

4.4 The Wall of Silence: My Story of Coming Out as a Bisexual Christian Man (and Some Things I Wish Someone had Told Me)

José, Spain & Germany

"I don't Get it. Why are You Coming Out?"

That was the question I got most when I decided to come out as bisexual. I was married, we have a lovely family together, I was happy in a passing "straight marriage". Why all the fuss?

The basic reason why I decided to come out was that I felt like an accomplice to queerphobia in many parts of society, especially in the church. My story is proof that what many churches state about queer-ness is ignorant and wrong. I wished I had known queer Christian people when I was a kid and a teenager. I cannot go back in time, but I can speak up now. And by writing it down, I am trying to reach other people in other places, as well as people in the future.

I have decided to tell my story. And my story involves the stories of many other people who have not decided to tell their side of their story. That is why I am not mentioning names nor going into specifics of who said what. To a certain degree, it doesn't matter. What I want to share is the kind of responses, positive and negative, that I got, so that you are better prepared than I was if you ever decide to come out.

I haven't sugar-coated my experience in this chapter. In today's society, there is a tendency to avoid negativity and many people expect me not to mention these negative reactions. For them, focusing solely on the positive demonstrates self-growth. But, in part, I think that is a form of

(internalised) queerphobia. Negative experiences are part of our lives, and we have to learn how to deal with them – learning from other people's experiences is also important and if we only share the positive, how do we learn? Nevertheless, I hope that the overall tone of the chapter is positive and constructive. Being bi is great, being out even better!

Coming Out to Myself

I was born in 1987 in Madrid, in a family with a lot of responsibility in a small evangelical church. With time, I have realised that it was a very conservative church in many aspects – although in comparison with many other groups and individuals we were in contact with, it was not ultra conservative. I was the only kid of my age, so from my youngest years I sat with the adults, listening to sermons which were not intended for my age-group. Homosexuality and abortion were very frequent topics in the sermons, presented as among the worst sins.

Not all was bad in evangelical circles, though. I grew up being loved, learning to cope with the feeling of being part of a minority, with many spiritual and cultural opportunities, where I learned about God and a special love for the Bible. I learned that we should be critical with traditions and love people around us, especially those in need.

Nevertheless, sex and how they deal with relationships was – and remains – a central aspect distinguishing evangelical from other Christians and the rest of society. We were expected to remain virgins until our wedding day, choose an evangelical partner, and only move in together after marriage. Masturbation was seen as bad or sinful. I remember workshops on sex where people who had several sexual partners in their life were compared to chewing gum chewed by several people. Any sexual practice that is not penis-in-vagina (such as oral sex or use of sex toys) was, and still is, considered sinful, questionable or unhealthy (allegedly).

If that sounds bad enough, the reality was actually worse. It was often the case that someone in our evangelical circles started a relationship with a non-evangelical person, or decided to live with their unmar-

ried partner, or got pregnant unmarried. And then the parents (often pastors or church leaders) of that person no longer spoke to their adult child. This person was not only excluded from friends and family but also omitted from conversation. The behaviour of their parents, family and friends was never questioned. It was like an emotional and social punishment that was inflicted on these people for not following the evangelical scheme of life (especially around sex and relationships), a kind of wall of silence that was built around this person. This wall of silence was used against me many years later. And it was a warning for everyone else. Deep inside it created the certainty that if we didn't follow the evangelical scheme of sex and relationships, we would be excluded by parents, family and friends, punished and hurt emotionally.

I wasn't even 10 years old, when I realised that I found female and male bodies similarly interesting and exciting. I have always liked to use categories and labels in order to better understand reality. I had probably read about bisexuality somewhere in a book or Internet site and I was happy that there was a label that could explain how I felt about my sexual orientation. I was like, "Great, now I know that I am bisexual. It's a great explanation. And now that I know, I will not talk to anyone about it for the rest of my life!" So, it's funny now to find myself writing this! I used to have crushes on both girls and boys. Many years later, I learnt about the distinction between romantic and sexual orientation. Although sexually I am quite bi, I have always tended to be heteroromantic, which means that I prefer romantic relationships with women, although relationships with men are entirely imaginable.

In 2005, Spain became the third country in the world to allow same-gender marriage. I was a teenager and the topic of homosexuality in sermons was exhaustingly frequent. For a while, I thought I should come out to a person who had certain responsibility in the church that I attended. I remember being sat in this green plastic chair in the church, looking at the big white floor tile and being disappointed in myself for not being brave enough to tell the truth about myself. Many years later, I came out to this person and I realised it was good that I didn't do it as a teenager. Remember, it's OK not to come out if you're in danger, including emotional danger.

No one in evangelical circles at that time was queer and when they talked about it, they spoke only of homosexuality. Bisexuality didn't even exist for them. I knew I was part of a bad category (queer) and somehow even worse than homosexual (which was already terrible), because by being bisexual, I was part of something that the people didn't even talk about. It would have been so helpful to have known that other Christian people were bisexual or somehow queer. Surprisingly (or not), some people that I knew back then now could, or indeed do identify now, as bisexual or queer.

I always knew that I could not be sincere with evangelicals about myself; I always saw myself as an outsider and I tried to make friends with other outsiders in evangelical circles.

Coming Out to my Partner

When I was 18, I went to England to a Christian organisation to learn English and have experiences abroad. This centre was a good example of the positive elements in Christian circles. Without this international network, it would have been much harder or impossible to spend time abroad.

There I met a German-Brazilian girl with whom I felt so comfortable talking about everything. She was another outsider in evangelical circles, and at one point, when we were talking about living outside the evangelical scheme, I told her I was bisexual. And she was surprisingly cool about it. She made me feel safe; she was the first person I felt comfortable talking to about cute girls and cute boys. She was the only person I felt completely safe with.

After our time in England, she decided to move to Madrid, where we began a relationship. A few years later we got married – young, (almost) following the evangelical scheme of life. But I always knew that I was not a good evangelical (I would have said that I was not a good Christian, too) and that I was hiding a part of myself. After a few years, we decided to move to Germany due to better economic prospects. We have lived close

to Göttingen for a few years now. Many of the things I describe in the next sections happened there.

I have thought so many times how glad I am that my orientation was never a secret or a big deal between us. It was part of me and played a very small part in our relationship from the beginning. She is my favourite person in the world and I thank God so often for our relationship and our story. Without her support, I would never have come out years later.

Purity Culture and Deconstruction

Deconstruction is the term used when people start to question aspects of their faith and religion, and it's particularly used for people raised in evangelical churches. Realising how wrong evangelical churches are about sexuality was a major step in my coming out process.

Like many other evangelical kids, I grew up hearing that any kind of sex (including masturbation) before or outside of marriage was sin. Save yourself for marriage and then the sex will be great. These are the two core ideas of the so-called purity culture that evangelical churches preach.

Many years later, I can say that purity culture is categorically wrong. It's not even biblical because it ignores the sex book of the Bible, *Song of Songs*. In my experience, some people who preach it are not transparent about their own experiences or views.

My wife and I went through some serious problems in our marriage, one of which was linked to sex. Because we had been taught that sex in marriage was supposed to be great, we found that we were not able to talk about sex, especially about problems and possible solutions. Our communication in general was good, but when we talked about sex it was terrible. So we looked for help in our evangelical circles – and this was when we realised how deeply problematic the evangelical sexual ethic is.

"If you look closely at almost every couple in the church, you will find messed up problems in their sex life." These were the words of a person who had been involved in couples counselling for many decades. But wait, you kept preaching that the sex life once married would be great!

In conversation with several people, a classic book on sexuality came up again and again: *The Act of Marriage* by Tim and Beverly LaHaye.¹ This is a book that almost every evangelical pastor has read and whose ideas are still very much kicking about today. In my view, it is a completely sexist book and wrong in many ways. Some examples: In this book, women are supposed to be multi-orgasmic in order to be considered sexually “well-adjusted.” Some critics have argued that parts of the book portray scenarios in ways that appear to blame victims of sexual assault. Other more modern classics (when it comes to evangelical books) such as Emerson Eggerichs’ *Love & Respect*² present sex as something for men only.

In conversations with several pastors, we realised that the majority of evangelical pastors nowadays don’t think that masturbation is wrong, but they are afraid of talking about it openly because conservative people in their churches would be upset. Moreover, they allow conservative people to keep saying that masturbation is bad, even though they know how badly these messages affect individuals, especially young people and singles. One example of this is Kari Clewett, a sexual coach from the US working in Spain, who publishes videos on YouTube in Spanish, which in my view, combine elements of purity culture with what I consider to be pseudo-scientific arguments – for example, the notion that masturbation leads to selfishness.

In my perception, some evangelical pastors may be reluctant to speak openly about sexuality because it could create instability in the congregation and even threaten their jobs, appearing to prioritise this above helping individuals resolve past and present trauma. While fear of losing their jobs is human, I personally see this as cowardly, cynical and inconsistent with the Christian values I was taught.

The same people who told us that talking openly about masturbation in church would cause too many problems are the same people who felt comfortable enough to suggest in sermons that people should abstain from sexual relations during Lent. Purity culture is not a phenomenon from the past; it is still very much alive in current evangelical churches

1 Study Resources, 1998.

2 Thomas Nelson, 2012.

in Europe, continuing to cause hurt to people (young and not that young) today.

My wife and I were involved in several sex-positive workshops at church. In one of them, sadly, we heard the same bullshit we had heard when we were young – masturbation was portrayed as bad, and people who were interested in practices such as oral sex or sex toys were shamed. We realised it was pointless to try to improve anything in evangelical circles. Conservatives keep preaching purity culture and liberals are too afraid to speak out.

When my criticism became clearer and stronger, people went silent. There it was again, the wall of silence. They did not want to talk about it. We realised that we were not going to get any help from the evangelical church in trying to resolve the traumas that evangelical teaching on sexuality has created for many people, including us. We were on our own, as the next generation of young people growing up in evangelical churches will be in a few years' time.

At one point, a pastor told me, "You put too much trust in the church; you really believed what they told you about sex" whilst admitting that he was afraid of talking about sex openly in the church. Although this could be seen as cynical coming from a pastor, it helped me. It helped me to see that the authority of the evangelical churches over sex was rotten and I came to see their use of authority on sexual matters as unethical and inconsistent with the Christian values I had been taught.

If they were so wrong about basic sexuality and sexuality in female-male-couples, what authority do they have about queerness? None.

My closet was already half open.

I just needed a good moment to come out.

Coming Out to Evangelicals

Trigger warning: this section contains some of the most hurtful, insulting and ignorant things I have ever heard about queerness in my life. By the end of this section there are some suggestions in list form of how to come out to evangelicals. Feel free to skip to that part or to the next

section. I considered not writing down these negative things, but I think it's important to provide proof of their discrimination. I describe them so that people can be prepared for these worst-case scenarios – however, even if they are hurtful, they are just words based on ignorance and arrogance.

In 2023, the group of evangelical churches in Germany under the umbrella of the *Bund Freier evangelischer Gemeinden* (FeGs) decided to start up a process on homosexuality to discuss if and how homosexual people should be accepted within their churches. We had been attending a local FeG church for years. My wife was a member, I was not; we as a family were regulars.

In March 2023, all members my FeG church received an email informing them of the process on homosexuality and discussions around unity and diversity. The email was signed by seven people, all heterosexual men, married, with more than one child, and all with German citizenship. A perfect picture of diversity in evangelical circles! In the e-mails and documents at national level, there was a coldness and distance towards homosexuals that was hurtful. Homosexuals were addressed in the third person, as if these people were somewhere, outside, far away. Until a few years ago, some churches within the FeG movement supported approaches aimed at changing sexual orientation, often described today as conversion therapy. The local church had silently but consistently rejected queer people as members up to that moment. There was no apology for any of that, no reference to the pain and rejection that churches cause queer people. In fact, the only reference to pain and rejection was about 'the pain of being gay'.

As I said, I was waiting for a good moment to come out. And that moment just appeared – I couldn't stand these men talking about homosexuality, queerness and diversity from their position of ignorance and privilege.

I came out to the pastor and then to other members of the church. My wife and I and a few other people insisted that the voices of queer people should be heard in such a process. Queer people should be invited to talk to the community, since only listening to heterosexual voices was about as unacceptable as a bunch of men talking about menstruation.

We believed that true diversity should be achieved and that other people besides the church leaders should be in a position to decide about the process.

Basically, all our proposals were silently rejected, often with the comment “it’s not off the table, maybe in the future”, and then we never heard anything again. There it was again – the wall of silence. In my opinion, they were erratic in their decision-making, saying in one meeting that we were at the beginning of the process and that there was no point in discussing details, and then in the next meeting saying that all the major decisions had already been made by the church leaders and the process was almost over. In my view, they did not seem equipped to lead such a process, neither emotionally nor in terms of their knowledge.

We invited the church leaders to an evening at our home where I, as an (almost) out queer person, stated my position and explained to them that the whole process was flawed and unacceptable. I think after that conversation they decided that the church was better off without us. By the end of the process, they were organising small meetings to discuss homosexuality more openly, although they acknowledged that these discussions would not make any difference to the final decisions. These talks were open to any person attending the church, not only to members. I expressed my interest in going. The day before the meeting the church leaders told me that I was not welcome. I responded to them that I understood this as discrimination and censorship against queer people. They didn’t reply. To this day, none of them have apologised.

A few weeks later we decided to leave the church and my wife cancelled her membership. In later conversations, the church leaders admitted that my not being a member of the church played a big part of my exclusion. This shows how unfair evangelical churches can be to queer people – they reject queer people as members but require queer people to be a member in order to be able to speak.

Parallel to this process in the local church, I came out to many evangelicals or people who had grown up in evangelical churches. The vast majority of these conversations went badly, but a few went much better than I expected. One of the exhausting aspects of coming out is that you never know how people will react. Each time you feel like rolling the dice

and the dice can surprise you. In general, evangelicals from Germany reacted better than evangelicals from Spain. Also, the more central a person is or has been to an evangelical church, the worse their response is likely to be. For example, many of the worst responses I received were from evangelical pastors or church leaders. In my experience, evangelical pastoral training often reflects theological positions that can be harmful to queer people. Even cool young pastors who seem very chilled with the topic can then defend very homophobic positions once you are out to them.

Some of the responses were just plain ignorant. For example, one pastor once compared being queer to liking heavy metal music in that their grandmother might be disappointed in them for it. Yes, we are at that level of ignorance when we talk to some evangelicals.

Although many people do argue that being queer is a sin, no one has ever told me “you being bisexual is a sin”. Of course, even for the worst kind of homophobic evangelicals, it’s difficult to say that to a guy who is living in a female-male-marriage with several children. For example, during discussions at a FeG Church, I heard statements such as “homosexuals choose a vicious way of life”, that queer people were abnormal or that “homosexuality comes from the devil.” Several of these comments came from people who preach in that church. When my wife and I posted information on social networks about my coming out as bisexual, some evangelicals called me a cheater or told my wife I was going to cheat on her.

The majority of the hurtful statements concerned comparisons evangelicals made when talking about queerness. A pastor compared being queer to being a prostitute, a thief, and a drug addict. Until today, this person hasn’t understood why this comparison is hurtful. Someone compared same-gender relations to humans having sex with animals. Another person compared the act of coming out to talking about the holocaust (in the sense that both things are awful and even talking about it can be difficult). If it wasn’t so real and insulting, it would be darkly comic.

Some people said they were fine with it, but they were really worried about the impact it might have on my immediate and extended family. I

always saw that as a contradiction – if you think this is dangerous for my family, then you are not totally okay with it, right? Some people asked me not to hurt my wife and family, because apparently that's what bisexuals do!

But worst of all was the combination of ignorance and arrogance shown by some evangelicals. Several people admitted that it was the first time in their lives that they had spoken to a bisexual person, but actually insisted on explaining things to me about my sexual orientation. A pastor who had never previously spoken to a bisexual person told me being bisexual was not an orientation, it was a deviation. A church leader asked me “why are you coming out?” and after I explained as best I could, he replied “I don't think that's the real reason” and then had the audacity to tell me the reasons I was supposedly coming out. That gave me the impression that evangelical leaders are not trained to listen to people, but to have all the answers and to give monologues.

Many of their responses were surprising to me, particularly the lack of compassion and love for others, and that they did not realise just how hurtful their responses were. Compassion and love should be what Christians are known for.

For example, the question about why I was *really* coming out came up again and again. If I am not interested in other relationships, why bother? The argument that rejection and discrimination against queer people is unacceptable did not convince many people. Probably they are fine with discrimination because it does not affect them.

One sad thing that happened frequently was that many questioned my faith as soon as I said I was bisexual. “Do you still believe in God? Do you believe in the Bible?”. The answers to these questions were obvious to them the second before I said anything about my orientation.

It was also surprising that many of them were seriously afraid of legal or political consequences. The word *discrimination* is particularly powerful because it's a word that's used in legal and political contexts. I think we need to work more closely with politicians and activists to curb discrimination in religious circles. I see that many evangelicals are reluctant to write anything on the subject. They are afraid of being accountable, both in the present and especially in the future. Many sense that their

homophobic attitudes are something to be ashamed of. In fact, some express fear that more queer people will be encouraged to write about their experiences – which is exactly what I am doing in this chapter.

Another thing I found quite shocking was the silence they exercised towards me – some for many months, some even years. Some told me they no longer wanted to talk to me. Some told me they did not want to talk to me about my queerness. Some asked me not to tell certain people. Some just did not respond, even after I asked repeatedly. There it was again, the wall of silence I had experienced in the past, in seeing how people who lived outside the evangelical scheme were treated, and during my criticism of purity culture. For a time, it felt like I was coming out of the closet but they were creating a new closet around me – that this wall of silence was becoming my new extended closet. Well, I decided to come out of that closet too, and editing and contributing to this book is a way of tearing down this closet.

The majority of liberal people who attend evangelical churches show some kind of empathy, but they prefer to do nothing and look the other way. But hey, probably I would have done the same a few years back, sadly.

But not everything was bad within evangelical circles. Some people responded positively and we were able to integrate my orientation into our conversations in a very natural way. I even had some good experiences with a few pastors and church leaders. I had long conversations with one of them and it was great training for talking to evangelicals. My parents-in-law responded warmly and my mother-in-law even knitted me a pair of slippers in the colours of the bisexual flag that I wear with double pride!

The support and love of my wife was vital to me during my coming out. Dozens of times I doubted whether what I was doing, what we were doing, was right. I could always come back to her love and understanding, to the stability of our relationship, recharge and prepare for the next emotional battle. I am aware that this is a privilege not everyone has.

Below are some recommendations when coming out, specially to evangelicals or people from whom you may anticipate negative reactions:

- a) Ensure you are grounded in theology and know how to respond to the “clobber passages.” But that alone won’t convince them, since many seem to operate within a culture where discrimination against queer people is normalised; many seem to believe that their religious convictions give them the right to exclude queer people (among other groups). Besides theological arguments, they need to give up their belief that they are better than us, that they can discriminate against us.
- b) The time and place of coming out is very important. Don’t rush, make sure neither you nor your loved ones are under any particular stress at that time. Give yourself time and do it in a safe and neutral place, for example, when taking a walk or in a park setting.
- c) Especially in the beginning, take care how often you come out to potentially queerphobic people. It’s exhausting; I needed days or weeks of emotional recovery in between. For a while, I decided to have no more than one conversation a week. Take breaks, do things that help you and give you strength.
- d) Control the narrative and conversation. You can say things like “You can’t talk to me like that”, “that’s discriminatory” or “that’s hurtful”.
- e) Many people have no idea how to respond to someone coming out to them. Lead them with phrases such as, “if you don’t know what to say, it’s ok, you don’t have to say anything.” Suggest taking a break or supply some questions or statements that you would like to hear from them (but be aware that they may not respond in kind).
- f) Find a welcoming church near you and consider therapy or pastoral care from a welcoming church. I did and it really helped me. We are not only called to love others, but also to love ourselves.
- g) It’s ok if your faith or your way of relating to God changes during this process.
- h) Have one or two people you can count on when you are feeling down.

Coming Out as a Father

I am the first person in several parts of my extended family to come out as queer. It would have been so great to have known that I was not the only person in my family who was not heterosexual, who was queer. Had I stayed in the closet, I would feel absolutely miserable and like an accomplice to evangelical queerphobia when people from the next generation of my family came out as queer. Nowadays, around 20% of young people identify as queer, with half of them being bisexual. For every five young people, we can expect one to be queer. We already have more than five people in the next generation of my family, so we can be pretty sure that one or more will be queer. It's not a question of whether someone in the family is queer, but whether they feel safe to come out. I want to tell these young people, but more importantly *show* them, that it is perfectly fine to be queer (and Christian). What is not acceptable is queerphobia.

I have come out to several young people and children in the next generation of my family. Some of the best responses and surprisingly wise ones came from them, especially when I compare them to the ignorant responses of people from older generations. In my experience, the next generation is much more open and less influenced by negative stereotypes.

Many bisexual people argue that they will come out to their children when they are teenagers or adults. But as I stated previously, I was under 10 when I realised I was not heterosexual. So I needed people to tell me about their orientation or queerness when I was around eight or nine. Anything else would have been too late. When coming out to young people, one possibility is to focus on the feeling of being queer, of being different. There are lots of stories and films for children with this focus, for example, Elsa from the film *Frozen*.³ We could read or watch these stories with them and explain how we relate to these characters through our

3 *Frozen*, 2013. Directed by Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee. USA: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.

queerness. A book that does just that is a children's book called *Perfectly Norman* by Tom Percival.⁴

In general, I think that queer people and especially bisexual people should act with more responsibility towards teenagers and children. If we want a future less affected by queerphobia, then we need to get more involved with young people.

Coming Out in the Lutheran Church

Coming out to people in mainline churches like the German Lutheran Church felt totally different from coming out to people in evangelical churches. The best and most valuable response I got was from my pastor at the local church. I was worried about some people having a problem with me being queer *and* working in the children's ministry. If that was going to be the case, I didn't want to start. She told me that my orientation posed no problems in that area, and that if I were to experience any discrimination in the church, I should go to her, and she would clear things with that person. Her response was amazing. I was not only being accepted, she was acknowledging my worries, and she was offering me her protection in possible future scenarios. This experience has changed my perception of pastors, who should not only be leaders, but also protectors of vulnerable people.

Sometimes I actually get overwhelmed about how open and liberal people in the Lutheran Church are. For example, some people in the Lutheran Church expected me to have an open relationship – some even encouraged it without knowing anything about me or about my wife.

When I complained that there was not any particular Christian organisation or event for queers in my locality, the pastor of the University church (ESG)⁵ asked me “What can we do about it? How can we change it?”

4 Percival, T. (2017) *Perfectly Norman*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

5 ESG is the “Evangelische Studierendengemeinde”, which translates as Protestant Student Congregation or Community.

Let's talk about queer services, for example." His speedy response and action overwhelmed me at the beginning, although it was also so cool to see that they were not only open to such an idea, but also wanting to change the status quo. A few months after that, we organized the first queer service in my local area, opening with the song *The Code* by Nemo and ending with a blessing where people could decide whether they wanted to be blessed, by whom and how (without touching, or with hands on their head, or with a hug...). It was amazing. A few months later, we started a monthly group for queer people to chat about topics relating to faith. They asked if I wanted to preach in a queer service. It was so strange to think of me preaching... But I kept thinking about what I would have liked to hear in those sermons in the past, and I realised that I had lots of ideas. So I did preach in the second queer service. And it was weird and cool and a blessing and I am so grateful for the opportunity!

Even though my experiences in the Lutheran Church have been in general very positive, I think there is still a lot to be done. I don't think the German Lutheran Church overall speaks about queerness in a very healthy way. A queer person once told me "everyone here is open to queerness, but no one talks about it." When Ralf Schumacher came out as bisexual⁶ and in a same-gender relationship, Thorsten Latzel, the Sports Commissioner of the German Lutheran Church, said that we must fight for a situation in which it is not necessary to come out.⁷ In my opinion, this idea is present in various liberal spaces, such as universities and mainline churches. And of course it is well-meant, but this perspective problematizes coming out. If I feel like coming out for various reasons, this statement could be interpreted as a critique. It makes certain categories invisible, supposedly because there is no need – or shouldn't be a need – to talk about them. I think this explains

6 Actually, to my knowledge, he has not yet used the label bisexual, although he has explained that he has been happy both in same-gender and different-gender relations.

7 <https://evangelische-zeitung.de/das-zitat-ekd-sportbeauftragter-latzel-zum-outing-im-sport>, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C-XMSRwN14D/>

why a situation has arisen, in which everyone is open to queerness, but nobody actually talks about it.

I am very vocal about my orientation, also in the Lutheran Church. In the same way that I talk about other parts of my identity (coming from Spain, being a foreigner, working in a library, having a PhD, etc.), being queer is a part of me that relates to many aspects of my life. I wished I had seen more queer people when I was younger, especially in the church, so I try to be coherent with that and be visible in the church.

Coming Out to Other People

Coming out in non-Christian circles was surprisingly easy, even though it is not common for bisexual married men to come out. People did ask why I was doing it, but it was easy to explain to them about the discrimination against queer people in Christian circles. In general their response was neutral, respectful or even encouraging. Some people came out to me and identified with a queer label; some mentioned the possibility of being bi even though they didn't identify as such at this point in time. Some people responded to my trust with a secret of their own, often unrelated to orientation or gender, like a way of sharing something that made us both vulnerable. I appreciated it, but sometimes I felt overwhelmed.

Something that happened almost every time I came out to people was the question of whether I was now going to have an open marriage. Regardless of their politics, gender, age, denomination, cultural level, queerness, almost everyone expected us to somehow have an open marriage. Some were neutral, some were concerned, some were encouraging. And it was very surprising because until that moment, as a presenting heterosexual person, no one had ever asked me that. It was obvious to everyone that my wife and I were not interested in an open relationship. There is a clear and strong expectation in society that bisexual people have problems with monogamy. In a similar way to how there are certain expectations that go along with cis-heteronormativity, there is also a kind of *queernormativity*, in which open relations are expected or

at least more likely. For bisexual people, this is even stronger. For many people, if you are bisexual, it means that you must either be a cheater, interested in casual sex outside your main relationship, or polyamorous. I think the bisexual community sometimes reinforces these prejudices: Julia Shaw clearly argues in favour of open relationships in her book *Bi: The Hidden Culture, History and Science of Bisexuality*⁸, and Robert Brooks Cohen's *Bisexual Married Men*⁹ further strengthens this argument. In my opinion, the bisexual community should challenge the expectation that bisexual people are unhappy in exclusive relationships. There were very few people for whom it was obvious that this was not an option for us, and I thanked them very warmly.

At some point I decided to include it in my coming out story, to tell people and correct the social prejudice from the start, like "I am coming out as bisexual and this has nothing to do with us having an open marriage, that is a prejudice in society against bisexual people, it has to do with..." and then explain it further.

Coming Out as Christian to Queers

A quick note on coming out as a Christian to queers. Part of my baggage of internalised queerphobia was that I expected that telling queers that I was a Christian would be problematic and that I would get negative reactions.

Nothing could be further from the truth – up to this point, I have not had a single negative experience. A lot of people were neutral and respectful, but a lot of people were also very positive about the fact that people could confidently combine these two labels, even if they personally were not interested in any form of organised religion nor faith.

8 Shaw, J. (2022) *Bi: The Hidden Culture, History and Science of Bisexuality*. London: Canongate Books.

9 Cohen, R.B. (2023) *Bisexual Married Men: Stories of Relationships, Acceptance, and Authenticity*. New York: Routledge.

Being Out

In this final section I would like to talk about the phase that comes after coming out: Being out. Because before you come out for the first time, you might think that coming out is something you do once and for all. And it's true that coming out to the first person is very different from coming out to the hundredth person. But you still get to come out to new people all the time. In the beginning it was very important for me to know who knew about my orientation, and at some point I decided to let go of that control and I wrote about my orientation on several social networks so that anyone could get that information if they did a little research. LGBTQ+ should be more visible in society and as an LGBTQ+ person, I have the opportunity to make my queerness visible and even have the privilege to do so without major negative consequences.

Actually, a rainbow on a piece of clothing on an ally had a major impact in the early stages of my coming out. I was in a café with a friend, and then someone came in with a cross with the colours of the progressive flag on a hoodie. And I was like "Oh my God! Should I talk to him? Is it weird? Do I come out right away? What do I say?" My friend kept talking to me, but I was not paying any attention, because I was lost in my own thoughts. So I did talk to this guy and I told him that I was interested in the interaction of queerness and Christian faith, but that I almost didn't know anyone in my part of town who was part of a queer-welcoming church. He told me that he was part of the local ESG, we exchanged our numbers and met a couple of weeks later. That led me to many important milestones which I have described in the above. That cross with the colours of the rainbow, this clear connection between Christian faith and queerness had a significant impact. Sometimes, making a difference can be that simple.

That is why I wear rainbows a lot – rainbow socks, rainbow T-shirts, etc. For the first queer service in my local church, we printed wristbands with the progressive flag and the verse Genesis 12:2, "I will bless you, and you shall be a blessing", which I wear pretty often. My wife and I, with the help of ESG, printed T-shirts with the verse Galatians 3:28 in the colours of the rainbow, which we wear at church-related events, espe-

cially. Such items attract people's attention to a certain degree. Of course, people don't see these things and think "Oh, look, José's wearing his rainbow T-shirt again, he must be bisexual," but they do know that queerness is important to me, to us, somehow. I think they assume that I'm a strong ally, or that someone in the family is queer, or that maybe I'm queer somehow, perhaps I relate to one of these confusing labels you see around! It doesn't matter that much. In any case, the result is that queerness and LGBTQ+ become more visible, so that other queer people are a little bit more comfortable about being queer and about coming out.

Another thing I experience this being-out phase is the integration into my life of different queer activities. For example, I am part of a local bisexual group that meets for brunches and meetups; I helped to migrate the library of the Queer Centre in my city to Zotero so that people can find books and DVDs more easily; I started working at ESG on behalf of the queer community; I started a group for queer people playing the Switch video game *Just Dance!* At some point, I realized that I had become a queer activist, especially in terms of the queer-Christian community – and this book is part of that activism. To be honest, I would have preferred to have just found a queer Christian community where I live and joined in. But there was none. So I decided to try and set one up, and God gave me the opportunity to find people who would support these activities in different ways.

These things are some options that work for me in this being-out phase. Other people can find their own ways. In any case, coming out and being out can make a positive difference, for the person coming out and for other people. I am not arguing for everyone to come out, there are good reasons for not coming out. But if we are safe, coming out as a queer Christian can be a way of loving God, loving ourselves and loving others.

And bisexual people in female-male marriages have a special responsibility. As far as it is possible for us, we should use the privilege of social recognition we receive and come out as bisexual more frequently. If just a small percentage of those people came out, we would be challenging both the stereotype of female-male-marriage in general and of queerness it-

self. We would be making the world a lot safer for many other people.
And that is a world we would like to live in.

This chapter reflects the author's personal experiences, recollections and interpretations. Names and identifying details have been changed or omitted where possible, and descriptions of conversations represent the author's understanding of events.