as Institution” in favour of other models; in particular, “Church as Mystical Communion.”
However, if this is the case, there is much that the church as a whole can learn from the spiritual and liturgical lives of those who have remained in the church despite harm. As the Church becomes more aware of its historical and current alignment with colonialism, and its collaboration with the powers of sexism, homophobia, and transphobia, I believe this will be important learning. This would not only be a matter of making space for those who have been harmed, but a means for the Church to move forward with authenticity and awareness. Development of a theology of sacramental mysticism, rooted in the experiences of the marginalised, could help to realign the Church (an institution) to the Church (the mystical body of Christ) and to God’s action in, through, and beyond us.
CHAPTER 7

7 CONCLUSION

This thesis asked how transgender Anglicans are responsive to God’s action in the Eucharistic liturgy. This question was investigated by interviewing seven transgender Anglicans from Canada, the United States, or the United Kingdom. The results of these interviews were sorted into themes, which were then brought into conversation with aspects of liturgical theology, including Baptismal Ecclesiology and Eucharistic theology. It is my hope that the findings presented in this thesis will be used in catechesis and in the formation of practicing Christians, as well as in the creation of new liturgies and the modification and revitalisation of current liturgies. This is not only a matter of inclusivity; it is essential so that the whole Body of Christ may enter into God’s action in, through, and beyond the liturgy.

The theology held by the Church tells us that God’s claim on us is absolute in our Baptism. There is nothing we or anyone else can do to change this. The character of Baptism is fundamentally communal; through our Baptism, we are beholden to all other Christians and to God. We are enfolded into God’s reality, especially the eschatological reality where all things will be reconciled to God in Jesus Christ. All the Baptised are called into the work of this reality. While we are imperfect, God acts upon us to support us in this work. God acts upon us whether we are perceptive of that work or not, but it is good – meet and right – for us to be perceptive and responsive to God’s action as much as we are able. This is particularly important in the transformative work of the Eucharist, which is the only repeatable part of our Baptism and forms us towards our Baptismal identity.

Transgender Christians come to God’s table having had unique experiences in life and in our journeys of faith. Certain approaches to the liturgy or liturgical themes, particularly when handled indelicately, can close off transgender Christians to God’s action. At the same time, the interview participants described a depth of relationship with God and an authenticity of faith. This was especially evident in their approach to the Eucharistic action. This enabled them to be incredibly aware of God’s action, intuiting theological principles without necessarily having the academic background or theological language to describe this in a scholarly sense, but able to articulate it nonetheless. Participants, for instance, found deep importance in things such as: the
unitive and communal aspects of the Eucharist; the Eucharistic as regenerative for one’s outward-facing ministry; and the eschatological orientation of the Eucharist.

The insights offered by the participants are not only for transgender Christians and those who wish to facilitate their faith journeys. The findings of this thesis have something to offer to the wider Church. Though not articulated in this way by the participants, I believe their offering can be summarised in one phrase: we are all an Easter people.\textsuperscript{137} We fundamentally belong to the pascal narrative – we have been reborn in Christ; we have died and risen with Christ in our Baptism; we are being transformed into the eschatological hope; and we belong to a reality where God is reconciling (and already has reconciled) all things in Jesus Christ. When the shortcomings of this world and the failings of human institution are stripped away, we are left with only the paschal mystery. The participants presented this as a source of strength and support; a theology seemingly developed as a survival mechanism from the harms they had experienced and from a world that continues to tell them that they cannot be both Christian and transgender. Writing from the perspective of liberation theology, Leonardo Boff suggests, “God so loved human beings that he became one of us, preferring the weak and impoverished of this world and guaranteeing to all who would be converted a happy ending to their life story. For God promises a creation wholly transfigured into a new world, where there will be no more tears but only the Reign of Justice.”\textsuperscript{138} The incarnation matters for the liturgical life of transgender Christians; as does the death and resurrection of Christ, and the eschatological hope.

This theology, a theology of sacramental mysticism, need not be a survival mechanism. The Church is in a place where we are coming to terms with the mistakes of our past: sexism, anti-queer attitudes, and allegiance to colonialism and empire. If we ignore this past, we close ourselves off from the future that God is actively creating. However, if the Church as a whole can learn from the theology of transgender Christians, I believe we will find a path forward which is authentic, restorative, and realigns us to our Baptismal identity where we are collaborators in the building of the Kingdom of God.


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