Polyamorous Theology

A Dialogical Experiment in Thinking

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1. Introduction by Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood:

All right. The beauty of this project is that we are bringing to the table lived experience and putting that lived experience in direct dialog with various critical theologies. The definition of lived experience for is not quite or only that which is visceral, but rather more like the relational polyamorous experience, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The focus of this project is to engage these facets of the polyamorous experience from a place of theological intrigue, placing that experience

within the contexts of faith and practice. As a non-practitioner of polyamorous lived experience myself, I, together with Bryan, am bringing all of these different facets together. My belief is that what we've accomplished is something that is rare, and I especially give thanks to Bryan for being bold, confident and brave enough to not only share these lived experiences with me and the world, but also to embark on a journey of theological reflection within – engaging modern liberation theology, queer theology, progressive theology and more. The resulting outcome is creating a theology

that is all together something new, and while not necessarily unbiased, but rather the bringing together of two different perspectives to the table in a way that may have not been done before.

I don't feel like there were certainly conclusions that we brought to the finished product, because there was not definitively any particular destination in mind; rather, it is very similar to taking a Sunday drive to explore and have an adventure together without placing any strict demands on one another or focusing on a specific endpoint. As we discussed the

theological intersectionality within the contexts of polyamory, there were indeed moments when our various definitions of both polyamory and theological specifics were different. And then there are moments where they're the same. What is interestingly significant is that the actual working definition of polyamory tends to be kind of amorphous in the same way that the actual practices of polyamory are equally flexible and amorphous. Bryan and I created a conversation that is a theological construction that is more physical or emotional or relational and more intimate and/or sexual

into the space. In many ways, we simply talked about human connectivity that is sometimes physical, sometimes emotional - sometimes this, sometimes that. That reality and flexibility encompasses the beauty of this emerging theology that we are offering - and we hope for at the very least a tremendous potential opportunity for theological and spiritual growth.

This theology is not one that should be read the same by every person because every person is different and, therefore, every polyamorous experience and sets of encounters

are going to be divergent. And so lastly, I'll ask this almost rhetorical and loaded question: What was surprising about doing this project? For me, part of the resulting all-encompassing answer is going be the case in most situations. This is my first time actually completing a project keeping in mind very candidly that I am a cisgender heterosexual male who is monogamous, while my primary conversation partner identifies as a cisgender homosexual male who is polyamorous. On some plane of existence the adventure was and is kind of miraculous in that we were able to kind find so

much common ground. Even though it is true that we seem to have quite an excellent and trusted working relationship and work well together, it is still somewhat surprising for me and for Bryan that it's almost like our ideas flow easily in a congruent and fruitful manner – despite such different worldviews and experiences in terms of loving relationships. To that end, I'm given hope, in that surprising reality that we do have what I call “proleptic possibilities” in these kinds of conversations and in the revelatory conclusions with this project, because we would not necessarily see

the typical resulting conclusions in the same manner. As scholarly partners on a project like this, we come from completely different backgrounds. But in that difference - a set of differences – we have found common ground theologically and experientially. And such common ground is based in a very critical experiential and theological concept that we keep tossing around: love.

Later in the project we make the distinction between ethical non-monogamy and polyamory, since they are, in fact two different concepts, even though they are often lumped

together. Polyamory within the bounds of its definition, even though it may be somewhat amorphous, is focused on LOVE, while ethical non-monogamy has foci that may or may not include love. And when one brings love to the table from different perspectives, I was completely surprised that we could get to this point and create a project that's going to be what I'll call poly-transformative. You know, such love-centered transformation speaks of human relationships and that human relationships have way much more potential that we've ever truly understood. Therefore, this

project has helped me realize that if we allow ourselves the space to dream, if we allow ourselves the space to love more widely than we ever thought possible, then such transformation can, does and will happen.

For a lot of people, the reason why they struggle with the idea of polyamory is because they simply hold on tight to their ideas of what love is supposed to be, usually in an idealistic image created and blessed and reinforced by culture, society – and even by often unrealistic Hollywood caricatures. And polyamorous practitioners are quite accepting of other

people's relationships in the ways that they encounter and experience love and they realize that the different ways do not necessarily mean that preclude the way that I love and the way that I live; likewise, this reality does not place a fixed way to experience love. It seems that as this project has progressed, there's so much that I have learned that will assist me in being a more polyamorous person, at least in the sense of learning how to love more widely and more universally without so much judgement, not necessarily including the romantic or intimate parts of polyamorous relationships, but learning

how to love more in ways that will transform me and transform those that I come in contact with.

From now on, I hope that people's engagement with this book, whether it is to engage and to discover how to practice polyamory in a more intimate, sexual or physical sense, or for people who practice polyamory in a more emotional, spiritual, theological and/or existential sense, or simply to engage the process of poly-transformation in order to truly love more widely as we envision a truly loving God would love with reckless

abandon and grace and mercy. I hope that what happens when people encounter this book is that they learn to love more immensely, more fully, more totally, more broadly and so on – and that they learn to love THEMSELVES more in these ways. My hope is that they learn to open their hearts and their minds more to all different and often previously unimagined possibilities and ways of being loving in the world.

If we've accomplished anything, with our relationship - our friendship - with each other and with our pathway and resulting adventure

with this project it is that we have paved a new way to open more room for love. Indeed, I hope this text will help people will truly make more room for love. On a personal note, the kind of comradery that Bryan and I have shared and have built in our friendship and working relationship has pointed me towards his side of the conversation more where I had previously attended the topic focusing on the romantic relationship side, the physical, the sexual – and with concerns around the resulting whole familial structure, rather than the support structure through scholarship. However, when,

through our dialogues, the idea of loving more widely revealed itself, it deconstructed my thoughts and reflections as well as my understanding and experience of a cisgender heterosexual, monogamous man. The introduction of the possibility of loving more widely pointed me in a direction that is going to not only enrich my own personal life, but also my professional and scholarly future. That’s the kind of transformation that I've experienced in this project and continue to hope for, for people who read and digest the thoughts and

reflections we've revealed in this project.

Definitely. Thank you.

2. The Nature of Polyamory and Its Theological Concerns

Jeff: So, as we enter this polyamorous conversation, I wanted to get us started, I wanted to ask Bryan first of all what polyamory is and just how old polyamory actually is. Furthermore, what does polyamory look like in history? I'm interested in engaging some of these types of moments and rich conversations. Another question that I'd like to pose, since we

will be discussing the Holy Trinity in conjunction with polyamory, is polyamory as old as trinitarian theology – and perhaps is it just that eternal?

Bryan: All excellent questions, of course, and what a way to begin! So, in my years of research and experience listening to people and various portions of the human polyamorous conversation, the place we should begin is that polyamory predates the existence of humanity. Eternal? Not sure, but let's begin here at least before the development of humanity itself.

If we take a serious set of moments to think about every other species of primate on the planet. In fact, each and every current species of primate practices at least one of the very rudimentary forms of polyamory. Whether it is a head male with subservient males with an ordered hierarchical standing of these males as well as females and various youngsters, or if it is something like the bonobos practice, which is a highly complex matriarchy and organized form of true polyamory, with sexual, romantic, and familial relationships not too far off from

what we experience in human polycules, polyamory is a “thing” in the primate realm. In fact, bonobos have sex to bond and for recreation and so much more. They even have kinks and fetishes, not unlike their human relatives. And such a lovestyle among bonobos certainly pre-exists human relationships because bonobos have been around much longer, according to the fossil record. Not only can we extrapolate that polyamory has been around long before monogamy, but I also certainly posit that primates practice forms of polyamory naturally and that they have been

polyamorous most likely from the beginning of their evolution. Furthermore, there are almost no documented cases of monogamy occurring in the communities of primates live in the world today, save human beings, so we also may want to ask why…. Right?

Jeff: So, yes, interesting! So, in terms of polyamory preexisting humanity, could we maybe even suggest that these relationships evolved for the purposes of survival? Or are they for love? Or both? Also - how would we differentiate those types of relationships in the

past and in primates from the types of relationships we're talking about now in humanity?

Another important point is that primates tend to be at one of the least populous families of animals on the planet, setting human humans aside for a just a moment. I think that polyamory not only be a way of not only surviving, but also being able to spread different DNA to ensure prolific diversity of heredity with the reality of fewer primates.

Again, aside from humans, the planet has not actually been able to support large populations of primates. And that could go into a different conversation for a different book about the overpopulations of humans, but we won't go there in this volume. But also I wonder about the nature of polyamorous relationships here safety, helping and supporting one another in a community. I mean: Love.

The older types of human family are not the same types of family, that we experience today, by and large, where there is a husband, a wife,

and 2.5 kids with, you know, a three bedroom house, two car garage - that kind of thing. The older types of families were often polygynous with a man and not only several wives, but also often extended intergenerational family including many children at differing ages as well as elders, those who can't otherwise fend for themselves, and so on. These older types of families were about safety and procuring and sustaining resources such as food, water, shelter and so on. This was more about creating a family structure of community and support for a wide range of family members.

It could even be seen as perhaps a move toward the preservation of the species. And the other primates, predating humans, are shown to have higher levels of intelligence than most other species on the planet and live in these types of family structures to this day. We can't really say that they love each other, but I could venture that if you were to spend any time watching *Gorillas in the Mist* or any other documentary like it, we could perceive that these animals are at least *almost* capable of the kind of love that humans are capable of? So very many humans

would agree that yes, absolutely, we know that other animals, including other primates are capable of love.

Going back in time for a moment, we can even see that the fundamental building blocks of life. Primordial primitive molecular life - the ooze - from the earliest ripe spaces on the planet, came together to make new life. And so even before the development of primates, life found a way -without the invention of modern or post-Modern delineations, social rules and

expectations. Love won, in essence – albeit a primitive type of love? Maybe?

And it is a very spiritual thing in that from creation, God is typified or the definition of all things coming together, the definition of love in whatever capacity and developmental stage. All things are proceeding forth out of God. So, I think that polyamory really a part of the God conversation.

It's a part of the love conversation that unfortunately has been so left out so much so

that, in some cases, this absence of dialogue partnering has caused tremendous destruction. And, to be honest, one of the issues is that when people hear about polyamory or try to enter the conversation, the first and primary thing they think about is the sexual part.

Most immediately jump to sex and they think that polyamory is all about just sex rather than about love. But love is something that is shared widely, and polyamory is about love, isn't it? Isn't the "amory" part resulting from the Latin *amor* meaning "love?" Of course, that's a

rhetorical question, but my point is pretty clear, I think.

Moving on now… obviously, you and I are in different relationship spaces. I mean, I'm very happily married to my wife, content with our family and its structure and those types of things. But at the same time, I am also not committed to just sharing love with my family and with my wife. And what I mean by that again, before anybody goes to sex, what I mean by that it is my responsibility to love all sorts of people, all people I meet. And I think that that's

one of the real destructive pieces of kind of the monogamous way of looking at life and looking at the world is that it teaches us that love is myopic, that love is meant to be contained, and it's not something that should be shared widely. That’s a very interesting avenue to explore, right?

Bryan: Indeed it is. And before we tackle that avenue, I’d like to address a few other points. First, notwithstanding your image about the primordial soup, non-monogamy is practiced by many other species of animals – probably more

than we don't understand than that which we think we do. And another key vocabulary phrase where human beings and sex are concerned is the term "Ethical Non-Monogamy" or ENM, which is contrasted with polyamory in some ways, or, actually, better stated this way: polyamory is one type of ethical non-monogamy. In other words, polyamory is NOT the opposite of monogamy; rather, non-monogamy is. And within that realm, there are many types of ethical (a.k.a. consensual) sexual activities among adults outside of polyamory. They typically do not follow the pattern of

“love” that polyamorous relationships do. Rather, they are indeed focused on the practice of having recreational sex outside of monogamy. Examples of ENM with which many people may be familiar include “swinging” or “partner swapping,” open relationships or open marriages and so on. These are NOT the same as polyamory.

The term ENM is accepted in the scholarly world of psychology and relationship studies. And so, Jeff, whenever you brought up how people often jump to the sex of polyamory, that

is something that is more appropriately relegated to ENM relationships which ARE more focused on sex and NOT love. It is important to note, however, that ENM can LEAD to polyamory and that ENM may have within its practices the art of love.

Another thought is to refer to what old relationships are known as which is the overarching term “polygamy.” Polygamy is a type of relationship where people have more than one legal spouse, and polygamy is typically expressed more through what is called polygyny

– where one man has many wives. It happens in the other parts of the animal kingdom as well. For example, when a herd of horses has a lead male with a group of females. However, it is slightly different since a rival male can come in and knock the lead male off his situation and take over the herd of females. But I digress.

And so in these older types of relationships to which we referred, it really is a situation of polygamy/polygyny going on, and ENM, by the way, is not polygamy because ENM is not about legally committing for the rest of their lives. If

the, the survival of the fittest is to put to the test at some point that horse that's, the lead male will no longer be in the lead and they change head partners.

And so this is kind of the way that we look at rudimentary, ethical non-monogamy, and the difference between ENM and polyamory. It bears repeating that this project focuses on the concept and practice of polyamory, and not ENM, even though we do not find it any less worthy of a topic to talk about ENM. That may be another book. At any rate, the definition of

polyamory is quite important, as, by definition, polyamory requires that love is a part of its relationships.

Interestingly, the term polyamory itself uses a Greek and Latin word together, but it does indeed include the Latin base “amor,” meaning romantically oriented love. It does NOT mean simply having sexual encounters and intercourse with more than one other person. So there's a very big difference between ENM and polyamory. Polyamory means that people are in multiple relationships that include loving

one another beyond simply friendly or casual love. You know, it seems to me that different people are more polyamorous than others, and in terms of looking at things from a spiritual perspective, any person who claims to follow Jesus should be polyamorous to an extent meaning that they should be capable of, of real love - sacrificial love - with more than one person. That kind of love is beyond casual or friendly love.

In other words, you know college students who are just figuring out that polyamory is a thing.

Their newfound “freedoms” along with their penchant for self-exploration often helps them arrive at often temporary descriptive definitions of themselves and their activities. Perhaps they start calling themselves polyamorous based on their beliefs that they should not only be focused on having sexual relationships with one person at a time. But in reality, that’s not polyamory. Often they engage in “open relationships” as a part of the ENM spectrum, and they does not often include the depths of love that polyamory by definition requires. And on the flip side, you have older people who’ve

graduated and started their adult lives who are so anti-polyamorous that they don't even know how to be spiritual with one another or to follow Jesus or to practice Islam, Buddhism, etc., because they are so preoccupied with controlling love and practicing a type of ownership of each other and one another's sexuality.

Of course we will be engaging a chapter later about Christ and the relationship that Christ has with the church and Christ's people. It is a very particular belief of mine that the relationship

among Jesus and the church bodies is akin to the relationship among the persons of the Trinity really.

Jesus and the church and the Trinity are all by definition polyamorous. If that isn’t correct, then I have questions, right? We should all be loving one another, no matter what, and that's the single most undergirding part of this, even though polyamory is usually relegated to the idea of romantic relationships. It is also a much more inclusive ideology than monogamy and even more so than ENM, because we do have

people who are asexual among us. It does not mean they're not sexual beings, but they choose not to have sex, but that doesn't mean they can't love. A truly loving partner leaves room for possibilities such as this example and others.

It seems that the church has a phobia anything outside of monogamy and that phobia has led us to yet another type of exclusionary oppression as well as the inability to love the way Christ calls us to love. To a certain end, this controlling nature and phobia has a disturbing consequence of producing a church and people

who are comfortable with hate. I mean, ultimately if you're not for an all inclusive love, if you don't believe that love is capable of being practiced way more broadly, then to me, it seems that you believe that hate has a hell of a lot more power than love.

And so religious people get to a space often where they want to love their neighbors. And, you know, they're saying all this hateful bullshit because it's that purport to be loving the sinner and hating the sin. But, in reality, love is love, right? Love is loving people. Love is willing to

have conversations. Love is willing to sit with people that you disagree with. And that is much more a polyamorous construct than a monogamous construct. And another way of journeying through the conversation about polyamory is to understand that polyamory is also itself an umbrella term that leads to a lot of other particular expressions of polyamory with which many people are familiar.

But they may not know exactly what they really are. Polyamory, for example, is of course the root construct for polygamous relationships.

Lovestyles like this and others are all subsets of polyamory. And those have also been around for a long time, which leads me always to the required theological comment that the Bible has very, very little monogamy in it. Most major biblical characters within our most favorite and defining biblical narratives were practitioners of polygamy – like Abraham, King David and so many others.

I mean, I do think obviously there are monogamous relationships, but there is a sense in which our post-modern ideas of monogamy

are being retrofitted on these ancient cultures and people. Like for instance, I think about Mary and Joseph. They were, you know, most likely monogamous, at least to some degree. But of course, I don't think any of us know their entire story, so how can we be sure? And technically, if Mary had a loving intimately sexual relationship with both God and with Joseph, isn't that really the epitome of the definition of polyamory?

And by the time that Jesus dies, being crucified, Mary has an entire community

around her. There is unquestioningly a shared love that is happening. I mean, Jesus looks down at John and says this is your mother and, I realize this might be for a different chapter, but it does seem like Jesus is saying that John is Jesus' brother, part of a loving extended family.

In addition, what is interesting to me and what I've long thought about that, within that context, there was a truly familial thing going on there – not just with John, Jesus, and Mary, but I think there's also something really beautiful to the

entirety of the narrative of all the disciples as one family.

And then, there is the important biblical truth that we are shown in the Old Testament that “I am my brother's keeper.” “I am my mother's keeper.” This is epitomized in the crucifixion scene’s conversation about John being the son of Mary and vice versa. This whole idea that family is a much larger construct than just Mary and Joseph, which is how we're told things started. We do also read and hear of other relatives of Jesus, like his brother James as only

one example. There's more to the story than we are given in the few aspects of a few narrative presentations that also have distinct agendas of different kinds.

In the Bible and in many aspects of historic Christianity and in other ancient religions like Judaism and Islam, we are exposed to a much wider family dynamic than is typical in most Western ways of thinking. In fact, in a different way of looking at it is that Joseph could, in the context within which they lived, have had as

many wives as he could afford to buy from their fathers.

That's how relationships and marriages worked in the, in first century Palestine, especially before the fall of the second temple – this entire idea of women as property through contractual trade. Right? And so at the same time there is an undiscussed controversy of all of that happens that flies in the face of our post-modern Western disabilities as well for a lot of good reasons. But in some ways it's also about protection and amassing a community, that can

love and protect each other, which is exactly why despite all of the different kinds of hardships that Jewish people. And before that the Israeli lights and the precursors of Israel lights, which were probably Canaanites. And there are endless examples of polygamous families and corresponding ownership models of women in various indigenous communities globally – not just from the biblical canon.

Despite the idea of ownership that proliferated, there was a type of familial community at the heart of the practice of those times. And so

sometimes I think it's somewhere in between property and polygamy/polyamory the way that it's practiced at that time. But what we can do is look to a lot of tribal cultures, my personal experiences with the tribal culture of the, the people in Benue state in Nigeria who are naturally indigenously polyamorous, and they have been living it out by hiding the practice from the colonially-empowered government and the oppressively imposed Western Christian culture. They hide it from the Roman Catholic Imperial colonized church of Nigeria because it's not accepted, but they still practice it to this

day. And I know that because I have many friends there who have shared the reality of the truth with me as a trusted religious leader.

I hear you and it makes me think of the familial constructs or what society tells us are “true” familial constructs. But, for Jesus, that love is ultimately meant to be a much broader family than any, you know, standard monogamous relationship could ever produce. And so, it seems to me that Jesus was - of all the world's teachers - a polyamorous teacher.

I mean I don't know who Jesus might have been having loving intimate and/or sexual relationships with – or what all was going on with the disciples, including Mary Magdalene. But that's not the part I'm really focusing on anyway. In fact, Jesus taught about mutual loving responsibility for each other in deep community and out of a true love for one another beyond the type of friendly love we have in the West these days where someone asks how you are but they don't really care and just ask that out of cultural norm. I mean we could talk about that a long time, but I guess I'm

just trying to say that the message of Jesus is a polyamorous message. And when people try to make it not be a polyamorous message, then they are the ones who are destroying the message of Jesus.

Agreed. And, I would just add to that, that it is expansive rather than limited in terms of the difference between biological family and then family of choice, because of course we all know that Jesus did ask his disciples if they loved him. And he certainly told his disciples that he loved them. So, this is an example of the creation of a

family of choice, not family of origin. And other examples abound such as the adoption of major religious figures even within the larger family, such as how Mohammed was adopted by his uncle when his parents both died.

And so not only is it broader in that sense that we should all be loving one another as Christ has loved us and tells us to love one another, it is beyond just biological families as well. It is beyond any imagined constructs of loving family that we may be able to conjure in our brains at any given moment.

So, last idea for this chapter – or question. Why is this conversation necessary, anyway? Why do people need to know about polyamory?

My first response is that recently, as I've been asked to speak on this issue in various contexts like the United church of Christ and other more progressive of units of the mainline Protestant church – and especially within the Unitarian Universalist Association. This is the next civil rights issue to fight in the church – within most Western religious contexts.

Indeed, even though we're not finished with LGBTQ+ rights, as we know, but our forward motion is always doing just that – moving forward from a practical sense. And because my Ph.D. is first and foremost in practical theology, I seek to find a practical response in love to almost everything I encounter – at the very least.

And so, the first thing is that people have been living in the closet polyamorously for literally thousands of years in some places in more

recent times for hundreds of years. And so right now, this is the next wave of human rights work in congregations. In fact, there are many congregations performing holy union services more and more for people who live in polyamorous relationships.

And even so it continues and will continue for a while to be a divisive issue. But also, I think it's timely because we are in a place and time where seeking to liberate oppressed and marginalized peoples must continue to be engaged. Many have self-admittedly left their

churches because of their church's refusal to accept the LGBTQIA+ community, and because they don't believe their relationship or lovestyle is supported by the church. So, if we're going to talk about the future of the faith - of any faith or even just spirituality as a baseline - the time is now, cause we're already here fighting the old ideas in conflict with a present reality.

We're already there. People already exist. It's just a matter of opening up ourselves to say, "Hey, welcome into the fold, finally." Ultimately, if the church is to survive, and if spirituality is

to survive, then polyamory may be the future. Polyamory is the survival of the church. It is the survival of spirituality. And what I mean by that is a broadening of love. Is necessary for survival. And as we continue, if we keep trying to restrict love, and if we keep trying to fence in love, then we are doing the exact thing that Christ and many other major religious teachers told us not to do.

Our commandment is to NOT to hold back when it comes to love. We are told to love extravagantly and widely - flamboyantly even.

Not only do I think that this is a coming civil rights issue, but I also don't think that there is any reason to exclude the church because currently the church has no leg to stand on, practically in that the church is losing steam; and truly, most spiritual traditions have no leg to stand on when it comes to denying people the recognition of their polyamorous relationships. Polyamory is way older of a familial construct than monogamy and we know this out of our historical spiritual teachings. So, we are not ONLY talking about a civil rights issue; it is a spiritual rights issue as well.

Yes, we are talking about an issue of spirituality as well as survival. Is the church going to survive? That question revolves around its ability to engage polyamory, to engage love widely. And if it doesn't engage. Love widely. If it doesn't embrace polyamory, then it is going to continue to be a space where that you can talk about love all you want to, but really what you're perpetuating is hate.

You’re creating fences, you're creating and reinforcing borders and boundaries. You're not

creating and recreating extravagant love, this extravagant beauty that spirituality embodies in the church’s belief in Jesus' teachings.

If we are going to survive, if spirituality is going to have any sort of relevant influence on society, then we must truly and deeply love each other. Not just love one person, but love each other. And I think that's the introduction to the truth that people need to be polyamorous; maybe not all need to be in polyamorous romantic relationships, but that people need to love in ways that merely fall short of that – and love

widely, broadly, deeply and completely – as Jesus taught us. That's how people need to start. That's the entry way. It's more than just than just sex it's about, and that's not to say that sex is not important.

But, in essence, it's about opening up the floodgate of love.

3. Transcendent Polyamory

Jeff: When we talk about transcendence, I always feel like it's important to define. So, when we talk about transcendence, what are we talking about, especially as it relates to polyamory?

Well, I try not to go where traditional many do – that transcendence is sort of the opposite, the

inclusive opposite, of imminence. But we do need to talk about imminence, too. So, I guess we'll define that as well. Transcendence starts with the mystical. part of the creator God who is the all-powerful, all knowing, the God that's out there above and beyond all that is not imminent in the terms of the ultimate expression for most Christians - of the God is Jesus Christ right here among us outside things outside. And people say that, hold on just a second. Sorry. Leap this out. I dunno, who's calling. They're gonna have to. So, um, anyways, the imminence is, uh, is the opposite of that. And God as transcendent, um,

is in all things and through all things, and it's just the God beyond you may have a different or additional, more clear way of, of, well, describing that.

It is interesting that, when I think of transcendence, I think about this whole notion of queerness, which is certainly not easily defined - or perhaps a better way of saying that is undefinable. Therefore, it is compelling that when you use the word “transcendence,” I feel like you're describing nothing and everything at the same.

Bryan: My notion of and probably my own best description of transcendence is in the book, *The Queer God* by Marcella Althaus-Reid, even though this volume is often seen as fairly inaccessible to the average reader, even to those of us who are scholars. Nevertheless, Althaus-Reid's expression of ultimate queerness in the image of "a queer God" is probably one of the best renditions, even though one may need to sit with that entire concept unfolded in the book itself for a long time. The following quote helps partially gear the point of her work that could

drive an entirely separate conversation, but which also begins to shed light on her notion of a transcendent queer God: “The Queer God may ... show us God’s excluded face, which is the face of a non-docile God, a God who is a stranger at the gates of our existent loving and economic order” (*The Queer God,* Althaus-Reid, 2003: p. 153).

Jeff: And I was also considering that when Tillich talks about the “God beyond God,” that it seems like transcendence is exactly that - God beyond God, but even more than that, the God

beyond God, that touches everything and everyone. Yes and this God beyond God who creates and speaks of and to polyamory quite directly - this transcendent God, this Creator God, this God beyond God, this God of All Things is both nothing and everything at the same time and somehow loves all of creation.

And in the expression of polyamory itself, instead of talking about it imminently in this case, we're talking about it in this transcendent way: Where if God is love, utilizing a system of logic, then polyamory means that you're

actually loving more than one person mostly in the sense that you're loving more than one person in truly, not only in a romantic way but in an overarching unified sort of Love Beyond Love. After all, if God is Love…. Continuing the logic…

In other words, when a group of people that are together (called a polycule; more later), even if the partner of has another partner who they don't know or see often, they're still part of the love - the glue that not only holds the relationship together, but love that is motivates,

solidifies, multiplies and progresses transcendently. And that's where you've got this, all powerful sort of umbrella that covers larger and larger groups of people.

Furthermore, whenever you look at a city from a distance, often there's sort of this hue over the core of it (not the pollution) which almost looks like it's in a bubble of protection over a that central urban area filled with tons of people – concentrated together. If you look at it like it's a sunrise and there's still a little fog and the sun and then there's this bubble, that's how I tend to

begin to understand a unified transcendence in this polyamorous conversation.

Right? Yeah. I mean, so Bryan, what's the difference between a, the word polycule and community.

Bryan: Well, because polycule is a very specific type of community where people have loving, intimate, caring, interdependent and romantic relationships with one another, or they are connected to a others because another person have an intimate relationship with a person that

they're with, even if they're not consistently with that person themselves.

So it's different from community because it involves intimate, loving relationships and the people that have intimate, loving relationships outside the immediate polycule, there’s a connectedness that is “beyond” what it associated with a mere community. Therefore, in other words, a polycule is a community that goes beyond community and is unified by the actual intimate love. This idea then, is a part of what is makes polyamory distinct.

Jeff: So a polycule is a community, but a community is not always a polycule… similarly to how a square is a rectangle but a rectangle isn't always a square.

Bryan: Yes, that simple mathematic and geometric illustration really helps to clarify that difference between a community and a polycule.

Jeff: And, going further, the actual term polyamory was coined by the thinking of a

group of people who actually lived in two communal situations in California, right? Community group sthat went beyond the essence of community and began living as a polycule.

Bryan: Yes! In fact, those two groups, the Sandstone and Kerista “intentional communities” worked together and are responsible for coining a lot of the terminology because it was actually these groups of people that lived together and really began the formal process of recognizing and defining everything

academic, because it seems that most, if not all, of the members were associated with academics and scholarly works themselves. They created words like polyamory, polycule, and other terms such as compersion that we'll touch upon later, and this adventure is the benchmark of what differentiates polyamory from most other types of romantic relationships.

Jeff: Got it! And the word polyamory, because it was within community, was in fact conceptualized out of that synergy of the people gathered together living interdependently. And

it is compelling that much of the vocabulary that we use in order to try to describe and to define polyamory and all that entails originates from these intentional communities.

In addition, I was thinking too about when we talk about God and when we talk about what God is, and that God is indescribable. Even if we travel down the musical route, it reminds me of the contemporary Christian song "Indescribable" by Chris Tomlin. Do you know that song, Bryan?

Bryan: I absolutely do. I was a church musician before I was an ordained minister. And, while that song – and most of contemporary Christian music – has some troubling theology in it, the indescribable part is spot on.

Jeff: Indeed. That song has played out for sure and has some other issues, but, nevertheless, it always comes to mind when I think about describing God. And other term that is talked about in church spaces as well as in many spiritual spaces is this idea of heaven.

What does the realm of God look like? And it seems to me that the realm of God is or can be and can include romantic and sexual intimacy. I don't know how to even speak to the extent of it, but it does seem like the realm of God is a place where some type of intimate love is shared by all.

And that if the realm of God is a place where intimate love is shared by all, then the realm of God encompasses the person of God- the being of God, God, God's self, the God beyond. And so therefore you're in this space where God is

intimate love that God is the totality, the transcendence, the encapsulation of intimate love that is God's person, in and of God's self is polyamorous. So, we can postulate and present our emerging truth here that the very core of who God is, is polyamorous.

Bryan: Wow! Agreed. And there is another keyword that I am quite fond of that has been used often now in a lot of liturgical language. And I think that some people just kind of think we're using it to be politically correct, but I actually think it's very important to change the

word to: Kin-dom instead of Kingdom. It verifies that we are all part of a family – the family of God – the family of the universe.

And this kin-dom is part of that realm of God in which we seek to have relationship with one another, whether it's an intimate, romantic sense or otherwise as a part of the kind that we're “kin” to each other. Honestly, that term is sometimes brushed over. Some people say, “Oh, well, they just put that in there so that it doesn't have masculinity and patriarchy.”

Jeff: However, if we look more closely, this is a prime example of why we see these types of things happening in liturgical language. It is an intentional set of theological shifts that help us reimagine the realm of God beyond. In fact, if we look at the transcendent God, and we also invoke that word along with the realm of God as kin-dom. Polyamory and that polyamorous sense actually tightens the relationships that we have with each other and moves them from just being kin to each other like family to then having a, an intimate sexual, romantic, familial interconnectedness.

As such, the primary focus is not the sex. Sex definitely can be part of that polyamorous familial love, but, by definition, sex not the focus; the focus is love. That is the essence of polyamory. And that transcendent love is the unifying factor of the kin-dom of God anyway. And so we just have it applied in just a little bit of a different way, but it's part of the whole.

I think about a lot of the times when you're in most any romantic relationship, sex is a part of it. We have relationships and we have sex,

except certain asexual individuals who still are connected romantically but approach sex differently. And the biggest part, perhaps the most meaningful part, is the space of intimacy. Intimacy is a much different word than intercourse.

Bryan: Yes. And it seems that that God's relationship with us is not a one night stand. God is interested in intimacy with creation. God is in interested in intimacy with us. There is a sense in which that space of transcendence has to do with intimacy.

Intimacy is a primary characteristic, not just of what it means to be a healthy human, but I would say that intimacy is the primary characteristic of what it means to be a healthy God. for God to be in a healthy relationship with Creation, intimacy is a requirement, which is why the creation story is so important. God seeks intimacy with Creation that is not just a one night stand. And that is not to diminish or judge one-night stands; it just is not what we are talking about in polyamory right now.

Jeff: And I think that polyamory at its best, at its fullest, is a promoter of intimacy, as opposed to a promoter of sex. Polyamory AND God's relationship with Creation are about fullness. And let me throw a little monogamy in this conversation, so that we don't get accused of totally dismissing monogamous persons. My relationship, at its best, with my wife Emily, is all about intimacy. Furthermore, I'm in relationship with my children – and at their best, there is intimacy. But when at its worst, there is indifference and certainly indifference is the opposite of transcendence.

Healthy love is a widely intimate love. On my best days, I want to show Emily how much I love her and exhibit as well as participate in the love widely and not just narrowly. And so we have a God that is interested in intimacy, widely and not narrowly, which is what makes God, God.

Therefore, polyamory is also about that wideness of intimacy and “God” love. Polyamory makes intimate love more available, through different expressions of sexuality. For

inclusion in an intimacy situation, what is usually on my mind when we have this type of conversation is that asexuality is a type sexuality and it is not talked about an awful lot, but we did touch upon it in the first chapter and in this one as well, just previously.

Bryan: There are people who are asexual who often find themselves alone, because, if most people are sexual beings (and not asexual), but want to have that intimate romantic relationship, then it seems there are issues that might arise. However, polyamory offers

alterative realities within the matrix of love. People can have a wide variety of intimate relationships, romantic, platonic, sexual, asexual and otherwise.

People can have many/all parts of their lives are nurtured while sharing multifaceted love. Indeed, people have other romantic outlets and asexual persons can feel a sense of kindness and profound love and protection of God in their lives through their relationships. But they don't have to have sex to enjoy those benefits; and

they're not going to be also then holding back the other person from having sex.

Jeff: All of this is so important because we both bring different gifts to the table of this discussion. You, Bryan, bring the practical experience as well as certainly the spiritual and the academic as well. I bring the perspective of the theologian and practitioner of ministry, but looking from the outside to some degree – enabling this rich dialogue. I see through this conversation and find it amazing that polyamory is not defined narrowly. I mean, by

the very definition of the word, it's not narrow, it is wide and broad and inclusive.

Even the word “queer” comes to mind in the milieu of all of this. When I think about the concept of “the queer God,” I see a God that is indescribable and uncontainable. But I do think about what has God created us to be, and in what I wrote a number of years ago, the courage to be queer, what I'm talking about primarily is that difference is what defines us not similarity.

And that we are, that we find community that we find love, that we find intimacy and difference. And so when I think about God and the transcendence of God's love, I think about the beauty of difference and the beauty of that transcendence in difference.

In addition, I think that what polyamory teaches us about who God is, is that God loves difference. God loves queerness. God is queerness. God loves us to be who we were created to be who we are, and we learn to be who we are as living into being in relationship

to a God who wants intimacy with our difference. And I think so often we think we have to be the same in order to create intimacy.

But what God shows us in creation is that God created all of us to be different. In the same way that God is different and, in that difference, intimacy comes about that in the very person of God, right within an intimacy of difference. There's a confluence of difference. And in that difference is the height of love, the height of intimacy.

Bryan: There it is. That's a wonderfully beautiful way of encapsulating all of that.

Jeff: Right. I was thinking, too, as we talked about heaven and kingdom and these types of things, I always say that (I think I might even have said this to you) our eschatology is often wacky and ineffectively articulated on in most evangelical spaces.

But in most mainline spaces, most serious academic spaces, we do not participate in these conversations of eschatology, but in my mind,

unless you have a clearly formed eschatology, and for that matter, a theology of creation, then it's hard to have an ethical reality in terms of where we are right now.

And so, we talk about the beauty of difference and the beauty of community, the beauty of intimacy kingdom, we use all of these terms. It seems like, the polyamorous folks, whether it's a sexual polyamory or whether it's a polyamory of loving, intimate relationships, with a variety of people, not necessarily romantic or sexual or whatever, but truly being present in the

relationships that I have and I learn to love people.

But I say all of that to say, when we talk about what does it look like for heaven to come to earth - for God's will to be in heaven, to be on earth - polyamory is teaching us is that God helps us to love in a transcendent way, like God loves.

God helps us to be polyamorous, helps us to be queer, helps us to be lovers of difference, helps us to be lovers of each other in the way that God

is and loves. And so polyamory teaches us is not just that love is wide, not just that love is special, not just that love is all of these different things but that God is love and love is God and all love is of God and God is all love.

I think those are all those pieces are all a part of it, but I think polyamory teaches us who God is. Like the very core of who God is. And that is a lover of intimacy, a lover of people, a lover of creation, God is a God of transcendent polyamory – transcendent love of all.

Bryan: I do agree with that.

Jeff: God loves through difference. One of the arguments that I have heard an awful lot about polyamory in more practical circles is that there's always a group of people who love each other. But the focus is too often on sexual love. But the love we are talking about here is a transcendent love. A God type of love.

Indeed, I try to guard myself against that the lackluster parts of English because we only have one word for love. Polyamory includes

specifically romantic sexual erotic love. But it's not just that, because then there's also eros, which is erotic love, and then there's agape love – God's love - and there's all these different words that are there.

Bryan: Now it's become more of course in Latin. An exercise in word derivatives. But if we could look into the Greek, we get the other words and that's why polyamory is a funky word because it's a Greek and a Latin word put together. So there are people that argue that, say, it should say it should multiamory or polyfilia and not

polyamory. And there's just all these different arguments. It's a linguistical exercise in acrobatics.

Jeff: Yeah, exactly. I do very much agree that we need to have a poly love style for our “modus operandi” in the kingdom, and that is a type of polyamory. Not just specific to having romantic, loving relationships but also embracing the differences of the different meanings of word love would much more if had that of expression of love in the English language.

No matter what type of love we are talking about, God is in the midst of it. God is all these types of love. The transcendent God is – any love and more love.

Bryan: Agreed. We definitely limit God so much cause we keep putting God in a box. We get groups of people saying, well, only this type of love is acceptable in romantic relationships. And that's not what I feel God is. God is all types of love – all at once and also one at a time. Either/or. Both/Many/And.

Jeff: Right. You know, the beauty is of this project is that we move from a space of erotic romantic love to a wider conceptualization of love.

Here's an ultimate question, therefore: What does polyamory have to teach us about who and what God is?

Bryan: You know, authors such as Bob Shore-Goss who wrote "Queering Christ" give us an extended theological vocabulary to be able to articulate what exactly we mean when we talk

about God’s love and its expression in queerness – in polyamorous identity. And of course, back to Althaus-Reid in, in that respect, I just think it's extremely important when we're talking about the transcendent nature of God that we see God as a sexual entity, because God created us in God’s image, and we are sexual beings, just like God is – and vice-versa.

An example is a bit of historical trivia with liturgy is that when the New Zealand prayer book came that alternative to the traditional Lord's prayer, There was a phrase that was

actually taken out of the original, that is in the native indigenous Maori tongue that they use: Earth-Maker, Pain-Bearer, Love-Maker, Life-Giver - source of all that is that and all that shall be. In the final English print, the editors took out "Love-Maker." What does that say about how religious Christian people in the West think about God?

Jeff: Good question. And now, wrapping up the discussion about transcendence: If God is "Love-Maker," then we need to not only acknowledge that, but then to also see that reflected in what

Shore-Goss call’s God's promiscuity. What a beautiful image! But it scares people to death. But what God's love reveals is a transcendent promiscuity… God loves all in a myriad of facets.

Bryan: You’re absolutely correct. In fact, my journey into polyamory, when it took a theological focus, showed me that the transcendent nature of God’s promiscuity is what really makes God truly transcendent, making all love transcendent.

Jeff: And what is so special about this conversation is seeing polyamory as something to be lived, as opposed to be merely defined much in the same way that I would.

Bryan. Yes! Furthermore, my PhD is in practical theology, so I tend to gear those cause it's a part of my academic journey as much as it is about my personal journey. And so for me, it's not just about conceptualization of it, but more so about the living in it, through it and of it, the beingness. The being in and of polyamory, of love, of God the Love-Maker.

4. Polyamorous Christ

Jeff: So this is part three, and we're talking about Christ for polyamory.

My thoughts start here. When you fall in love, when you meet somebody, you know, when you're in, in the bar or, you know, in the park or wherever you're at, and you, you lock eyes with somebody. And there's just something that

happens. You know, I think that beautiful moment of, of falling in love - that beautiful moment of romantic, erotic love, - we often experience that, and we see it as a particularly human experience.

What we often fail to do is see it as a divine experience – an imminently divine experience that may be a bit transcendent but more focused on divine imminence. Whether it's when the eyes lock in or the eventual sexual activity or whatever it is, those feelings that we feel we've relegated them to the temporal.

However, unfortunately, we've relegated them to the temporal as opposed to the eternal. And it seems to me that Christ's pursuit of the church and Christ's pursuit of us is by its very function, a romantic, erotic, and sexually divinely imminent set of encounters.

Um, what are your thoughts, Bryan? I've been waiting to have this part of the conversation since we conceptualized this project. So let’s go!

Bryan: There is a phrase which is often made into an acronym: “new relationship energy.” It's

exactly what you have initiated in your opening comments, and so much more. Going forward, I'll offer the acronym for new relationship energy as "NRE." NRE is all about when I had that mystical and liminal set of experiences meet erotic and sensual and sexual thoughts and feelings - those visceral physical, emotional, and inexplicable "things" that happen in those initial intensely romantic and erotic moments that almost become like sort of an addition.

In fact, among other things, it is a moment or set of moments of serotonin explosion. Yet there

are many ways to explain it, but however you do, it falls short of the true experience.

And so, at this moment, this is where I've never been able to completely eradicate the evangelical part of my being because when I was 14 years old in the general Baptist church that I attended, I experienced a NRE experience with Christ. I had a conversion experience. We called it “being saved.” No one forced me or guilted me or manipulated. It was a moment, as I remember even now, of true imminent communion with the Divine Christ. Now,

theologically, I certainly believe in the more mainline understanding of conversion which is that type of conversion that is ongoing. But that mystically liminal moment when I had one of the most intimate or the first really truly intimate with Christ was when I was 14 and I was on my knees at the altar changed me forever. It put me on the path I'm still on today.

And I was not just inspired by the pastor and the emotional experience of the altar call at the end of the worship service. In fact, I had lived that my whole life callous to those things and

had often mistakenly misunderstood what was going on with others at their times of conversion and recommittal. But my new experience was an experience of imminent communion with the Cosmic Christ and all the corresponding Divinity and NRE that didn't complete itself, but rather began itself. I now cannot help but to link the emotive feelings exuded and experienced at that moment – as a euphoric, romantic, erotic, inexplicable and profoundly mystical event.

And then it over time, if given the opportunity, this NRE with Christ transforms into the complex multiplicity of imminent divine love, that is a relationship with Christ long-term. And through this long-term relationship with Christ, I then created new and different and deep and profound relationships with others like never before. Multiple divine relationships with other believers in the divine experience that I had. Subsequently, my arguments about why polyamory is natural and blessed goes along with this event because God is bigger than that.

Love is not just a one-time affair with one person or experience.

Christ is bigger than one type or experience of love. Christ has a relationship with all of us and at the same time, not just one at a time. Christ's love is intimate - profoundly intimate. I'm sorry; I didn't mean to preach, but it's an occupational hazard as you know, and I've been waiting to express this theological reflection that to somebody for my entire life living as a polyamorous person.

Jeff: No, it's good. I think it's beautiful. I mean, ultimately, you're right: it is an incredibly intimate moment – with all types of corresponding and even conflicting thought, feelings, emotions, and physical expressions. I think that this speaks of kind of all the great mystics and how they all describe such experiences in so many divergent ways. They speak with awe and from ecstasy when deepening relationships with God.

In this sense of relationship with Christ's and Christ's relationship with us, it is when Christ

calls us to such a new level of intimacy that we've never experienced before that we experience conversion, even the ongoing type. And I realize that I'm not the, the originator of this thought, but this whole idea that, the experience of God is like an orgasm. And, although some orgasms are better than others, there is a sense in which that relationship with God through Christ is truly orgasmic. And I'll tell you, Bryan, I know exactly what you're talking about in that when I look back at a lot of the experiences that I had as a young person that

there were moments that were real, that were even more real than real.

Bryan: And, times of imminence (and transcendence), times of “other worldliness,” which is what has kept me in this space of really believing in the supernatural. This fact is especially true when I feel like a lot of folks around me have declined to believe in the mystical. Notwithstanding, these new relational experiences are quite like new religious and mystical experiences. This reason is why one of

the reasons this conversation is so important that religious experience.

Jeff: So let me get really specific. Say, you have a new relationship with Christ, right. But, at least in my experience and in my observations, many religious people are more worried about that experience but then just like a lot of relationships, there's little to no support within the religious community, for most people, to nurture their relationship with Christ. The same can be said for new sexual experiences, especially in a society where sexual

conversations are quite taboo. Then, to take it to an even more risky level, I could discuss the time that I had an orgasm while reciting the Lord's Prayer; talk about a religious, mystical, sexual experience.

Bryan: Wow. And then this lack of conversation and support about any such experiences is unfortunately representative of the many dysfunctions of religious experiences, plus we have separated sexuality from the religious experience. I could say that I had a brand-new infant style relationship with Jesus at one point,

but received almost no nurture, support, or explanation of how to grow that relationship. Likewise, my first sexual experiences as a young person had similar lack of support.

Jeff: Yes, and then immediately all the things that I was taught made me feel like sexual experiences as a young person were sinful. Of course we know that one of the main definitions of sin is separation. And so, I had to separate myself now from this relationship with Jesus to go and be able to make love to myself or with someone else. Therefore, what many religious

groups force people to do is sin by expecting them to separate from Jesus to essentially live two different lives. This truth is why probably one of the other many reasons that teen suicide rates are so high, especially among LGBTQIA+ a people.

Bryan: I could also offer that it's getting a little better as people leave religious circles, which is sad to say, but it's because we've separated the two types of relationships - and we do damage as religious folk. We don't even acknowledge any type of new relationship in energy in either

the new religious experience with Christ or that which exists in any sexual awakening.

Jeff: You know, right there could be its own book.

Bryan: That's my next book. All right. Haha! But that new relationship energy, new religious experiences, and new sexual experiences should be considered mutually beneficial and co-existing relational events. In fact, as William Black said: Christ is the great hound of heaven, calling us as a lover.

Jeff: I love that imagery in that Christ is a lover that never gives up, that is constantly after us, pursuing us in a positive way. And, if love is a divine construct, and God is love, love is God. There's the reality that Christ's love never fails.

Love never stops pursuing us. And so the representation that Christ as lover offers experiences of encounter forever more. We are constantly being pursued by love. And as far as polyamory is concerned, it is a real understanding that such love is coming in all

from all sorts of directions and in all sorts of ways. In fact Christ is indeed polyamorous with us all and with the Creator and the Holy Spirit.

And I think that what the polyamorous Christ teaches us is that we need to be ready. We need to be ready for new religious experiences, new relational experiences, new romantic relationships, and new sexual experiences. And we need to recognize love as it comes to us just as flowers as they bloom.

So often we think of Christ as this thing that we study and not this thing that we experience and that we live with and become a part of. I'm just trying to make it very plain that that love is a phenomenon that is something in which we are being pursued and that we were created for and it pushes us toward who we are becoming. Such love is indeed coming to us in all sorts of directions and we must prepare our hearts, our minds and our souls to truly welcome it and experience it. And we must be open in ways that are honest and welcoming of the imminent love of Christ.

Bryan: I'm inspired when I have this type of conversation about the imminence of Christ as lover - and the resulting evolving relationship that we have with Jesus. Furthermore, you hit the nail on the head when you use the word pursue. But I also like to use the word “chased” or the phrase “chased after.” (Not to be confused with chaste).

Christ chases after us, and I know that we're coming at this from different sexual orientations. But to further the image of

chasing, it's important to point out that the gay community has many subsets or tribes, if you will. For example, I ascribe to the "bear and chaser" tribe or community within the larger umbrella of the queer culture. A gay "bear" is a man who is hairy and on the bigger body build side, often with a beard and in their 40s or older. I am a bear. Then, there are chasers: younger gay men who are naturally attracted to the bear type, but who themselves are not bears at all; in fact, they are often the opposite.

To be even more revelatory, both of my partners – my husband and my boyfriend – identify as chasers. They are both younger than I am, and they are both fit, athletic and muscular. The reason why the term “chaser” is important is because such chasers must be the pursuers since there is a pervasive thought that men like them are “out of their league” to the typical middle aged hairy bearded plump gay bear. So, like this pursuing lover of Christ, offering us grace and love, they must make their intentions known and often must work hard to convince someone that they “really” are

attracted to and want to have a relationship with someone seemingly so “unworthy.”

And I also think that within all of that - that messiness, that diversity - that the way that we look at people and objectify in the world of polyamory, we can see how there's much less objectification. There's much more intentionality, dialogue and ultimately equity in a relationship. People respect other relationships and work very diligently to overcome jealousy and their own internal issues

in order to build and sustain polyamorous relationships.

Jeff: Polyamory is bigger than just sex and emotions, where one actually is filled with joy and satisfaction at an elevated and enlightened emotional plane. When you know that your romantic partner is having pleasure and love with somebody else that requires your absence. Compersion. It's kind of also like how the thought that Jesus loves everyone, and sometimes that requires us to leave people to their own relationships with Jesus without

saying “our way is the right way” or that we trademark the idea of Jesus (like white Jesus).

Bryan: Here, there, and everywhere, Christ is constantly showing up in places that we don't expect.

Jeff: Yes. And in times that we don't expect. And wow, as you just summarized that, I got cold chills. We’re writing a dialogical book, not about emotions… but an intimate relationship with Christ does include emotions, right? And it’s beautiful.

Bryan: There's talk about being practical, and some say emotion is not practical. However, you just experienced the practicality of emotion, you know? We shouldn't apologize for it. I remember preaching a sermon one time against the war in Iraq when it was going on. And I just broke down and cried right in the pulpit in front of the congregation and then I said, “I'm sorry.” And one of the people in the congregation said out loud, “Don't say you're sorry. We’re with you. We see the Holy Spirit working right through you now, so keep going.”

And that's what I hope that we can do here: A beautiful moment of emotion that points toward the bountiful love of our lover the Christ. I hope that the people who engage this book will feel this too. I mean, I just feel like I'm learning, and this is a totally different world for me.

Jeff: I’m with you. I'm aware of a lot of things, but I feel as I hear your emotion and as you experience some of these things that are new to me and, I'm experiencing Christ and in radically new and different ways.

When we dare to explore new spaces and new communities, we meet Christ for the first time, once again. (Sort of a reference to Marcus Borg's *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time.)* We're constantly experiencing these new relationships, these new religious and spiritual encounters, so that's why we're doing this. And I am thankful.

Bryan: I am too. By taking this journey together, we're teaching each other and learning from each other. And we are sharing it with the

world now. I hope that the people that encounter this book, they have a new religious, spiritual experience with the polyamorous Christ as well. I do too. And, you know another practical example is when, when my husband leaves to go on a date with another, and I give him a kiss and as he goes; this moment is the transformative imminent power of the polyamorous Christ.

And I'm like, wow, isn't love amazing? Because we have so much more of it than we actually think we do. And it is because of Christ that we

do have that imminent love. I am so happy that my husband can go and find happiness that requires my absence. And can actually love another person just as Christ can love multiple people. That’s the polyamorous Christ at work.

Jeff: And just as we are in relationship with not only Christ, but also God and the Holy Spirit, we're already in polyamorous relationships in the way that you even describe it, which is about just that sort of familial love.

Bryan: It is these experiences of and with and through Christ which encompass the true essence of conversion. And that's the reason why I use that example that I think that's very similar, if not the same as how, when Jesus looks at us and sees us truly loving each other in whatever different ways, whether it's romantic and sexual, or if it's familial or if it's truly altruistic.

Even though there are those who do not believe it, I believe that altruism does exist and guides us through imminent feelings. Altruism is as

imminent as it gets. However, I don't think it's something that always comes naturally – or maybe it’s better to say that it doesn’t come easily. It's something that must be worked on just like in any relationship, and often Christianity mistreats those who are new to such religious experiences.

Jeff: The being saved or being converted is a one night stand is really a travesty in many ways. While I do not routinely denounce one night stands, it is a situation that metaphorically represents the typical evangelical

understanding of conversion. And furthermore, it becomes like an addiction – convert as many as we can, then mark that one down; see all the good we've done? And then we toss them out and move on to the next unsuspecting victim. It's just like, okay, let's save the life of this unborn embryo or fetus. And when they're born, oh well you're on your own. Now we saved the baby and now it's your job to take care of it; we don’t want to appropriate any real resources to help you. Our job here is done. Good luck.

This is the way that we've done things and it's all encompassed together. And I didn't mean to go into a second sermon, but I mean to say, as far as my perspective of conversion is concerned, it is an ongoing, lifelong continuously revelatory process and very much like a good relationship.

In terms of monogamy, I find myself with my wife Emily constantly trying to learn how to love her better and really putting all of my energy into making that happen. For that matter, I do similarly with our children. And

while that is not the most empirical example of polyamory as it is specifically defined, it is similar in that we continue to learn and grow together, finding new ways of engaging in evolutionarily transformative love.

I do think that there is a shared love in family that, like I experience with Christ in my relationship with Emily. Emily wants to be Christ in her relationship with me, and we're trying to learn how to do that better. And I think in the same way, as you describe the space that you inhabit with your husband, whether he's

going on a date or whatever he's doing, you are trying to learn how to do that better. And I'm sure you are in the process of doing so with your other partner as well.

This, then, is the message of Christ: We can and should learn how to engage in loving intimacy better and better, in new and different and transformative ways. And we should always be learning how to love those that we encounter no matter how we encounter them. Amen.

5. Polyamorous Spirit

Jeff: Let's get started by just talking about what we mean about the Spirit or Holy Spirit. What is it? A feeling in the pit of your stomach? Are we talking about ESP? Are we talking about a ghost? Are we talking about joy?

What are we talking about? Bryan? Good old, Holy Ghost?

No. When I talk about spirit in any way, shape or form, I probably first say that the spirit exists as that mystical, inexplicable “all other.” You know, like when you’re on a customer service call and the recording says “press 3 for all other questions or issues.”

Unfortunately, though, this “all other” example can and has been misused by Christianity to insert problematic theology and doctrines that don’t appear elsewhere and/or are exaggerated extrapolations of some group’s interpretation of

Scripture or church practice. Such comes about often through supposed mysterious, mystical experiences, i.e., encounters with the Holy Spirit, God, Christ or all of the above.

And, on the flip side , it’s important to point out that there is nothing inherently wrong with having a mysterious, mystical experiential encounter with something that you don't completely understand. From previous conversations, this is very much akin to the new relationship energy we’ve discussed.

Bryan: These experiences are imminently crucial to the process of understanding and listening to the Holy Spirit. Harkening back to the conversation about Christ, we share that force of new relationship energy within intellectual and spiritual liminal moments. In educational pedagogy and andragogy, a liminal moment is like the light bulb comes on over your head. And it is one way of many that I attempt to explain encounters with the Holy Spirit. New understandings. Epiphanies, to use a theological word.

I'm not trying to evade the question; it's just important to understand where I'm coming from in explaining my understanding of the spirit. In fact, it is sometimes unable to be explained – these encounters with the spirit – and, instead, they are rather inexplicable things. For example, when I first encountered the ideology of polyamory as a function, not thinking about it, theologically or philosophically or anything like that, but how does this work?

I was intrigued because I thought, “Wait a minute; we have so much love to give as human beings and we give it to many people in diverse ways, that this whole polyamory thing makes sense.” But it only made sense to me in that I didn't quite understand where it was taking me, but it was an inexplicable feeling like maybe this is for me.

Jeff: You know, when I think about the spirit, I think about lightning and electricity and I think about this great big old home where electricity goes to every outlet, turns on appliances and

does things we never really see, but upon which we certainly depend. Most people don't know how electricity even works, but they just know that when they flip the switch, they expect the light to come on or something to work for them.

And I think a lot of times with regards to the spirit, we are in a home: our lives - this earthly home within the all encompassing home that is the Universe. And we find ourselves flipping on lights, plugging in appliances, doing all sorts of things. And we do so with the understanding that something is going to turn on, that

electricity's going to come through “them holes” and something's going to work.

And it's interesting that sometimes when we live in such a place, we take, we take such things for granted. Like when you sit down on a chair, you expect the chair to hold you up again. When you flip the switch, you expect the light to come on. And so I think that sometimes our interactions with the spirit become so ordinary that we forget how extraordinary they are. For instance, when we think about love, and when we think about joy, when we think about passion and

romance and all of these different things, you know I never have to explain to my kids physiologically why I love them, anatomically, why I love them.

No, instead the light just comes on, and that’s like the spirit. The spirit is with us and it joins us in our actions, it guides us, it's that light that gets turned on. And I think so often we don't recognize it, but I think when we pause and we stare up at blank darkness around the light, when it's the middle of the night, we then turn all the lights.

Bryan: And we turn the light on and we are overwhelmed by the light. We are able to stop and say, “Whoa, that is a miracle.” That is a miracle that there is light coming through that once dark and foreboding space. And so conversations about the spirit are important to talk about because the extraordinary, the Pentecost moments, and that leads us to the extraordinary in the ordinary and with regards to the polyamory spirit.

Jeff: You know, Bryan, when you talk about your relationship with your husband, and when I've heard others talk about their polyamorous or otherwise non-traditional relationships, I've encountered different, a wide array of various constructions of polyamory and marriage. In fact, some say their relationships – as different as they may be to many - become ordinary. Ordinary miracles like those of the spirit.

But I think that my relationship with my wife and I think a lot of people's relationships become ordinary and even mundane day to day.

In reality, however, these constructions that emerge often out of “holy accidents” are not ordinary, but rather truly extraordinary.

And I will tell you, brother Bryan: love is extraordinary – it absolutely just is. And when you share love, it can become even more extraordinary. And because love is a verb, and the force of that love is inherent in the ideology of the spirit, thinking again about the electricity in the house, right? Ordinary is actually extraordinary.

And so I think that when we talk about the spirit, when we talk about the polyamorous spirit, we need to remember that this conversation about polyamorous theology is extraordinary because love is extraordinary. And the more directions that love goes, the more that it intertwines. What's more, is that the more that we're unable to explain, the more it becomes and is revealed to be extraordinary.

Bryan: That reminds me of one of the conversations that I have often whenever I'm asked to speak publicly at a symposium or such

about polyamory. Typically, I find myself in those situations not be able to discuss the spiritual nature of polyamory, because it's just not part of the conversation in secular agendas for a lot of unfortunate but understandable reasons.

The church is not held in the positive light right now in our society among especially the more progressive groups and, of course, polyamorous circles would be typically more progressive. One thing that I always wanted to really discuss about this love that you have described and

articulated, this extravagant, extraordinary love, is the miraculous type of love revealed through the spirit in polyamorous relationships. It’s like the press 3 button as you so eloquently put it earlier.

And then we take it to the erotic level. When you are loving someone in a sense where your body then for moments typically becomes a part of or at the very least intertwined with or inside of another person's body, the event, the interaction, the experience is the “all other” or, in my words used often in my presentations, an

“other-worldly event.” These events are of inexplicable nature, where you sometimes feel that you don't know where your body ends and the other person's body begins.

And that moment of mystery, and bliss – and whatever else inexplicably is going on - is also a part of the spiritual realm - part of the Holy Spirit's activities. We simply do not talk about that quite enough in the world of love and sex. The ordinary is extraordinary even when we don’t realize it.

Jeff: I will tell you that in polyamorous circles, any ordinary-ness is all but gone. And that is because the kind of creativity employed and encouraged in expressing and growing polyamorous relationships is nothing but extraordinary. Ordinary doesn't work. It just doesn't.

There are many and varied combinations and expressions of polyamory, not unlike the forces behind the Spirit; and, in fact, the spirit can lead us into those relationship situations, especially in liminal moments of inexplicable synergy and

new relationship energy. I just find it more nebulous, but at the same time, more beautiful. Right. It's like that house metaphor. The electricity's flowing all through the house, never knowing where it may end up or how it's happening. Ordinary, yet extraordinary.

Nevertheless, the polyamorous spirit, leads polyamorous persons (and even non-polyamorous persons) into extraordinary opportunities. And the spirit is what can lead them there. Polyamorous persons can certainly bring much to the wider theological

conversation, and this project is one attempt at opening a dialogue geared toward the emergence of polyamorous theology.

That's why this theological work is important and these conversations are important because I think that there are different spaces where the spirit is more fully manifested. And it seems like polyamorous situations and relationships are one such example of more fully manifested Holy Spirit stuff.

Bryan: I would agree. And that process of expressing and accepting yourself as a polyamorous person, you actually have to work to get over the restriction of jealousy, for example, and then work toward compersion. And when you get into that extraordinary trajectory, you can't "uncook" the metaphorical eggs, or you can't "unring" the metaphorical bell.

In fact, society has always taught you is actually okay to be jealous; it is expected even and perhaps somewhat celebrated as a mark of

humanity. It’s more than ok. And then it's always blamed on this bullshit idea of there's a jealous God and all this mess. But once you get to the other side and you can't go backwards, it opens up a whole new avenue of the spirit where you can actually embrace the extraordinary – the manifestation of the invisible spirit.

Jeff: The Holy Spirit is indeed involved in our everyday activities and just like the house where we just expect to happen, there's a whole new set of things that happen that are much

more unexpected. An example would be that if a one person who is dating another person outside of a primary relationship and comes into the lives of the other people in the relationship. And then all of a sudden there is a new bridge built, and there's a whole new dynamic.

Bryan: Yes, it's kind of like the idea of mobile over baby crib: when one part moves, the entire thing moves. That is the action of the holy spirit, but you have to get to the other side in

order to actually even live in a polyamorous lovestyle.

You have to go across to another side of love. And once you cross it, then there's a whole new ball game of where you can encounter the spirit. And it makes polyamorous people more full of the spirit because there are so many more possibilities. There are miraculous possibilities.

Jeff: Absolutely. There are ways of creating a family that nobody has ever done before. Inexplicable, extravagant and extraordinary

forces fueled by the creativity of unique persons create a synergistic spirit manifestation that can produce unrecognizable bonds of love.

Bryan. Right. There are so many inexplicable ways that people can connect in polyamorous communities. Even if it's not a romantic partner then it may the partner’s other romantic partner that causes a miraculous shift. Talk about transformational community. We talked about community before when our other conversations and it transforms community.

Jeff: It transforms in a way that it is unformed, if that makes any sense. There's a sense in which there is a physical, sexual erotic, romantic, whatever you want to call it in a relationship. Now, I am not interested in heading in the polyamorous direction myself, but with that said, I AM interested in a more plural manifestation of spirit – of love.

Bryan, our friendship and the conversations that we have had have taught me what it looks like to love my wife more. They have taught me to be a better partner to her, as you are a better

partner to those you are partnered with, specifically your husband and your boyfriend as well.

And so it seems to me that there is a spirit involved in our friendship - a spirit of love, a spirit of commitment, a spirit of, of wanting to bring about that kind of extraordinary and extravagant, transformative love: in heaven as it is on earth or on earth as it is in heaven, I mean that space of really helping each other grow.

And I think that that's the polyamorous spirit moving between us and within us. The polyamorous spirit is pulling us and guiding us to love more fully and more widely. We love our partners, the people in our communities, our congregations, all sorts of tribes in ways that are extraordinary. Not just ordinary, but extraordinary. And so I think that you have taught me how to love in a more extraordinary way.

Bryan. I really appreciate this feedback very much. I really do. I treasure our friendship and

this conversation. And I think that is the polyamorous spirit that exists in polyamorous spaces, has much to offer the rest of us – pushing us toward extraordinary love. Many people don't realize this concept, but whenever we talk about polyamory in our society, most people, and this is something that blows people away, who are polyamorous are straight or bisexual, not gay or queer.

One of the reasons for the misconception that polyamory exists mostly in LGBT circles is that learned about polyamory through me, and they

relegate it to more of something that happens in the gay community, but that's actually not correct.

And what's also interesting is the first example I'll give is you poly situation where let's say heterosexual, who always identified as heterosexual. And then the woman starts to take a partner who is another man. And the man who she's dating comes into their lives more and more fully, to the point where they all three coexist even in the same space. Suddenly, even though the men are not having a romantic

relationship, they actually form a bond that is an expression of open, transformative, extraordinary, extravagant love.

These men are by virtue of the spirit are brought together more closely than most unrelated straight men might otherwise be, to encounter each other in a more intimate way to get more comfortable with each other in a deeply personal an intimate manner. I'm not talking about in a sexual way, but rather in an intimate way where they have to learn how to share the love of another person when sharing –

especially the romantic love of another person - is not something that we like to do an awful lot.

Such a relationship requires people to confront jealousy. And mu philosophical, theological and academic opinion is the single most destructive human emotion.

Jealousy undergirds and creates almost all of the rest of the problems we have in society, such as greed. Greed results from the jealousy one has about the other person having more than they do. Another example is to see that a person

has a beautiful wife and now you want one too. It's jealousy, scripturally known as coveting. Jealousy is a tough part of our society that is woven into the very fabric of human communities, cultures and relationships. And so being able to overcome that jealousy transforms a person, because of the employment of undeniable creative extravagant and extraordinary love.

Polyamorous people have different experiences because of the infinite possibilities. And I think that that is that mystical extraordinary part of

the love that is channeled through the power of the holy spirit.

Jeff: Right. And I do realize that a lot of these polyamorous conversations do get to this sexual place. But I also think that there is a beauty and non-sexual intimacy born though this conversation. And I do think what polyamorous folk can teach us is that we should be more open to intimacy than we. And the polyamorous spirit teaches us, guides us, provokes us and helps us.

That's what the the spirit opens us to: an extravagant spirit-led intimacy where the polyamorous spirit invites us into deeper spaces of intimacy. And so I see the polyamorous spirit working like that, inviting us to these, spaces of deeper emotional intimacy. And this idea leads us to loving more extravagantly, extraordinarily and transformatively.