

# Queer-affirming Pastoral Care: Challenging – Encouraging – Liberating

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## 1 Observation

»Now is the time to say God is queer.«  
(Quinton Caesar)

The words were spoken during the closing sermon of the 38th German Protestant Church Days in June 2023 at Nuremberg's main market square. The South African pastor of the East Frisian congregation of Wiesmoor, Sinnfluencer<sup>1</sup>, person of color and activist Quinton Caesar formulated these words: »God is queer!«

From a nine-minute prophetic and generally very confrontational sermon, it was precisely these three words that triggered a digital »candystorm« on the one hand, but also a shitstorm and even death threats against Quinton Caesar and his family. Why was that?

- I. First of all, queer is an ambiguous term with different levels of meaning. »Queer« is a derogatory term, a slur initially used to describe and reduce homosexual women and men to their sexualities or gender identities. Since the 1980s and 1990s, the term has increasingly been reclaimed by the LGBTQI+ community, transforming it into a source of strength. »Queer« is now used by people positioning themselves outside of heteronormative categories, with regard to sexualities, lifestyles and/or non-conformity to the gender binary. It consciously pushes the envelope, challenging norms and categories, adding fluidity to the mix.
- II. As such, queer theologies are not a theological discipline as much as they are an umbrella for different perspectives in theological research. They mirror the realities of individuals experiencing exclusion and rejection based on their sexual orientation, their trans\* or non-binary identities or their otherness, making

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1 »Sinnfluencer«: German composite term for »sense-/meaning-influencer« in social media.

queer theologies contextual and specific in the process. They embody critical approaches and a plurality of perspectives.

- III. Queer research perspectives are aimed at questioning seemingly self-evident heteronormative and cis-normative notions of sexuality and gender identities and crossing borders, i.e., ›queering‹ them. In so doing, patriarchal power structures and hegemonic images of masculinity are also exposed and critiqued.

In this sense, the sentence »God is queer!« is encouraging for many, but also provocative and irritating for others. At the same time, G\*d is indeed queer, namely beyond all human categories, beyond all human ideas and beyond all human gender systems. G\*d is and remains unavailable and completely different.<sup>2</sup>

## 2 The book ›Queer-affirming Pastoral Care‹

My book ›Queer-affirming Pastoral Care‹ was published in German in March 2023 and in English in May 2024.<sup>3</sup> In the book, I reflect on more than 25 years of pastoral care experience in parish work, in church institutions and in the university chaplaincy at the University of Mainz. In the book, I present five case studies from university pastoral care. Five case studies come from my parish pastoral practice in the context of conversations in preparation of

- a blessing service for a lesbian couple
- a baptism in a rainbow family
- a coming-out in a confirmation class
- a naming ceremony in the context of a transition
- a funeral service for a gay man.

In addition, there are seven queer-affirming sermons for various occasions.

I have evaluated all the case studies and noted down insights for queer-affirming pastoral care. The appendix contains a self-reflection questionnaire for pastors, a checklist for ›safer spaces‹ and examples of international queer and religious networks.

2 I write G\*d with Asterisk\* if it is not used in a quote. It refers to the Hebrew name of G\*d which is written without vowels and which is not pronounced. The spelling also marks the fact that G\*d is beyond all human classification systems and attributions.

3 Söderblom, Kerstin: *Queersensible Seelsorge*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2023 (English Version: Söderblom, Kerstin: *Queer-Affirming Pastoral Care*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2024).

The book presents good practice examples from practice for practice and reflects on them. The aim is to provide minority-sensitive and non-discriminatory pastoral care that shows the following:

- queer and religious are not opposites.
- queering biblical texts is an exciting endeavor that can strengthen queer people – and others in their faith.
- queering church life means giving queer people a voice in churches and religious communities and showing that lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\* and intersex people are part of G\*d's creation and that they are made in G\*d's image in all their diversity and variety.

### 3 My approach to pastoral care

The risen Jesus accompanied two disciples to Emmaus.<sup>4</sup> They did not recognize him. Jesus listened to them, talked to them and shared part of the journey with them. He took their worries and needs seriously and perceived their insecurities. Jesus ate and drank with them and finally shared bread and wine with them. This is how he had done it before, so that the two disciples could finally recognize him. The scales fell from their eyes. Jesus was back. How could they not have recognized him before? He had risen from the dead, hallelujah! Through the encounter with the resurrected Jesus, they gained new courage. After Jesus had disappeared again, they went back to Jerusalem to tell the others about their joyful experience.

This biblical story from Luke 24 lays the basis for my thoughts on pastoral care. In this sense, pastoral care is bodily accompaniment along the way, involving attentive listening and participation in both small and large concerns and crises, for a limited period of time, and in very different everyday situations. Asking questions and being silent, listening and providing company, were decisive interventions made by the risen Jesus. He also made great memories with the disciples, by sharing the communion with them. Through the familiar ritual, he released inner sources of strength in the disciples and changed their view of the future, so that hope rather than despair shaped their perspective on life.

In my understanding, pastoral care means seeing and addressing a person holistically – body, spirit, and soul. It is G\*d who made them unique and full of wonders (acc. to Ps. 139,14) and it is in their wholeness that they become G\*d's image. That is why empathy and appreciation for all are non-negotiable prerequisites for pastoral care. It means to understand and accept people in their uniqueness and diversity. It

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4 See K. Söderblom: Queer-Affirming Pastoral Care (note 3), pp. 15f.

sounds banal, but for quite some queer people it is not self-evident at all. Too many have experienced insult and devaluation by clergy or religious groups.

That is why I am interested in a theology and pastoral care that enables queer people – just like everyone else – to relate to their everyday life experiences and to be heard with their specific voices. For a long time, they were only the objects of theological debates and struggles. It is time to perceive them as subjects and experts of their life stories and to listen to them. In this respect, theological and pastoral work is not a neutral activity, but stands in solidarity with those who have suffered injustice, violence and/or marginalization.

## 4 Case study: »I don't know how to say it!«

The following case study is taken out of my book ›Queer-affirming pastoral care‹.<sup>5</sup> It is one of many case studies I presented in the book and is meant to give an idea about the format and the content.

### 4.1 Meeting

It was a Wednesday afternoon in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. I was preparing for an evening service and a counseling session was coming up in fifteen minutes, when there was a knock at the door. Jay, a chemistry student, opened my office door. She was wearing a mask and stopped on the threshold. She knew she was early. I asked her to wait on our leather sofa in the second-floor hallway until I shut down my computer. During the Corona period, we offered primarily online counseling or ›Walk-and-Talk-meetings‹. From the preliminary phone conversation, it was clear, though, that neither would be appropriate here. So, I put on a pot of coffee, filled two glasses with water, put cookies and chocolate on a plate, and unlocked the seminar room. (That's where our face-to-face counseling sessions took place during the pandemic years because it provided enough space). The student took a seat at the large table across from me, thanked me for the water and coffee, and took off her mask. She drank from the glass of water and then held on to it with both hands. Beads of sweat gathered on her forehead.

*»Talking is not easy for me. I don't even know how to start«, she managed with difficulty. »Don't worry, I have time! Why don't you take a deep breath first? You don't need to order your thoughts either. Just let the words come!«*

I replied and looked at her encouragingly.

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5      See K. Söderblom: Queer-Affirming Pastoral Care (note 3), pp. 32–36.

## 4.2 Secure framework: Confidentiality

She took a deep breath.

*»Everything we say here stays between us, right?«*

I confirmed to her that the conversation was subject to confidentiality.

She swallowed, took another deep breath, and began:

*»I think I'm a lesbian and I'm afraid to tell my parents. And in my shared apartment, I don't know how to tell the others either! Everything has to stay between us, otherwise I'll freak out!«*

I nodded understandingly.

## 4.3 Finally being allowed to tell – with someone listening

Over the next half hour, I asked questions, listened attentively, encouraged her to continue, and gradually learned bits and pieces of her story: she had been active in a free church congregation as a teenager, which had shaped her spiritual life. Her parents had started taking her to the free church at an early age. She actually felt comfortable there, but even before she graduated from high school, she had a feeling that she did not fit into the community in certain ways. She did not want to get married and have children. She did not want to just be good and do ›woman things‹ as she called it. She wanted to travel, have adventures, be independent. Now a fourth-semester chemistry major, she had loosely kept in touch with her home congregation. Then, a few weeks ago, she had fallen in love with another student. Since then, her life had been turned upside down.

## 4.4 Naming fears and finding understanding

Jay took a deep breath and continued:

*»Actually, it's great that I've fallen in love. It tingles in my stomach and everywhere else. But I feel guilty and fear that my parents or someone from my congregation might find out! I am a woman and I have fallen in love with another woman. I can't do that! That is sinful! Our congregation is very clear on that. What am I supposed to do now?«*

After breathlessly forcing out those last sentences, she swallowed in exhaustion, looked at me and began to cry. I handed her a handkerchief, nodded in understanding and waited. She continued to cry, blew her nose at some point and drank a sip of water.

*»I'm just afraid that my whole life will fall apart, and everyone will be shocked when I tell them I've fallen in love with a woman!«*

I nodded and replied that I could well understand her worries. We took our time to look at what her worries were and what a worst-case scenario might look like.

I asked about friends and people within her social circle who were on her side. There was one best friend, who was in the know. She wanted to ask her for support.

Then I calmly replied,

*»You are brave and courageous for telling me all this. And you have found words to describe your situation. I congratulate you on that. That's a very important step, even if the fear is there and may remain.«*

She replied that she was glad to have voiced what had been troubling her.

*»Take your time!«*

I replied,

*»You see, the first steps are the hardest. Everything else comes little by little. You set the pace and the rhythm. And you don't have to say more than you want to or can. Period.«*

Relieved, she looked at me and hurried to tell me that she still had many questions and felt insecure and vulnerable. I confirmed to her that I could well understand this, and agreed with her that she could visit me during my office hours every two weeks from now on. Step by step we would then work on her questions and see whether, how and when she wanted to tell someone about her feelings of being in love.

I encouraged her not to rush into anything and to give herself time to adjust to the new situation first.

*»Enjoy the time with your girlfriend. And at the same time, I understand your worries!«*

Jay smiled, thanked me for the conversation, and said,

*»Can you also help me with the Bible passages that deal with homosexuality? I need that for my church.«*

*»We'll take care of that at a future meeting«, I replied.*

*»For this, please bring along any things you have heard people say in your community on this subject. We'll look at them together and work out how we would respond to this. Okay?«*

## 4.5 Speeches against fear

Over the next few weeks, we met regularly. Jay told me what she was afraid of when she pictured coming out to her parents, congregation, and fellow students. We practiced what she wanted to say to her parents and others by role-playing. We looked at the strengths and resources she could use when she was nervous and insecure, and how she could protect herself. Little by little, she became more fluent in talking about herself and her feelings, and we celebrated every sentence she was able to say to her parents in role play.

## 4.6 New home

Finally, we created a small biblical argumentation tool for their free church congregation. About half a year later, Jay came out to her parents, her roommates, and her fellow students. There were mixed reactions. But all in all, she was glad for the most part that she had told them. In addition, there had already been a conversation with someone from the congregation. That had been difficult, but it was a start. In the meantime, Jay has reached a point where she no longer feels dependent on the judgement of people in her free church.

*»If they don't accept me, I can always leave«, she once said defiantly. »After all, I have found a new home in the university chaplaincy in Mainz!«*

# 5 Findings<sup>6</sup>

## 5.1 Framework: Safe places and reliable time frames

*»Is this conversation really confidential? Will everything stay between us?« (Jay)*

These were Jay's first questions, and in that way, the conversation with Jay was not any different to those of other students with a pastoral care concern. The safe conversational framework guarantees a protective space for all involved parties, which is indispensable. This is particularly true when queer students like Jay seek counsel with me. For them, the safe space is doubly important: On the one hand, they sometimes share thoughts and feelings with me that only their very best friends know about. On the other hand, quite a few are afraid of negative reactions from family members and their social environment when it comes to them being queer. Pastoral confidentiality and concern for the safety of those seeking pastoral care is therefore a

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6 See K. Söderblom: Queer-Affirming Pastoral Care (note 3), pp. 57–64.

basic prerequisite for queer-affirming pastoral care. A safe place also involves a clear and reliable framework: it needs time free of the hustle and bustle of everyday life and a clear time frame. A hospitable space, a cup of coffee, tea or water will not hurt, either. These prerequisites create a sense of security and freedom in the counseling room.

## 5.2 Attitude: Appreciation and respect

*»It feels so good to not have to explain and justify myself. I know that I will be taken seriously, just as I am!« (Jay)*

This sentiment that Jay expressed following our meeting is one that I encounter quite often, regardless of the age of those seeking pastoral care, because even queer students, despite their relative youth, have experienced trauma, insults, and exclusion. Some of them have been singled out, whispered about and laughed at. Others were bullied in their youth groups, teased and insulted by the other children because they were somehow different. They were not boys; they were not girls – they themselves lacked the words for exactly who they were. They did not fit into any of the pigeonholes and did not enjoy the usual opposite sex relations that their peers engaged in. That made them outcasts. Others come to me because they do not feel at home in their own bodies. Some are considering gender reassignment. Others simply do not want to be pigeonholed, while quite a few come from religious homes and are afraid to tell their parents about their true selves.

It does not matter who comes to me – I look forward to meeting young and older people regardless of who they are, where they come from, how they live and love, or what their gender identity is. I see them as children of G\*d, wonderfully created in G\*d's image, loved and blessed in their uniqueness and dignity.

They feel the appreciation and respect I show them and many are grateful that with me, they do not have to explain or justify themselves, they do not have to fear a moral lecture or a theological sermon on sin. Of course, heterosexual students also come to counseling sessions, appreciating being respected for who they are. All people need recognition, also and especially in pastoral care.

For me it is frightening to see how many young people have already experienced devaluation in the family circle, at school, in sports clubs or at a church youth group. Queer-affirming pastoral care shows: »You are wonderfully made, just as you are!« (acc. to Psalm 139:14). Acceptance and recognition are foundational to pastoral care work – out of conviction and not from a sense of duty.

### 5.3 Knowledge: Knowing about minority stress

*»You know, pastor, I'm sometimes afraid of being offended again, like I was in my congregation.« (Quote from a queer pastoral care seeker)*

When a chaplain knows the trauma, insults, and arrogance that some of us have had to endure due to our sexual orientation or gender identity, relief is the result. Just being able to say: *»You understand this, don't you?«*, is an enormous relief.

Physical, emotional, and religious minority stress cuts to the very core of who we are. *»Religiously authorized«* language that demonizes and threatens people with hell and damnation hurts those affected deeply, leaving them shaken. This is especially true for those who come from very pious homes and backgrounds.

Conversion therapies legitimized by religion can also have traumatic effects. Preaching about hell with threats of damnation often have toxic long-term effects that can damage young people's self-esteem for years or even decades to come. Queer-affirming counselors are aware of the multi-layered consequences of minority stress and incorporate them into their counseling work.

A confidential narrative does not become a confession but can bring about reassurance and resilience. Counseling can create a protected space to share stress, pressure, and hurt feelings. And if these feelings are taken seriously and dealt with, they can even become spaces of freedom in which the care seekers can try out various options and see which work. Other resources can be discovered and built on. Biblical stories, prayers and rituals can help to give expression to situations and to reinterpret them in a positive light. An appreciation of how theological language works, and a knowledge of queer theological re-readings of biblical texts are important and helpful for this.

#### 5.3.1 The minority stress model

The minority stress model was developed by Ilan H. Meyer, a lecturer at the Williams Institute of the UCLA School of Law in Los Angeles in the 1990s.<sup>7</sup> The model states that minorities and members of stigmatized groups face increased (structural and institutional) stressors due to their minority position. This stress is multi-faceted and can be experienced physically, emotionally, and religiously/spiritually. Moreover, it is not just situational stress, but involves stressors that plague many affected individuals throughout their lives. In this way, minority stress leading to anxiety can become chronic and limit the quality of life enormously. For LGBTQI+ persons, it can lead to toxic self-hatred and/or internalized homo-/transphobia, and even se-

7 See Meyer, Ilan H.: *»Minority Stress and Mental Health in Gay Men«*, in: *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 36 (1995), pp. 38–56.

vere depression. All of these threats serve to lock those affected into heteronormative and binary behavioral systems.

### 5.3.2 Examples of spiritual/religious stress

The assertion that same-sex love and sexuality are not desired by G\*d, but are sinful and come from the devil, often leads to acts of spiritual violence. The same applies to the threat of withdrawal of love, and threats of hell and damnation. Such phrases are uttered primarily by right-wing evangelical and fundamentalist groups of all denominations and confessions. They are used specifically as leverage to force a confession of thoughts or actions that are considered deviant or condemnable. Exclusion from religious groups, church services, communion or Eucharistic celebrations, or from other church activities are further threats.

A substantial number of believers have been offered alternative ›treatment approaches‹, ranging from (demonic) exorcism to religiously legitimized conversion therapies, which can have extremely traumatic consequences for those affected. People with experiences of spiritual violence are therefore particularly dependent on pastoral care being offered in a queer-affirming manner, to prevent re-traumatization.

## 6 Evaluation: Change of perspective and expansion of action

*»I never thought of it that way!« (Quote from a queer pastoral care seeker)*

In almost all counseling conversations in a queer context, I sense my clients feeling inferior, deficient in some way, or ›stained‹ at some point. Being queer is experienced as a stigma. The experience mirrors the beliefs of people in the wider community and/or within the religious peer group. Instead of recognizing these beliefs as structural issues, though, these attributions and stereotypes are internalized and perceived as personal shortcomings. This is the case for people who come out late in life and feel that they are neither normal within the heterosexual nor in the queer world. Others describe the situation like standing between chairs, as the heteronormative and/or binary world surrounding them simply does not fit for them. This experience was also shared by many students, even though the university environment is supposed to offer a far greater degree of personal individual freedom.

Reframing and being open to further new perspectives take time in pastoral care and counseling work. In most cases, there is further work to be done beyond a change of perspective and discovering new strengths. In the religious context, moreover, this process is primarily about addressing evaluations of the queer person that have mostly negative connotations in terms of lifestyle and gender identities and which link to concepts of sin and remoteness from G\*d. Some struggle against a

concept of a superior, punishing, and judging G\*d and against priestly statements of being damned to hell serve as a dramatic expression of this spiral of devaluation. But other people seeking advice also wrestle with internalized devaluation and low self-esteem.

Careful steps are needed to challenge outdated evaluations and norms and to change perspectives. However, such steps are only sustainable if practiced repeatedly over a long period of time. Those who change their views and broaden their perspectives also learn to expand their own scope for action and eventually stop seeing themselves as victims of other people's attitudes and prejudices. The options that arise can then be explored and tested out together in the safety of a counseling session.

## 7 Challenge: ›Clobber Passages‹

*»But it's written in the Bible that it's sinful and not godly. What am I supposed to tell the people at my church?« (Jay).*

For queer-affirming pastoral care, it is not necessary to know all the Bible verses that judge homosexuality negatively. However, it is important to make clear that these texts are over two thousand years old and that they were written at a completely different time and in cultural and religious contexts that are not applicable to our life today. Therefore, they cannot be used literally as moral guidance and instructions for action in the 21st century.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, it is useful to know the ›Clobber Passages‹, especially when dealing with students from environments that take the Bible literally. It is important to point out that 21st century scientific knowledge around sexual orientation and gender identities cannot be compared with knowledge from the first century AD, or from centuries BC. Therefore, individual biblical verses cannot be used as moral guidelines for the 21st century.

## 8 Workshop: Queer re-readings of Biblical texts

The overall message of the Bible is one of encouragement and liberation. This message can be expressed in queer-affirming counseling conversations in simple words suitable for everyday life, if that is what is desired.

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8 For more in depth information see K. Söderblom: Queer-Affirming Pastoral Care (note 3), pp. 64–72.

## 8.1 Stories of life and faith

What a queer re-reading of biblical texts has shown in all of the case studies, is that it enabled those seeking pastoral care to relate their life stories to a biblical story, creating resonance in the interpretive space. It helped them to realize that the Bible is full of stories of people who were confronted with questions of faith, doubts, crises, and injustices in the face of their G\*d and had to learn to deal with them. What also helped them was to discover that G\*d stayed alongside people and did not reject them, even though they struggled with G\*d and their fate – for example, Jacob, Joseph or Elijah. In other stories, the protagonists had to deal with fundamental changes – for example, those who had lived with Jesus and had to process his death and resurrection. Pastoral care seekers experienced that queer life stories can be related to biblical stories and that they play an important role as actors in interpretative workshop. They felt that their life stories were relevant and that biblical stories could also be empowering for their lives. For people who keep hearing that being queer and Christian do not go together, these serve as a source of encouragement.

## 8.2 Creative energy

Relating biblical and everyday stories to one another released creative energy in those seeking pastoral care. The undogmatic engagement with biblical texts, which allowed subjective references and associations to be made, instead of condemning the hearer, had a liberating effect on them. Instead of being objects of theological doctrines and moral devaluation, they became subjects in conversation, subjects of their own story. In this respect, it is helpful to be aware of queer approaches to biblical texts, or at least to be open to allowing personal references to be applied to biblical texts. In this way, biblical texts can be both encouraging and liberating.

# 9 Reflection: The role of pastoral caregivers

## 9.1 Street Credibility

In all of the counseling sessions it was important to those seeking counsel that they came to me in my capacity as an openly lesbian counselor. As a queer pastor, I have a certain ›street credibility‹, i.e., an everyday credibility that leads to a certain amount of trust being placed in me prior to the conversations. This has the advantage that the threshold for requesting pastoral care from a queer person and opening up to this person is lower. However, it may also be the case that a queer pastor cannot automatically fulfill all expectations, is not a better pastor, and is not suitable for all

individuals and presenting issues. The disappointment can be double when queer pastors do not live up to expectations.

Empathy can be both an opportunity and a challenge. Queer pastors are probably familiar with many of the problems and conflicts on which people seek advice. Empathy and understanding of the situation are therefore easier to come by. However, strong empathy can also lead to queer pastors lacking the distance required to provide professional pastoral care. They may also be triggered by their own traumatic experiences, which may impact on their ability to act appropriately. They therefore tread a fine line between closeness and distance, empathy and professional distance, knowledge and openness to new ideas, and all while keeping an eye on the client experience.

For these reasons, there are various advantages and disadvantages to different pastors offering queer-affirming pastoral care. As long as the respective challenges are reflected upon and one's own role and position questioned, it is possible for all pastors to offer queer-affirming pastoral care. This also applies to other life events; not all pastors need to have shared similar experiences in order to offer professional pastoral care in these areas.

## 9.2 Queer-affirming communication

In the case studies, pastoral care seekers all referred to the queer-friendly statements of the Evangelische Studierendengemeinde (ESG)<sup>9</sup> on its website and in social media. Some explicitly mentioned queer-friendly events and projects of the ESG that they had attended previously. This clearly shows that pastors do not have to be queer in order to offer queer-affirming pastoral care. What they need to make transparent, however, is that they are working from a queer-affirming perspective. Furthermore, they must be aware of the following phenomenon:

Many queer people are distrustful or even defensive when it comes to offers from church facilities and institutions. Too many of them have already experienced exclusion, devaluation or worse in a church environment. They might also be skeptical, fearing forms of ›pinkwashing‹<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, none of them will go to a counseling session ›on a whim‹. Most will inquire very carefully in advance on what to expect. If there is even the slightest suspicion that a pastor might have an ambivalent or even negative relationship to queer people, they will not come.

9 Evangelische Studierendengemeinde (ESG) means: Protestant University Chaplaincy.

10 Composite term used in German discourse, combining ›pink‹ and ›whitewashing‹. See Lake, Nadine: »Corrective Rape« and Black Lesbian Sexualities in South Africa: Negotiating the Tensions between ›Blackwashing‹ and ›Pinkwashing‹ Homophobia«, in: S. J. Dodd (Ed.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Social Work and Sexualities*, London: Routledge 2021, pp. 100–113.

### 9.3 Queer friendly setting

Being queer *and* being Christian encompasses a complex and ambivalent experiential mixture that includes experiences of humiliation, exclusion, and religiously legitimized devaluation. In this respect, it is important that a queer-affirming pastoral care setting is ensured and also publicly communicated. This is what this might look like:

This place is a safe place for queer people. It is welcoming, inclusive, and queer-friendly. It is crucial that this place not only states this on its website, but also demonstrates it through queer-friendly projects, thereby living up to its statement. If, in addition, a queer-affirming mission statement exists and rainbow flags, flyers and posters indicate that the place is queer-friendly, then queer people will come, help shape the space and, if necessary, also ask for pastoral care.

I will close my deliberations with a poem that I have written some years ago. I shared it with Jay and discussed it during a couple of our counseling sessions.

## 10 Easter<sup>11</sup>

### *Easter*

Pushing away the walls of fear and prejudice.  
 Rolling away the stones of constraint, sensitivities, narrow boundaries.  
 To finally dare to show myself, to say I, to be there, to take up space.  
 Just as I am.  
 Just as G\*d created me and blessed me.

### *Easter*

Out of the grave caves of fixed ideas,  
 a human being shows himself,  
 confesses to himself.  
 Look, that's me!  
 Wanted and blessed by G\*d.

### *Coming Out*

Leaving the confinements of what is considered normal.  
 What will the neighbors say?  
 How can you do this to us?  
 What did we do wrong?  
 No longer willing  
 to hide in the closet.

11 First published in German in K. Söderblom: Queersensible Seelsorge (note 3), p. 33f.

*Easter*

Someone showed us the way.  
He left the realm of violence, hatred and death.  
He overcame deadly expectations and called out to us:  
Look, I live! You can live, too!

*Coming Out*

Stepping out of the burrows of prejudice, slander.  
Daring to be myself, just as I am,  
created by G\*d,  
lesbian, gay, bi, trans\*, inter\*, queer,  
free from pigeonholes, labels, or seals of normality.  
Simply blessed.  
Simply me.  
Stepping out of the burrows of prejudice.  
Not only for Easter.

