

“Queering Jesus”

A Breakthrough in Doing Theology in the Indonesian Context

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Abstrak

Tulisan ini mencoba menjawab kebutuhan berteologi gereja-gereja di Indonesia di era posmodern. Sudah saatnya gereja (baca: orang Kristen) melihat figur Yesus sebagai seorang “queer,” yaitu salah satu dari mereka yang aneh “yang tidak seperti biasanya,” “yang berbeda dari yang dominan dan normatif,” yang dimarginalkan dalam masyarakat. Hal ini tentunya akan memberi peluang bagi semua orang untuk diterima dan dihargai. Yesus memang adalah seorang “queer,” karena Ia lahir dari seorang perawan dan tidak punya ayah biologis, kehidupan seksualnya tidak boleh dipercakapkan, Ia hidup dengan pesan dan tindakan yang berbeda dari kelompok yang berkuasa saat itu. Jadi queer di sini tidak hanya dibatasi sebagai sebutan untuk kaum homoseksual saja, tapi untuk semua yang tertindas dalam masyarakat oleh karena adanya perbedaan dan pembedaan. Teori queer mungkin belum begitu dikenal oleh banyak orang di Indonesia, tapi teori ini menurut saya mampu menjawab kebutuhan berteologi di konteks ini, di mana masih banyak orang yang hidup dibedakan dan dimarginalkan, di mana kaum homoseksual masih belum punya tempat yang “equal” seperti mereka yang heteroseksual. Dengan teori ini maka gereja akan dilihat sebagai gereja yang merangkul semua orang, apapun latar belakang mereka. Pada akhirnya, berteologi queer ini harus dimulai di sekolah/institusi teologi dan di jemaat-jemaat lokal, kini dan disini.

Kata kunci: teori queer, Yesus, homoseksual, penindasan, gereja, konteks Indonesia.

A. Introduction

In a postmodern world, where people mostly accept what they personally experience, there will be the openness to diversity. In this regard, “postmodern fosters willingness as well as ability to recognize authenticity in all kind of otherness.”¹ Then in doing theology in this postmodern world, it should bring all people to respect one another in their differences and uniqueness, to be in solidarity and to love, and to embrace all human beings and the rest of creation in “the horizon of God.”²

¹ Eung Chun Park, *Either Jew or Gentile, Paul’s Unfolding Theology of Inclusivity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 1.

² This is my translation of “*basilea tou theou*.”

“Queer theory” that is in line with feminism, poststructuralist, and postcolonial analysis,³ as well as it is indebted to postmodernism,⁴ can be a breakthrough in achieving this, which means it provides tool in doing theology. The word “queer” itself is a term that has been used to describe those who are “strange” especially in sexuality, but then it opens up to those who are powerless and marginalized because of the binary distinctions or categories.⁵ Queer theology then using this theory in carving its theology. It is, as what Cheng states, “a place where the Christian theology and the queer theory meet.”⁶ Through this theology the Christians can unravel structures and stories, including the stories of Jesus that have been oppressive. Thus, it is significant to portrait Jesus as one of those who are strange or odd, those who are different from the dominant, which I call it to be “queering Jesus.” This can be a breakthrough in doing theology that meets the special needs of the postmodern world, including the Indonesian context.

Queering Jesus is important for the Indonesian churches, where some of their members still live in oppression, even within the church itself, primarily due to the binary distinctions. It seems that there is no place for the homosexual and transgender whom instantly judged by the church as the sinners. Even if there is any, their identity should be hiding behind what people would perceive as “*the heteronormativity* or the normal one.” Adding up to this, the Indonesian churches still perceive that discussing the sexuality of Jesus is inappropriate; even talking about sexuality in a general sense has been perceived as taboo for the church people. Therefore, by promoting queering Jesus, it will open possibility to welcome all people specifically those who have been mistreated because of their identities; those who have been suffered due to binary categories.

In aiming this, I will divide this paper into four important parts. First, I will portray the relation between Christ and the church and how it connects to the world. This is to show the importance of the world as the locus of doing theology. The church therefore needs to do God’s mission in the world not against the world. In so doing, I

³ Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 43. See also Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), 39.

⁴ Mary Elise Lowe, “Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Theologies: Origins, Contributions, and Challenges,” in *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, Volume 48, Number 1 Spring 2009, March (Wiley Periodicals and Dialog, Inc, 2009), 52.

⁵ Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), 1, 6.

⁶ Cheng, *Radical Love*, x.

also provide a rationale behind using queer theory as one of the bridges into the never-ending relation of the church and its larger society. Then in the second part, I will describe about queer and queer theory as well as the importance of queer Christology and queering Jesus in the present postmodern world. After doing so, in the third part I will explain about queering Jesus in the Indonesian context. At the end I will draw a conclusion about what might be the concrete actions that the churches are to take as their efforts in doing queer theology. I realize that this is not the only way of queering Jesus; therefore, I hope that my essay could inspire another research or discussion as a breakthrough in doing theology that meets the needs of the Indonesian context.

B. Christ, the Church, and the World

The doctrine of Jesus established by the Nicene Creeds which declares that he is fully human and fully God has dominated contemporary Christological thoughts.⁷ The human aspect of Jesus as well as his divinity is prominent. Thus, discussing these two natures of Jesus is necessary in order to understand the Christian witness or mission that the Church should bring into this world. Yet, what is important in the present context is how to make a connection between these two concepts.

Furthermore in this postmodern time, there is a need to understand Jesus's two natures in relation to the context of hegemony and oppression. Broadly speaking, what would Jesus think, what would Jesus say, and what would Jesus do in the midst of hegemony and oppression as an ordinary man to reveal his divinity? The church, as a community of faith that believes in Jesus Christ, needs to answer these questions in its real actions. The church needs to be like Christ, doing God's mission in the world.

Hence, the understanding of Jesus might affect the ministry within and outside the church that is the larger society (the world). Helmut Richard Niebuhr in his classic book "*Christ and Culture*" suggests some types of relation between Christ and culture, which are "Christ above culture," "Christ against culture," "Christ of the culture," "Christ and culture in paradox," and "Christ the transformer of culture."⁸ Following Niebuhr's argument, I think it is not about choosing one from these five models, but to understand that in the history of Christianity, these relations characterized the encounter of the church and the world. Yet, in this postmodern world, how the church should relate to

⁷ Thomas Bohache, *Christology from the Margins* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 4.

⁸ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publisher, 2001), i-iv.

the world? What is the relation between Christ and culture that in return will characterize the life and the ministry of the Christians? In answering these questions, the church needs to consider that Christ will always in relation to the culture; the world is the locus of doing theology. By so doing, there will be “a hopeful view toward culture.”⁹

The church and the world can be differentiated but cannot be separated. There is no division of history into sacred and profane.¹⁰ A church is a matter of symbolic engagement. It is a theological symbol and a location for engaging with the many other symbols of Christian theological discourse. Further, the church is a symbol of communion with God and others. Therefore it is beyond an institution, organization, or a place of worship. The church is a living witness of the love of God, which in return it should reflect and share God’s love to the entire creation.

As Jesus once lived as an ordinary human who was able to do extraordinary things, it gives the church hope and encouragement as well as an example to do the same thing. The church needs to reflect the signs of the horizon of God just like Jesus did, i.e. solidarity, justice, kindness, respect, and liberation for the entire creation. Based on this understanding, the Christian faith ought to have its social character as the church needs to always engaging with the world.

Then, the critical social theory provides tool in doing this especially since it does not only relate to the structural system in a larger society, but also in the domestic sphere (a context within a household). It analyzes the society and the culture. Agger argues that critical social theory is political because it participates in bringing social change, which could begin at home.¹¹ In other words, it connects every day life with the large-scale social structures. Therefore, it is an essential tool of doing theology in this twenty first century society, where people live in a multicultural-postmodern world, where the public life is as important as the domestic domain. There are many forms of critical social theories; however, I choose “queer theory,” for it connects us with not only the issue of homosexuality or gender but also class and race even wider than that;¹²

⁹ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 191.

¹⁰ Brad Harper and Paul Louis Matzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: BrazosPress, 2009), 222.

¹¹ Ben Agger, *Critical Social Theories: An Introduction* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 4-5.

¹² See Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction*, vi. See also Cheng, *Radical Love*, 39.

it rejects all kind of binary pairings. Queer theory represents a broad range of cultural strategies and academic modes of analysis. This theory is prominent as a theological method to discuss about witnessing Jesus as well as to understand his life and identity that in return might affect the ministry of the Indonesian churches.

C. Queer Christology: Queering Jesus

Queer theory has been developed since the late twentieth century.¹³ This theory rejects binary pairings of gay/straight, male/female, and inside/outside. Although it was first developed in the United States, nowadays Asian also concerned with this queer study.¹⁴ The word queer literally means strange or odd.¹⁵ It has been used to signify or to denote one's difference.¹⁶ However, the meaning of queer can be much broader than this. Queer, as what Sullivan comprehends from Foucault, is anything that is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, or the dominant.¹⁷ This definition helps to understand queer as more than just about being sexually different. Furthermore, as states by Cheng there are three meanings of queer, as for Stone there are two.¹⁸

According to Cheng, the terminology of queer can be understood as an umbrella term, which refers collectively to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and other individuals who are not fit the fixed one.¹⁹ Queer could also mean the "*transgressive action*", which is an intentional reclaiming of a word that previously had only negative connotations.²⁰ Then, queer is about "erasing boundaries", which is grounded in queer theory.²¹ It refers to erasing or deconstructing of boundaries with respect to categories of sexuality and gender. Queer is more than just a negative connotation.

For Stone, queer can be seen as an inclusive term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT). Queer is also understood as a theory that questions all kinds of

¹³ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 9.

¹⁴ James Walker and Lucetta Kam, "Introduction of Queer Import(s): Sexualities, Gender, and Rights in Asia," in *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context* (Issue 14, November 2006), accessed January 28, 2014, <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue14/introduction.htm>.

¹⁵ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 3.

¹⁶ Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction*, v.

¹⁷ Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction*, 43.

¹⁸ See Cheng, *Radical Love*, 2-8. See also Ken Stone (ed), *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 334 (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 7.

¹⁹ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 2.

²⁰ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 2-3.

²¹ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 3.

binary distinctions. In this case, queer is understood to communicate lesbian, gay, or bisexual identities, experiences, or social locations.”²² Since the social location as well as identity is fluid, very diverse, and subject to change, this understanding becomes wider. Queer opens many possibilities dealing with binary distinctions. It starts from LGBT but it reaches all who are oppressed because of distinctions.

Queer theory as a critical theory, is constructed as “a sort of vague and indefinable set of practices that has the potential to challenge normative knowledge and identities.”²³ It is a theoretical perspective that challenges the normative. From this understanding, queer can be used by anyone experiencing oppression, primarily as the result of his or her sexual orientations and practices. Everyone then could be queer.²⁴ This queer theory then has been taken up by theologians like Marcella Althaus-Reid and Robert Goss in shaping their theologies that meet the specific needs of those who are oppressed and marginalized.²⁵

In queer theology, Goss asserts that the queer Christian community spreads the good news to the “*translesbigay*” (transgender, lesbian, and gay) community and reaches out to the marginal and the oppressed.²⁶ From this perspective, queer theology can function as a tool of liberation for all the oppressed and even the oppressor, not only for the LGBT. The queer community preserves the memory that Jesus was at home with the outcast and the oppressed.²⁷ The stories of Jesus can be a source of liberation; Jesus himself was a queer.

To be queer or to queer something is to be subversive to the norm in order to benefit the oppressed and marginalized, just like Jesus did. Thus, queer and queering are not limited to sexuality or to personhood; it opens anything that needs to be changed so that everyone is taken care. In accordance to this, Althaus-Reid argues that queer theology “has taken contextual theologies to the new limits and thinking of

²² Stone, *Queer Commentary*, 19.

²³ Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction*, 44.

²⁴ Lowe, *Gay, Lesbian*, 58.

²⁵ See Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer Theology* (New York: Routledge, 2003). See also Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversion in Sex, Gender, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2001).

See also Robert E. Goss, *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007).

²⁶ Robert E. Goss, “John” in Deryn Guest, et.al. (eds), *The Queer Bible Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 550.

²⁷ Goss, “John”, 550.

alternatives which sexual and political too."²⁸ Therefore, queer theory can be used in doing theology in this postmodern world. It is to assert that to understand Jesus in relation to queer is important, "Jesus himself is a queer."

The embodiment or the incarnation of Jesus through the Virgin Mary is essential in discussing about queer Jesus. The existence of Mary herself attracts my attention. Mary is a queer since she is different and unique as she was pregnant without having sexual activity. Here, the use of queer in describing Mary's identity as it connects to divine attachment that comes with her pregnancy could be put to elevate her existence. Mary's pregnancy was widely accepted that makes her the "holy mother," as the church has believed for centuries. Nevertheless, in the Indonesian context, an expecting woman without husband will be treated as an outcast by the society. She then will be punished morally and ethically, since in the Indonesian context to be pregnant in extra marital relationship indicates "sinned against God." In this regard, Mary can represent a queer.

If the virgin birth indicates the divinity of Christ, Mary's motherhood affirms the fullest possible identification of Christ with the human condition from the beginning.²⁹ Her motherhood can serve the horizontal dimension of the incarnation, which means it relates Christ to the human nature. It incorporates Christ into the historical, social, and material realities of life in all its possibility and finitude; it is symbolically significant for the affirmation of the full humanity of Christ.³⁰ Mary then in the Gospel of Luke 1.26-38, as Bohache asserts, can serve as paradigm of "the queer empowerment."³¹ He further notes that the greeting of the angel of God to Mary, "God is with you," resonates with many queer people who felt lost and abandoned, but often found out through his or her surrounding or even from a stranger that God is with him or her. Mary was a queer who gave birth to a queer son, Jesus. The existence of her is important in the narratives of Jesus.

Furthermore according to Schneider, the narratives of Jesus of Nazareth suggest that the divinity, in which his flesh reveals it, "is radically open to consorting with

²⁸ Althaus-Reid, *The Queer Theology*, 2.

²⁹ Tina Beattie, "Queen of Heaven", in Gerard Laughlin, "*Queer Theology: Rethinking Western Body*" (USA, UK, Australia: Blackwell Publishing Ltd), 297.

³⁰ Beattie, "Queen of Heaven," 298.

³¹ Bohache, *Christology*, 238.

anyone.”³² This indicates a tremendous hope for all the people. Jesus as an ordinary man delivered a message that crossed over all the social, cultural, and religious boundaries. The incarnation of Jesus can consort every one especially the one who is being oppressed.

Jesus was an ordinary human with extraordinary teachings and actions. The cultural sphere around him shaped his identity and presumably his sexual life, which would never have a place to be discussed in the holy church. Unfortunately, there is no reference in the Gospels regarding Jesus’s sexuality that can help in discussing this matter further. However, it should open up possibility and encourage the church in interpreting anything related to Jesus, including his sexuality. Then, it will open a window for the LGBTIQ.³³

Jesus defended the outcast within the society, those who are powerless, such as women, children, and prostitutes were at the same time, Jesus was become an oppressed too. He died under the political hegemony of the Roman Empire in the first century, due to his defense to something that is “not normal”, “not in accordance with the dominant” which made him a queer.

Queer Christology seeks to explore thing that have been silenced or unheard in a discussion about Jesus. As I borrow a statement from Bohache, “we are doing theology (Christology) from the margin.”³⁴ The discussion about Jesus should relate to those who are oppressed and marginalized, and those who are suffered because of the binary distinctions. Christology ought to relate the church to the larger society. Relationship and community should become the healing center of Christianity.³⁵ In this Christology, each person who shaped a community is a precious-unique human being; everyone therefore could be a queer.³⁶ It is tolerable to be queer. Stuart believes that Christianity is a queer thing,³⁷ which encourages the Christians to be and to live as a queer. The crucifixion is God’s invasive identification with queers.

³² Laurel Schneider, “Promiscuous Incarnation,” in Margaret D. Kamitsuka, *The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires, and Sexuality in Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 244.

³³ LGBTIQ is a recent term which also includes the “Intersex”. It stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer.

³⁴ Bohache, *Christology*, ix.

³⁵ Nicola Slee, *Seeking the Risen Christa* (London: SPCK, 2011), 9.

³⁶ William Turner, *A Genealogy of Queer Theory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 8.

³⁷ Elizabeth Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Differences* (Hamshire, England: Ashgate, 2003), 11.

D. Queering Jesus in the Indonesian Context

People of Indonesia need to develop their own understanding of God (of Jesus) that meets their specific context. It means that all people ought to do their own theology. In so doing, the contemporary Indonesian Christology should examine Christ in its specific cultural context.

Unfortunately, the Indonesian churches "have not been able to release themselves from their colonial legacy,"³⁸ that often leads to hegemony especially when the church perceived itself as the holy community created by God. They perceived themselves to be the chosen-sacred people and view those who are not "sacred" as do not belong to the church. Thus, the church needs to expand its mission by making "others" become "brothers",³⁹ by putting them into the sacred category.

According to the church, homosexual is not sacred, they therefore need to be repented or cleansed because the church believes that they are sinned against God's heteronormativity. Moreover regarding sexuality, the church hardly talk about it openly and deeply because it is believed to be too taboo to discuss. As for the church, sexuality is God's gift for only the married couple, husband and wife, which is "man and woman only," which will closes all doors even windows for the LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer). That is why many of homosexuals in Indonesia are living in denial, meanwhile they are trying so hard to change their identity, or they try to hide it because they themselves think that they are sinned against the holy God and the holy church. They believe that as long as they hide their sexual orientation, the society would not desert and outcast them.

Homosexuality is not a new phenomenon in Indonesia. It has been in place for hundreds of years in Indonesian history, which was manifested in some traditions, such as *Bissu monks* in Bugis-South Sulawesi, the tradition of *warok-gemblakan* in Ponorogo-East Java, *Ludruk* theater performance in East Java, the *Indang* dance in West Sumatra,

³⁸ John A. Titaly, "From Abandonment to Blessing: The Theological Presence of Christianity in Indonesia," in Sebastian C.H. Kim (ed.), *Christian Theology in Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 86.

³⁹ I choose to use the term 'brothers' instead of sisterhood or family or fellowship, as my deliberate decision in criticizing the patriarchal society that still colors the interaction of people within the Indonesian churches.

and the *Rateb Sadati* dance in Aceh.⁴⁰ Through these traditions one can trace the existence of homosexuals in Indonesia. However, as the state produces and reproduces ideas of the perfect sexuality, “homosexuality thus is regarded as a common enemy and threat.”⁴¹ It means that if a person confesses his or her homosexuality, the society in return will alienate him or her.

Some of the people will estrange the homosexuals and some are tolerant towards homosexuals but they prefer not to talk about it because of the strong culture of shame or *malu* in the Indonesia context.⁴² Moreover, the culture of *malu* is extremely strong in the Indonesian culture that prevents the homosexuals to come to light concerning their identity. It becomes worst since the society will punish them, verbally or nonverbally. Hartoyo, one of many gays in Indonesia, is a living witness of this sad reality. He and his partner have been harassed in custody, and sexually abused as the punishment of their homosexuality given by the society and the authority (in this case the police) in 2007, as what he reported to the Asian center for human rights.⁴³ He then wrote an open letter to a newly-elected justice at that time that introduced the world of gay in Indonesia. In his letter, he claims that homosexual is not a product of the West. “They are not the people who have invaded from the West but rather they are part of us,” Hartoyo says.⁴⁴

Yet, Indonesia remains one of the least tolerant countries in the entire world regarding attitudes toward homosexuality.⁴⁵ An intriguing quote from the Pew Research Center’s findings, informs that the acceptance of homosexuality is particularly widespread in countries where religion is less central in people’s lives. This strikes me as a theologian who lives in a religious country. I am questioning myself what is wrong with my religious doctrines and practices. Hence, the people including myself need to do

⁴⁰ Wisnu Adihartono Reksodirdjo, “When Society Deprives Sexual Minority Groups of Their Rights” in the Jakarta Post, Sun, 07/28/2013, accessed February 1, 2014, <http://m.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/07/28/when-society-deprives-sexual-minority-groups-their-rights.html>.

⁴¹ Reksodirdjo, “When Society Deprives.”

⁴² Anggatira Golmer, “It’s OK to Be Gay in Indonesia So Long As You Keep It Quiet,” accessed February 1, 2014, <http://www.dw.de/its-ok-to-be-gay-in-indonesia-so-long-as-you-keep-it-quiet/a-6456222>.

⁴³ 429 Magazine, “Letter from Indonesia, “I’m Gay, I’m not a Product of the West, and I’m Not Alone,” accessed February 1, 2014, <http://dot429.com/articles/1635-letter-from-indonesia-i-m-gay-i-m-not-a-product-of-the-west-and-i-m-not-alone>.

⁴⁴ 429 Magazine, “Letter from Indonesia.”

⁴⁵ Jakarta Globe, “Indonesia Among World’s Least Accepting Countries of Homosexuality,” Pew, accessed February 1, 2014, <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/news/indonesia-among-worlds-least-accepting-countries-of-homosexuality-pew/>.

something. We cannot keep silent and neglect the existence of homosexuals. We ought to care to the LGBTIQ as they are prone to be subject of violence and harassment, verbally and nonverbally. They could be one of our family members. Therefore, it is important for the churches to address their needs.

Besides homosexuals, in discussing about queer theology, the issue of class and race are also important. It creates distinctions of people. It is also connects to gender and sexuality. Therefore, using queer theology will help the church to discover that there should be no distinctions of people; all are equal before God. Thus, the ministry of the church should meet the needs of all people regardless their background.

Yet, there are still inequality of men and women in almost every domain of life in the Indonesian context including in the church. There is gender bias in interpreting the message of the Bible that disadvantages the women.⁴⁶ There are many people who live as the oppressed because the impact of the biblical interpretation. The traditional way of reading and understanding the Bible are conducted by the people who hold ecclesiological authority. This kind of interpretation leads to a blind obedience which creates an exclusive community as well as inequality between men and women. Thus there is no "meaning making" in doing theology, just the "meaning receiving." People just follow the traditional interpretation without questioning their present needs and context.

Many Indonesian pastors who are influential figures toward their congregation's life still interpret the Bible with "the out-of-date eyes," in which they see the church as a holy community that closely related to the people of Israel that needed to maintain their particular identity to differentiate them from the others. In this regard, there is a strict distinction of "sacred" and "profane." The church becomes an opposite of the world. The church is sacred and the world is profane. The homosexuals, the prostitutes, those who are pregnant in extra marital relationship, the divorce couples, and many more; they are categorized as the profane. Tragically in some churches, those who are considered

⁴⁶ See Ester Damaris Wunga and Yusak B. Setyawan, "Maria Magdalena dan Pemuridan yang Sederajat: Suatu Studi Hermeneutik Feminis terhadap Model Pemuridan yang Sederajat dari Kisah Maria Magdalena dalam Yohanes 20:11-18," in *Waskita: Jurnal Studi Agama dan Masyarakat*, Vol. IV No. 2 April 2013, (Salatiga: Magister Sosiologi Agama Fakultas Teologi UKSW, 2013), 50-54.

belong to this group cannot take part in the holy communion because of the strict rule of the church. They need to be cleansed and repented.

In this circumstance, the concept of the righteousness of God plays an important role. It is an essential concept in Christianity that is connected to justification and salvation, especially in the Pauline Corpus. Yet, it does not only shape theological discussion in a theoretical level, but also in the practical one. The church often deals with question(s) about ethical obligations that the people need to perform in order to be “righteous.” The problem is that “not all people” can perform this ethical perfection.

In relation to this, the phrase “the righteousness of God” (*dikaiosisyne tou theou*) is needed to be discussed. It was used by Paul in Romans and Philippians. Bultmann describes God’s righteousness, which is given to believers as the basis of relationship between God and person. Therefore it is a gift, not an attribute of God which makes a new existence for an individual. Here, he uses Romans 10.3 and Philippians 3.9 to explain how righteousness denotes salvation. God’s righteousness has been revealed apart from the law.⁴⁷ It is not “*sinlessness*” in ethical perfection, but rather in the sense that God does not count human sins. This opens possibility to include those who are not capable to perform ethical perfection. It conveys relationship with God as the creator not an ethical perfection.

Unfortunately, many people still consider the righteousness of God as the righteousness that people should own before God. It obligates the quality before God which leads to a significant problem to those who cannot perform ethical perfection “according to the church or to some people.” This will create an exclusive community of faith, which also characterizes the Indonesian context, where the church becomes ‘the judge’ onto people’s ethical behavior, rather than to reflect and to share the love of God to all human beings and the entire creation. The church is inclined to seek individual perfection then forgets the social responsibility. The church tends to focus on the individual sin and neglects the social sin. The church disregards to be in solidarity with all. This “privilege” the church holds can make it decides who is sinned who is not, who can join the holy communion and who cannot. The church is not doing God’s mission; it creates its own mission.

⁴⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Son, 1951), 273.

The church (the Christians) need to change themselves in terms of way of thinking and attitude. They need to understand that theology is a meaning making process which makes everyone can do his or her theology. Theology should start from the real needs and contexts of the people. Thus, Jesus who was an oppressed should be a liberator to all, not only to some. Jesus should be seen as a queer who liberate. He did not fit what the world would think as "normal" since he was born from a virgin which makes him have no biological father. He did not fulfill the expectation of the Jewish regarding "the Messiah." With regard to the ruler or the emperor, he did not compromise with the majority. He dared to be different from the dominant. He was on the part of the poor and the oppressed. He was different, abnormal, unusual, strange, and odd, he was therefore a queer. This is what the church should comprehend in Indonesian context "queering Jesus."

However, the question will be why is it crucial to introduce queer theory and its theology? Is liberation theology or postcolonial approach or feminist analysis not enough to answer the problems of the oppressed in the Indonesian context? These all approaches are aim for liberation, yet they are different in their starting point or their main concern. For instance, the feminist will start by seeing the reality of the Indonesian women, while the postcolonial will be sensitive on the issue of colonialism and neocolonialism. Queer theology starts by questioning the issue of binary distinctions especially in relation to gender and sexuality. Yet as Cheng asserts, queer, postcolonial, and feminist are the wide range of the hermeneutic approaches.⁴⁸

Queer theology is intriguing as it connects theology with the LGBTIQ, to those who are not reached out by the ministry of the church because they are in the profane category. This is what makes queer theory is appealing for the Indonesian context, since there are so many people who have been treated as they are belong to this category or distinction. Queer theory starts from homosexuals and reaches all who are oppressed in quest for liberation. It contributes to intersectionality and hybridity of the contextual theologies and it should be in dialogue with the diverse contextual and liberation theologies."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 14.

⁴⁹ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 40.

Thus queering Jesus will open up a possibility to embrace all people in the *horizon of God*. Queering Jesus might give a chance for the invisible to be seen and for the voiceless to be heard. Queering Jesus will help the church to be in solidarity with those who are oppressed. Queering Jesus might help us doing theology not only in a public sphere but also in domestic one, within our household.

E. Conclusion

Queer theology seems to be a very new approach in the Indonesian context. However, queering Jesus is important in order to embrace all the people in Christ community. By queering Jesus, it means that everyone has the right to be oneself and express it without afraid of being judged or hated because it does not fit with the dominant or the normal. Being queer means one is always aware that gender or sexuality as well as identity is fluid and never being static. Being queer means confronting all forms of oppressions. Being queer means bringing all the experiences and stories that unseen to be seen as well as voices that unheard to be heard. In the Indonesian context, this queerness will resonate primarily with the LGBTIQ, but also to those who are oppressed due to distinctions or binary categories. This queer theology should start by queering Jesus so everyone can have a place in Jesus Christ's stories. It is a lifelong process. Nevertheless, it is need to be started somewhere and somehow.

Concretely, it should be started from theological institutions where pastors are trained. In this case, queer theology should be one of the important theological discussions in theological schools. It should be an important part of the curriculum. There should be an education and conscientization regarding queer theory and theology. Pastors who did not have an opportunity to learn about queer theory before in their education should be invited to join these programs.

Then in the context of the church, people need to think about the existence of homosexuals and those who have been oppressed by the structures and by the Christian stories. The church needs to discuss about sex and sexuality in its right portion. The church should also form a group of people who read the Bible with liberating stance, by using queer understanding as a tool in interpreting the stories of the Bible. For queer

theologians, "the meaning emerges from the interaction between text, reader, and the broader discourses."⁵⁰

For the larger society, the church should perform and maintain its social character. The church is to become a tool of God's universal mission to the world. The church should demonstrate the sign of the horizon of God characterized by love, justice, solidarity, peace and liberation for the entire creation, including the homosexuals. The church should reflect its uniqueness and queerness as a fellowship of God's people that have different characters comparing to the other social institutions.

Finally in queering Jesus, Christ himself becomes the center of theological discussion as well as the center of life. Then, God is black and white, woman and man, homosexual and heterosexual, Ambonese and Javanese, Chinese and indigenous; "God is all for all." All the creation reflects God as the creator. Furthermore, God is the relationships one nurtures in the community. Accordingly, there is always hope for a better world to live as what Jesus fought for and brought to his community thousand years ago, but also to the Indonesian people.

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⁵⁰ Lowe, *Gay, Lesbian*, 52.

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