

Article

Saint Wilgefortis: A Queer Image for Today

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Abstract: An increasing number of people identify outside of the sex/gender binary, many of whom are in crisis and under attack simply because of how they choose to identify. There are few opportunities for them to experience healing in liturgies, particularly as these liturgies often perpetuate a normative view of the sex/gender binary through language and art. This article offers Saint Wilgefortis as an emancipatory image that offers healing while also transforming ethical attitudes and behaviors toward those who identify outside of the sex/gender binary. First is an examination of the history of the cult of Wilgefortis. This is followed by interpretations of the medieval devotion to Wilgefortis, providing a liberating depiction of someone who blurs boundaries, who is ‘both and neither,’ who is and is not Christ (human and divine), and who is and is not ‘female’ or ‘male.’ Next is an exploration of contemporary portrayals of Wilgefortis, providing a queer, multivalent, and prophetic image for today. Finally, there is a discussion of how Wilgefortis could be incorporated into liturgies that minister especially to those who identify outside of the sex/gender binary while also expanding the imagination of those who struggle to see sex/gender as a spectrum.

Keywords: Wilgefortis; queer; sex/gender binary; liturgy; art; healing; crisis



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1. Introduction

There are an increasing number of people who identify outside of the cisnormative¹ sex/gender binary,² identifying as bigender, gender fluid, gender nonconforming, genderqueer, intersex, nonbinary, and transgender, among other identities. Many of these people face higher levels of violence, economic instability, and health issues—both physical and mental (Budwey 2023; The Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law 2021). How are liturgies complicit in perpetuating this normative view of the sex/gender binary? Furthermore, what liturgies of healing are being offered for those who are in crisis because they are under attack for not ‘fitting’ into the sex/gender binary?

Liturgies, both in their language and art, often reinforce the belief that sexual dimorphism—a paradigm where “people are seen to be naturally (in a normative sense) unequivocally and exclusively male or unequivocally and exclusively female” (Jung 2006, p. 293)—is ‘natural’ and ‘God-given’ along with the notion that to be a human being means to be created *clearly* ‘female’ or *clearly* ‘male’³ in the image of God (Budwey 2023, chp. 4). In their discussion of “The Normative Power of Images,” Stefanie Knauss and Daria Pezzoli-Oligati describe how art has been used in the “religious legitimation of gender norms” as it “communicate[s] and shape[s] normative ideas about and the actual practice of gender identity, gender roles, and the relationships between different gender categories” (Knauss and Pezzoli-Oligati 2015, pp. 1–2).

Binary language and art exclude all those who identify outside of this strict binary—to the point of making people feel like they are monsters and not human (Budwey 2023, chp. 3). While there are many examples from the Christian tradition—both visual and textual—that reinforce the sex/gender binary, there are also those that help expand religious imagination beyond the sex/gender binary (Budwey 2018, 2020, 2023, chps. 4 and 5). These are what Marjorie Procter-Smith calls emancipatory language and images, those which challenge

and transform norms and stereotypes (Procter-Smith 2013, chp. 3).⁴ One emancipatory image is that of Saint Wilgefortis, a crucified, bearded woman (Figure 1).⁵

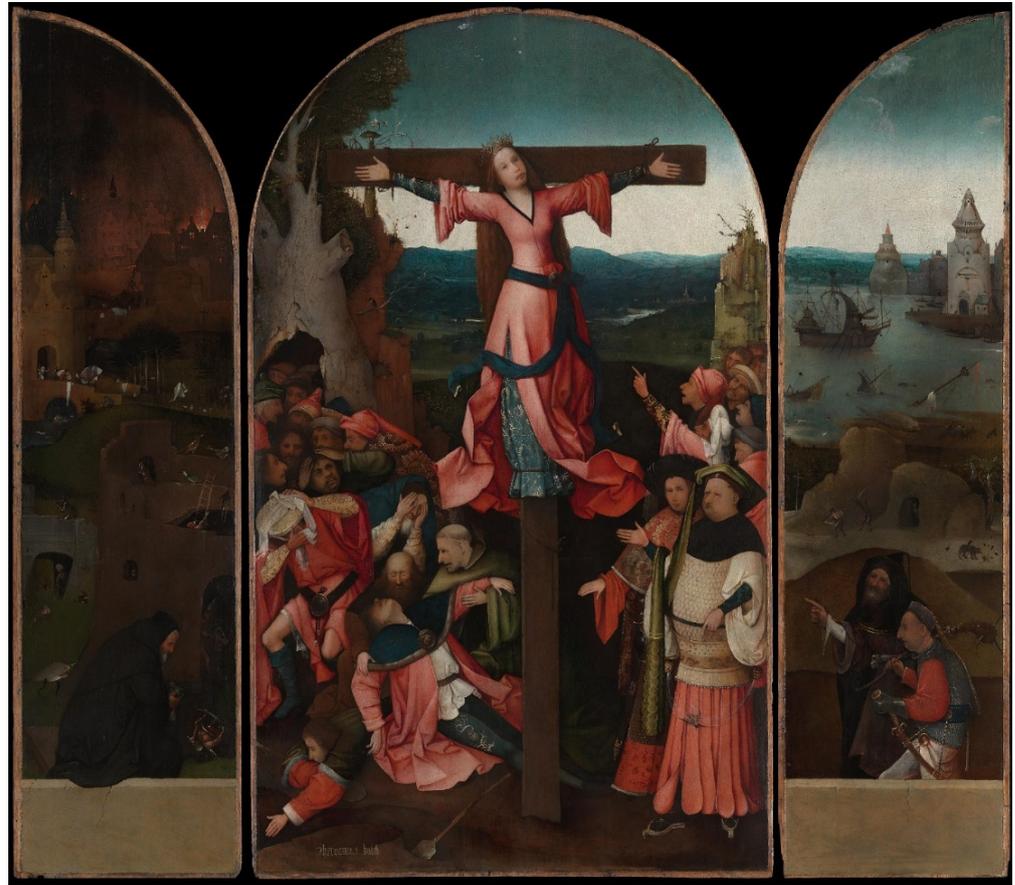


Figure 1. *Saint Wilgefortis Triptych* (c. 1497) by Hieronymus Bosch. Photo Credit: <http://boschproject.org>, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2634019> (accessed on 29 May 2022).

Wilgefortis was one of the most popular medieval saints in Europe, closely rivaling devotion to the Virgin Mary (Friesen 2001, p. 1). She was someone to whom people prayed as they sought liberation, comfort, and intercession. Today, the image of Wilgefortis can help to expand the vision of what it means to be created in the image of God beyond a sexually dimorphic understanding of Genesis 1:27 (Budwey 2023, chp. 4), while offering comfort and healing to those who identify outside of the sex/gender binary.

This article will show that the emancipatory image of Wilgefortis can help all people—particularly those who identify outside of the sex/gender binary—knowing that they too are made in the image of God. First is an examination of the history of the cult of Wilgefortis, relying heavily on the most recent and extensive work by art historian Ilse Friesen (2001), an updating of the earlier work by Gustav Schnürer and Joseph Ritz (1934). Next is a consideration of interpretations of the popular medieval devotion to Wilgefortis, providing a liberating depiction of someone who blurs boundaries, who is ‘both and neither,’ who is and is not Christ (human and divine), and who is and is not ‘female’ or ‘male.’ Following this will be an exploration of contemporary portrayals of Wilgefortis, showing how they provide a queer, multivalent, and prophetic image for today that can represent all individuals. Finally, there will be a discussion of how this art could be incorporated into liturgies that minister especially to those who identify outside of the sex/gender binary while also expanding the imagination of those who struggle to see sex/gender as a spectrum.

2. The Legend of Wilgefortis

The legend of Saint Wilgefortis has its origins in the image of *Volto Santo* or *holy face*, a famous eight-foot-tall carved wooden cross in the Cathedral of Lucca in Italy (Figure 2).



Figure 2. *Volto Santo* (8th/9th c.), Cathedral of Lucca, Italy. Photo Credit: Joanbanjo, own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=14326616> (accessed on 29 May 2022).

Originally thought to be from at least the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, recent scientific evidence now dates it to the eighth to ninth centuries, making it the oldest wooden sculpture in Europe (Povoledo 2020). As Friesen describes, this is an example of a *Christus triumphans* (triumphant Christ) crucifix, where Christ is usually depicted with open eyes, sometimes wearing a “bejeweled crown instead of a crown of thorns,” and Christ “is merely resting on the cross after the heroic and cosmic battle has already been won” (Friesen 2001, pp. 11–12). Some of these carvings also portray Christ in a long robe, as the *Volto Santo* does, which “reflects an eastern or Syrian-Palestinian tradition which tended to portray Christ in the role of a divinely ordained High Priest” (Friesen 2001, pp. 12–13). On special feast days, the cross is decorated “with precious dresses, ornaments, a crown and shoes” (Friesen 2001, p. 15).⁶ As Friesen points out, the symbolism of Christ’s robe “as signifying sacred kingship and royal priesthood was not always fully understood or appreciated,” and with the addition of the extra clothing added to the cross on feast days, this led “to the growing misunderstanding that the statue was, in fact, that of a woman rather than of Christ” (Friesen 2001, p. 15). While some posit that as this cross spread throughout Europe so too did the confusion about the sex/gender of the person on the cross, Friesen argues that “many of these later images were deliberately created in order to portray a female saint,” that is, Wilgefortis (Friesen 2001, p. 2).

The legend of Wilgefortis dates from around the fourteenth century in Europe. She was a young Christian Portuguese princess who was to be wed to the king of Sicily. Because she had taken a vow of virginity, she prayed to avoid the marriage. Her prayers were answered when she grew a beard, yet this greatly angered her father who had arranged the marriage and he had her crucified.⁷ As Wilgefortis’ cult grew, she became more and more Christlike, “both in terms of her physical appearance and with regard to her martyrdom

on the cross” (Friesen 2001, p. 2). These depictions began to blur the boundaries between human and divine (Wilgefortis and Christ), and ‘female’ and ‘male’ (Figure 3).

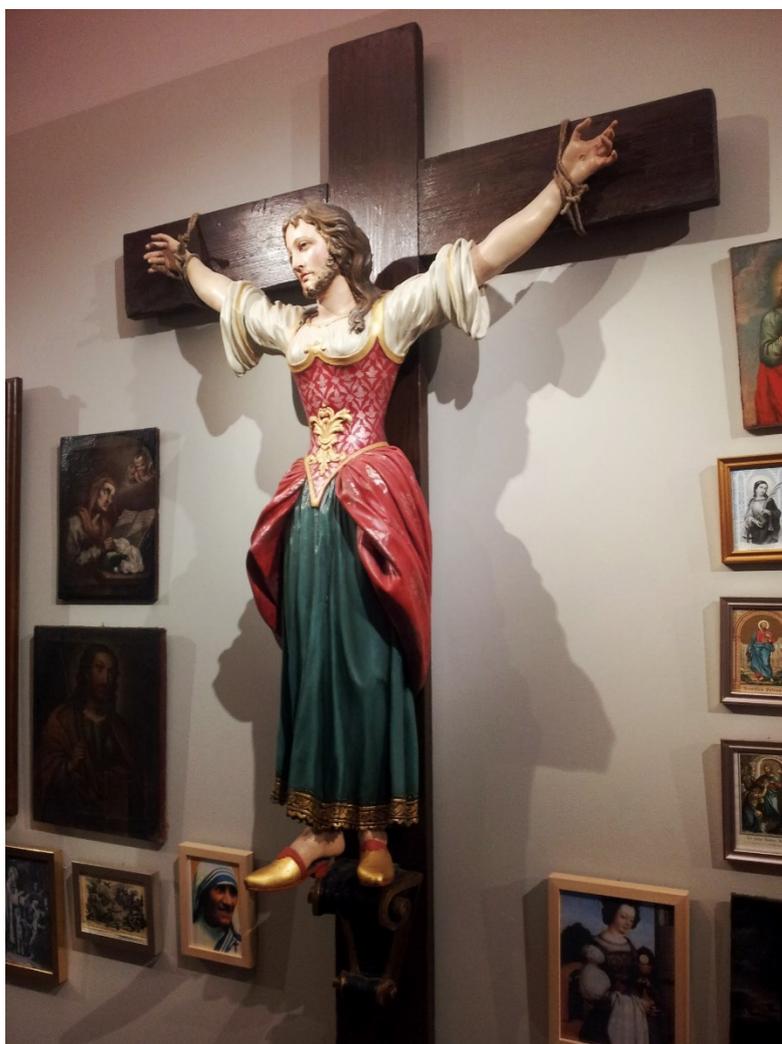


Figure 3. *Saint Wilgefortis* (18th c.), Diocesan Museum of Graz, Austria. Photo Credit: Gugganij, own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=27324725> (accessed on 29 May 2022).

Friesen looks at many artistic versions of Wilgefortis in various countries where she is known by different names.⁸ In Holland, she is known as Saint Onkommer and in England as Saint Uncumber,⁹ with the etymology describing her as someone who “helps to free her supplicants from cumbersome concerns so that they may be ‘un-encumbered’ and thus unburdened and liberated, as indicated by her Latin name *Liberata*” (Friesen 2001, p. 47).¹⁰ In Bavaria and Tyrol, she is known as Saint Wilgefortis or Kümmeris. The name Wilgefortis might come from the Latin *virgo fortis* (strong virgin) or German *hilge vrazt* (holy face), and Kümmeris comes from the German word *Kummer* meaning grief or sorrow (Friesen 2001, p. 1). Women in unwanted and/or abusive marriages often called upon her, and in images where she is tied to the cross with ropes (Figure 4) she was particularly seen as a “comforter and intercessor for people in bondage, especially for those in prison, as well as for conscripted soldiers” (Friesen 2001, p. 4).

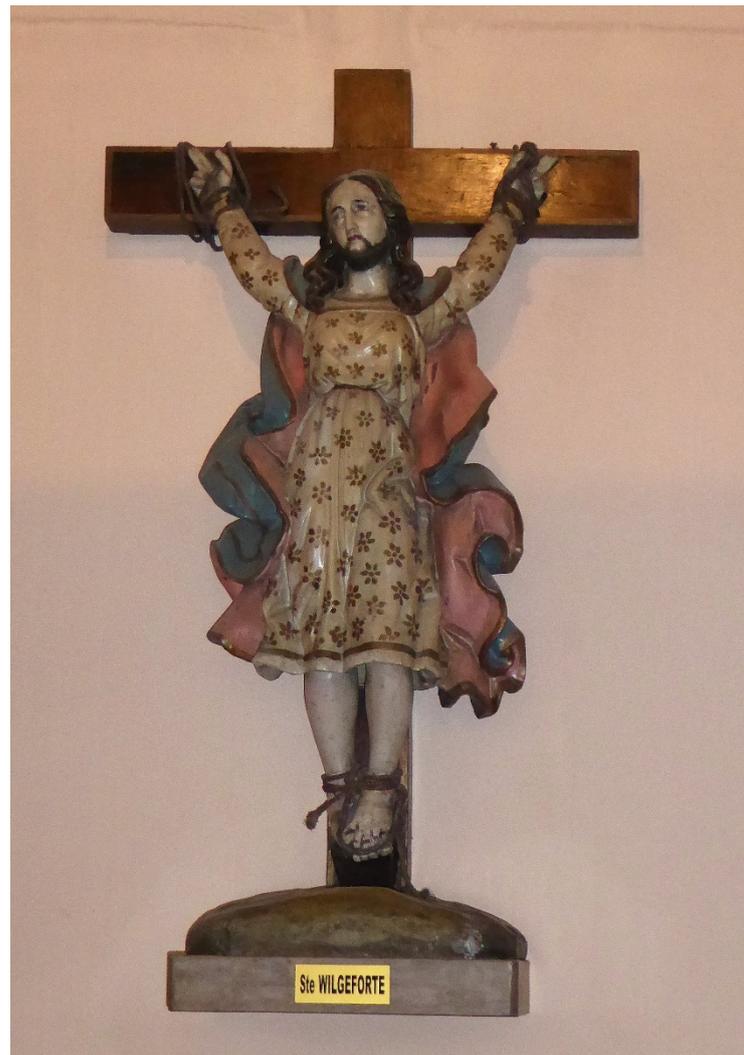


Figure 4. Statue of Ste. Wilgeforte (date unknown), St. Nicolas Church of Wissant (Pas-de-Calais, France). Photo Credit: PIERRE ANDRE LECLERCQ, own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=50011929> (accessed on 29 May 2022).

Additionally, Friesen writes that this image of “a crucified female saint who was held to have become Christlike” can be seen as filling “an emotional and spiritual need which the official patriarchal Church was failing to provide at the time, especially for women,” as it allowed them to identify more closely with Christ on the cross (Friesen 2001, p. 27). It is important to remember, as Elizabeth Nightlinger points out, that for women to attain higher spiritual levels at that time it often meant they had to become more “masculine”: “Praise for a woman in the medieval Church was given in terms of virtues and traits considered to be masculine; sexual equality lay in the effective androgyny of a masculine mentality in a female body whose sexual nature was denied” (Nightlinger 1993, pp. 302–3).¹¹

3. Interpretations of Wilgefortis

In the introduction to *The Bloomsbury Reader in Religion, Sexuality and Gender* (Boisvert and Daniel-Hughes 2017), the editors explain why they chose to have a picture of Wilgefortis on the cover:¹²

Wilgefortis’ image adorns the cover of this reader because her story offers a compelling example of how religion and sexuality intersect. It reveals, first, how sexuality regularly infuses religious devotion and identification. Wilgefortis’ religious devotion was expressed through her commitment to virginity and it was

placed under threat because of an impending marriage. But there is something more here that solicits our interest in this saint's story. For it indicates that holiness or sacredness may itself be "queer." Here we take queer not as an identity (something that Wilgefortis has), but rather as a description of how her story unsettles binaries, such as male/female and human/divine (Boisvert and Daniel-Hughes 2017, p. 1).

In disrupting these binaries, Wilgefortis joins the notions of 'both/and' and 'neither/nor' to become 'both/neither.' The concept of 'both/neither'¹³ comes from Leah DeVun's article "The Jesus Hermaphrodite: Science and Sex Difference in Premodern Europe" (DeVun 2008), which explores various analogies used by alchemists to characterize the process of transmutation. One analogy was that of a 'hermaphrodite,' drawing from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* because "the hermaphrodite story provided a particularly apt model for alchemists: it described a fusion of male and female sexed parts into a biform body that was, as Ovid claimed, *both* and *neither*" (DeVun 2008, p. 194).¹⁴ Throughout her article, DeVun draws from fifteenth-century manuscripts that illustrate how "Christ is the ultimate hermaphrodite, a unity of contrary parts—the human and the divine—the male and the female" (DeVun 2008, p. 209).¹⁵ DeVun also makes a connection with Wilgefortis, who is often depicted as only wearing one shoe (Figure 5).



Figure 5. *Kümmernis* (1513), Egidienkirche, Erlangen-Eltersdorf. Photo Credit: Unknown author, Fotografie des Gemäldes, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=7763933> (accessed on May 2022).

Because an empty slipper was "a common symbol for the female sex organ," one reading by David Williams sees this "'one-shoe-off, one shoe-on' imagery as a playful iconographical allusion to male and female genitalia and an indication of the saint's—and

Christ's—hermaphroditic nature" (DeVun 2008, p. 213; see also Friesen 2001, p. 38). In another explanation, the shoe was dropped as a reward for the fiddler (seen on the left below the crucifix in Figure 5) who had tried to soothe Wilgefortis' "final agony with his gift of music" (Friesen 2001, pp. 35–36).

As Lewis Wallace points out, this time period often includes religious imagery and thought that expresses gender fluidity: "The representation of Saint Wilgefortis as virile and feminine, female and Christlike, 'disfigured' and transcendent, either alternately or simultaneously, reflects a fluidity and paradox common to late-medieval religious symbols" (Wallace 2014, p. 63). Friesen likewise conveys how "the distinction between male and female tended to be regarded as considerably less than absolute" (Friesen 2001, p. 2; see also Wallace 2014, p. 47), and this applied to Christ's body: "During the fifteenth century, Christ's flesh was seen as being simultaneously male and female. He was male insofar as he was the son of God and of Mary; however, his body was also regarded as female in that his flesh had been fashioned from the womb of his mother" (Friesen 2001, p. 25). The image of Wilgefortis/Christ serves as an example of this fluidity and blurring of distinctions.

Knauss and Pezzoli-Oligati describe art's ability to have multiple interpretations: "Because these practices of looking and relating are necessarily subjective and dynamic, they are open to multiple significations and conflicting meaning making processes: they can, at the same time, communicate dominant norms and question them for an individual in his/her [sic] relationship to the image and the wider set of practices surrounding it" (Knauss and Pezzoli-Oligati 2015, p. 3). Individual viewers were therefore able to decide what the multivalent, gender-fluid symbol of Wilgefortis meant for them (Wallace 2014, p. 52). Furthermore, Wallace writes that Wilgefortis—someone he portrays as experiencing "gendered transformations"—"could be alternately or simultaneously read as a virile woman, a feminine bride of Christ, a 'disfigured' virgin martyr, and a female version of Christ" (Wallace 2014, pp. 44, 50, 52, 62). This fluidity fueled Wilgefortis' popularity, creating a "gender-blended image that may be interpreted as male, female, or both" (Wallace 2014, pp. 52, 62). While Friesen explains that some modern-day viewers might find the image of Wilgefortis as "paradoxical," "contradictory," or even "offensive," she asserts that the combination of genders and the persons of Wilgefortis and Christ was deliberate, writing that "this gender ambiguity, far from being confusing or troubling, was instead regarded as inspiring, and even comforting" as it allowed the viewer to see the image "as either male or female—or even both at once" (Friesen 2001, pp. 92–94, 107). This article now turns to contemporary depictions of Wilgefortis by artists who continue to be inspired by this gender-fluid image.

4. Contemporary Images of Wilgefortis

In addition to the above images of Wilgefortis from earlier time periods, there are also contemporary artists who are creating new portrayals of Wilgefortis. Although Wilgefortis was removed from the Roman Catholic calendar of saints in 1969 (Cherry 2021), she continues to be a part of the religious imagination of people today, often as a queer icon. One example is by Shoushan (Figure 6), which hails Wilgefortis as the "patron saint of gender equality and protection."¹⁶ Kittredge Cherry further calls Wilgefortis the patron saint of many diverse people, including "intersex people, an asexual person, a transgender person, a person with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome or a lesbian virgin" (Cherry 2021).¹⁷

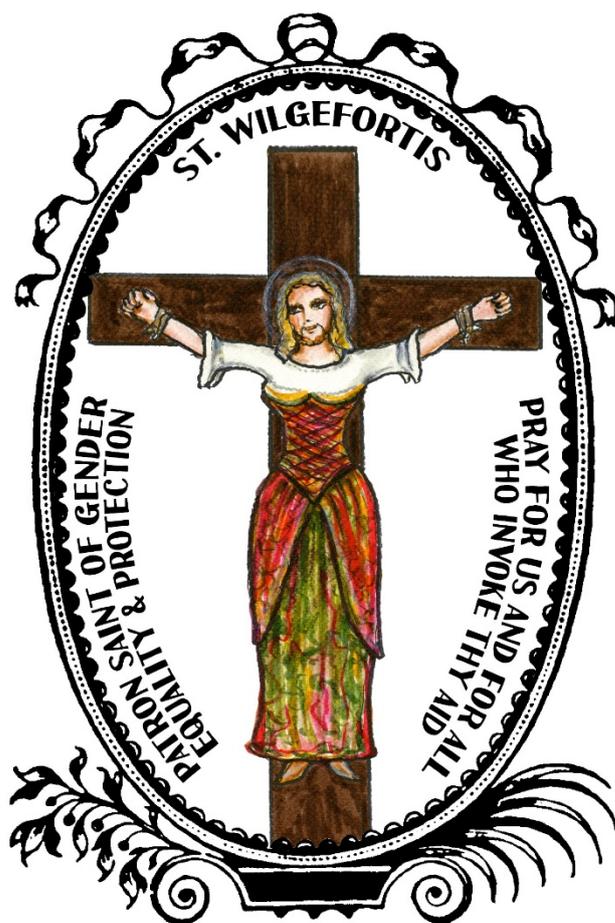


Figure 6. *St. Wilgefortis* (2015) by Shoushan. Photo Credit: Image used with author's permission.

Queer Chicana artist Alma López (b. 1966) portrays Wilgefortis as “Saint Wilgefortis” and “Santa Liberata,” both part of her *Queer Santas: Holy Violence* series.¹⁸ In his discussion of her work, Sabia-Tanis elucidates how López’s work is grounded in Wilgefortis’ “connection with violence against women and the ability to free women from these situations,” particularly those oppressed by patriarchy (Tanis 2017, pp. 146, 168). López’s *Queer Santas* series is a response to her asking why these women (including Saints Agatha and Lucy) refused to be married and instead chose to be tortured and killed. As a lesbian, López conveys how if she were in a similar situation, she too would refuse to be forced into a heterosexual marriage (Tanis 2017, p. 146). Cherry highlights how the *Queer Santas* series therefore comes from López’s “insight that [these] female martyrs may have protected their virginity to the death not so much out of faith, but because they were lesbians” (Cherry 2021), thus referring to the etymology of Wilgefortis’ name as *virgo fortis*, strong virgin (Tanis 2017, p. 164).

For Sabia-Tanis, these images point “directly to the colonization of women’s bodies (holy violence)” while also “sympathetically demonstrating ways in which female masculinity offers liberation and holiness (queer *santas*)” (Tanis 2017, p. 164). The women represented as Wilgefortis and Liberata defy stereotypical feminine appearances through their female masculinity and what Sabia-Tanis expresses as “the strength and conviction to follow their own sexual path, regardless of the consequences, because of their faith” (Tanis 2017, pp. 147, 149). Furthermore, just as Friesen, Wallace, and others argued that medieval depictions of Wilgefortis could be read as female, male, or both, Sabia-Tanis likewise contends that López’s portrayals of Wilgefortis and Liberata can be seen as “female and masculine simultaneously” (Tanis 2017, p. 150).

Looking more closely at these pieces, first with “Santa Liberata,” one notices the t-shirt bears another of López’s pieces of art, *Our Lady* (1999), her work that depicts the Virgin of Guadalupe as a strong woman who is proud of her body that created much controversy.¹⁹ Tanis recounts how the woman who was the model for *Our Lady*, Raquel Salinas, is a survivor of sexual violence, further tying her to Santa Liberata as someone who liberates women from sexual violence (Tanis 2017, pp. 154–55). He writes: “In this way, Salinas and López have created an image which functions as St. Liberata and St. Wilgefortis do—embodying flesh that has been exploited by colonialism and patriarchy, and the violence it causes and condones, in order to become freed from that impact” (Tanis 2017, p. 156). Liberata is not shown on a cross, rather she is surrounded by flowers and butterflies, which López describes as “this idea of being released or freedom by perhaps . . . this difficult decision that she’s made. Where she’s kept true to herself” (Tanis 2017, p. 156; quoting López 2014, 00:15:37).²⁰

The image of “Saint Wilgefortis” includes traditional portrayals of the saint in the background and a woman with natural body hair, both under her arms and with a slight mustache (Tanis 2017, p. 158). The picture on the t-shirt is the coat of arms of Saint Joan of Arc, another saint who died as a virgin martyr, killed for wearing men’s clothing. Sabia-Tanis connects the stories of Joan of Arc and Wilgefortis, describing how “[t]he presence of Joan of Arc’s coat of arms on the chest of St. Wilgefortis reinforces the interpretation of this image as one in which a masculine appearance removes women from the social and political obligations of femininity and of heterosexual marriage and sexuality, freeing them to be their full selves” (Tanis 2017, p. 162). He further ties them together explaining how “the path to liberation was through a complete embrace of her faith, which directly led to her masculine appearance—for Joan through the wearing of men’s clothing and for Wilgefortis through the growth of her beard—and ultimately to her death” (Tanis 2017, p. 160). Both of these pieces uphold those who seek freedom outside of the sex/gender binary as they cross the borders of what is perceived to be ‘female’ and ‘male,’ feminine and masculine. This is supported by López’s use of the symbol of the butterfly, which for her signifies “nature, border crossings, and freedom” (Tanis 2017, p. 163).

5. Wilgefortis in the Liturgy

This section returns to questions raised at the beginning of this article: How are liturgies complicit in perpetuating a normative view of the sex/gender binary? What liturgies of healing are being offered for those who are in crisis because they are under attack for not ‘fitting’ into the sex/gender binary? And how might the emancipatory image of Wilgefortis be used in the liturgy to help all people feel welcome?

To address the first question, liturgies perpetuate a normative view of the sex/gender binary in many ways, including the language used in prayers and songs, the images found in worship spaces, as well as through decisions about who may be in what leadership roles and even where people may sit based on their sex/gender (Berger 2015). Siobhan Garrigan offers insight into how liturgies enforce the sex/gender binary:

As you sing with the faithful in all times and all places, how often have you sang in terms that were not based on heterosexist binaries—father and mother, male and female? Are you invited to sing as “sopranos and altos/tenors and basses” or just as “women/men,” regardless of the voice God gave you? How is sexual diversity talked about and otherwise imaged in your worship? How do you recognize the one in every 2000 babies born with “indeterminate” sex organs? How many prayers begin only, “Brothers and Sisters?” (Garrigan 2009, p. 215).

The movement toward inclusive and expansive language acknowledges the issues raised by Garrigan, including the reality that most language used in liturgies for both God and humans is binary—either ‘female’ and ‘male’ or ‘woman’ and ‘man’—and yet there is the need for language that includes those who identify outside of the sex/gender binary (e.g., the use of “siblings” instead of/in addition to “brothers and sisters”) as well

as language for God that is not gendered (e.g., Friend or Parent instead of Mother or Father).²¹ Additionally, most images found in worship spaces—including those of God, Jesus Christ, and saints—are depictions of people who are seen either as a woman or a man.²² By introducing images of Wilgefortis into worship spaces, the liturgy could include art such as Figure 7 that can be seen as depicting not only a woman or a man but also as *both* woman and man and *neither* woman nor man, disrupting the normative sex/gender binary of either/or with both/neither by representing all those along the entire sex/gender spectrum.



Figure 7. Wallfahrtsbild Kümmernis aus Schwarza am Steinfeld, Öl, Relig. Brauchtum, Widmung des H. Pfarrers Berger, Schwarza a. St. Anonymous. Städtisches Museum Neunkirchen. Photo Credit: Public Domain, licensed from alamy.com by the author.

Regarding the question of what liturgies of healing exist for those who are in crisis for being outside of the sex/gender binary, while there are not many (at least that are documented), there are a range of liturgies from those that are explicitly liturgies of healing to those that may not be labeled as healing liturgies, yet can still offer healing to those who have experienced suffering, trauma, and violence (both physical and psychological) because they identify outside of the sex/gender binary.²³ Some examples of liturgies that explicitly mention healing include “I Am Not a Mistake: A Healing Service for the Queer Soul” (Institute for Creative Mindfulness 2022) and “An Apology Liturgy to LGBTIQ People” (Maher et al. 2016).²⁴ There are also services that were written for gay and lesbian people that could be adapted to speak specifically to those outside of the sex/gender binary who need healing, including “A Healing Service” and “Rite of Healing from Lesbian/Gay Bashing” (Cherry and Sherwood 1995, pp. 27–29, 34–36). Services of Renaming (Episcopal Church 2018, pp. 120–24) and liturgies that are held during Pride, on Intersex Day of Remembrance/Intersex Solidarity Day (November 8), and on Transgender Day of Remembrance (November 20)²⁵ may not explicitly mention healing, but they are opportunities to both celebrate those who identify outside of the sex/gender binary as well as to remember those who have lost their lives because they did not ‘fit’ into society’s normative view of sex/gender. Artwork depicting Wilgefortis could be incorporated into these liturgies to provide “nonbinary or gender-expansive imagery” that could be a “source of inspiration” (Mills 2021, p. 149) as well as a source of healing.

In addition to these liturgies, Wilgefortis’ feast day is on July 20 and offers the opportunity to celebrate this saint who has the potential to bring healing, liberation, and comfort to those who identify outside of the sex/gender binary. Some churches have celebrated worship on Wilgefortis’ feast day, including Saint Wilgefortis Mission, a member of the Catholic Apostolic Church in North America in Schenectady, New York,²⁶ and the People’s Presbyterian Church in Milan, Michigan.²⁷ Liturgies on Wilgefortis’ feast day create space for the creation of liturgical vestments with her image, such as a fifteenth-century tunicle from the Order of the Golden Fleece (Mills 2021, pp. 140–42), as well as the composition of music celebrating her, such as “an antiphon from a prayer book printed in Paris in 1553 for use at Salisbury” (Nightlinger 1993, p. 293).²⁸ New liturgies for this feast day could incorporate emancipatory images of Wilgefortis as well as prayers and congregational song that use inclusive, expansive, and emancipatory language.

6. Conclusions

Wilgefortis is an emancipatory image—in both its historical and contemporary instances—that can help deconstruct and unencumber people from the bonds of the sex/gender binary by making space for all expressions of identity. In her discussion of Saint Uncumber, the English version of Wilgefortis, Alison Jasper characterizes the saint as a “liberator from the imprisonment of biological essentialism or normative sex-gender” (Jasper 2005, p. 52). Friesen similarly says that medieval depictions of Wilgefortis “constituted an attempt to transform the figure of Christ into a more universal and gender-inclusive symbol, thereby deconstructing the fixed binary opposites of male and female, as well as those of the human body and of varying attire” (Friesen 2001, p. 133). As the contemporary pieces by Alma López have emphasized, the borders of the sex/gender binary are “arbitrary and ultimately permeable” and “being true to oneself and one’s God is the highest form of spirituality” (Tanis 2017, p. 168). In combatting these borders, Friesen underscores the transformative power of art, which can “envision the blurring and even the ultimate disappearance of our various gender-based distinctions” (Friesen 2001, p. 134). This brings to mind the eschatological vision of Galatians 3:28, where the hierarchies and oppressions that humans have imposed on differences of sex and gender will be no more.

Images of Wilgefortis could be brought into a variety of liturgical spaces: healing services specifically for those who identify outside of the sex/gender binary and find themselves in crisis; LGBTQIA+ liturgies, such as those during Pride, on Intersex Day of Remembrance/Intersex Solidarity Day (November 8), and on Transgender Day of Re-

membrance (November 20); and Wilgefortis' feast day (July 20). Additionally, by bringing depictions of Wilgefortis into everyday liturgical spaces, churches could help expand the imagination of people to think outside the sex/gender binary with the hope of transforming ethical attitudes and behaviors toward those outside of the sex/gender binary, while also supporting and offering healing to those who already identify outside of it. This image of someone from Christian history who is 'both and neither' can encompass and provide liberation for *all*: those who identify as women, those who identify as men, those who identify as both women and men, and those who identify as neither women nor men.²⁹ In the words of biblical scholar Teresa Hornsby (2016, p. 103), this creates the ability to "embrace the ambiguous" and to "purge the illusion" that all people must neatly 'fit' into the sex/gender binary, allowing space for both those who wish to identify within the binary as well as those who do not wish to do so. When liturgical imaginations are expanded—both through verbal and visual emancipatory language—people can experience "a variety of understandings of the revelation of God in Jesus," reflecting a multiplicity of embodiments as this revelation "speak[s] in an emancipatory way to various persons at various times in their lives" (Wallace 1999, p. 84). May the beautifully multivalent and fluid images of Wilgefortis help to bring forth the eschatological vision of Galatians 3:28, where all humans along the sex/gender continuum are able to flourish in their chosen identities.

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Notes

- ¹ The cisnormative view is that those who are assigned 'female' at birth will identify as a 'woman' and those assigned 'male' at birth will identify as a 'man.' It assumes a strict binary, erasing intersex people (those with variations of sex characteristics) and all those who do not identify as 'women' or 'men.' This is often coupled with heteronormativity, the assumption that romantic/sexual relationships are only between women and men.
- ² The terms 'sex' and 'gender' are often conflated and "used synonymously in both social and legal contexts" (Viloria and Nieto 2020, p. 16). This article follows the definitions of Viloria and Nieto where 'sex' (female, male, intersex) refers to "biological traits" and 'gender' (woman, man, nonbinary) refers to "gender identity" (Viloria and Nieto 2020, p. 16). Furthermore, 'sex/gender' is used "in situations where it is accurate to note that both sex and gender, or either sex or gender, are being referenced" (Viloria and Nieto 2020, p. 16). For a helpful glossary of terms, see (Viloria and Nieto 2020, pp. 143–46).
- ³ Single quotation marks are used in this article around terms such as 'female' and 'male' to recognize their constructed nature.
- ⁴ For an in-depth look at emancipatory liturgical language and congregational song as it relates to intersex people, see (Budwey 2023, chp. 5).
- ⁵ The identity of the saint in this image has "long remained a mystery" (Bosch c. 1497), with some believing it to be Saint Julia of Corsica. However, after the image underwent restoration from 2013–2015, the beard was clearly visible and the person in the painting was identified as Wilgefortis. See also (Mills 2021).
- ⁶ The image of the decorated cross can be viewed here: <https://www.twopartsitaly.com/blog/2017/9/16/the-legend-of-the-volto-santo-holy-face> (accessed on 29 May 2022).
- ⁷ Friesen (2001, pp. 111–25) and others discuss the possibility of female hirsutism (de Jong and de Herder 2016; Katritzky 2014).
- ⁸ For the connection between Saint Librada and Wilgefortis see (González 2014/2015).
- ⁹ There is a statue of Saint Uncumber (16th c.) in The King Henry VII Chapel of Westminster Abbey in London (Lipscomb and Hoff 1963). In addition to Lipscomb and Hoff's article, an image of this statue can be viewed here: <https://genderben.com/2017/06/19/how-saint-wilgefortis-came-to-be-the-saint-of-bearded-ladies/> (accessed on 29 May 2022).
- ¹⁰ In discussing the cult of Saint Uncumber, Thomas More complained that women "reckon for a peck of oats she will not fail to uncumber them of their husbands" (Friesen 2001, p. 60). Furthermore, Lewis Wallace writes that "what is notable here is that

Uncumber is not criticized for her appearance or gender blending, but for her unusual role as a patron saint of unhappy married women" (Wallace 2014, p. 57).

- 11 See also (Tanis 2017, pp. 147–48). Throughout this article I refer to the author by his present name, Justin Sabia-Tanis.
- 12 The image is *Saint Wilgefortis the Bearded* by Alana Kerr and can be viewed here: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/bloomsbury-reader-in-religion-sexuality-and-gender-9781474237789/> (accessed 29 May 2022).
- 13 This paragraph draws from (Budwey 2023, p. 144). For a theology of 'both/neither,' see (Budwey 2023, pp. 150–57)
- 14 I recognize that in the intersex community, 'hermaphrodite' can be an extremely hurtful term for some, while others are reclaiming it, and so I only use it in a historical context when it is specifically used by the author.
- 15 See also (DeVun 2021), particularly Chapter 6, which highlights writings where Christ is described from a feminine side as well as a joining of feminine and masculine. Chapter 6 also looks at The Jesus Hermaphrodite in alchemy.
- 16 The image can be downloaded here: <https://myaltar.com/products/saint-wilgefortis-download> (accessed on 29 May 2022).
- 17 For a discussion of Wilgefortis and Polycystic Ovary Syndrome, see (Richardson 2020). For a discussion of some issues that might cause difficulty in Wilgefortis being adopted by transgender people, see (Mills 2021).
- 18 These images can be viewed here: <https://qspirit.net/saint-wilgefortis-bearded-woman/> (accessed on 29 May 2022). The *Queer Santas* series also includes Saint Lucy, Saint Agatha, and Julia Pastrana (Tanis 2017, p. 144).
- 19 The image can be viewed here: <http://almalopez.com/ourlady.html> (accessed on 29 May 2022). For more about this image and the controversy surrounding it, see (Gaspar de Alba and López 2011).
- 20 López also describes the nature imagery as challenging the notion that being a lesbian is "unnatural" (Tanis 2017, p. 157).
- 21 For more on the sex/gender binary in liturgy, including the need for multiple images of God, the use of inclusive, expansive, and emancipatory language, as well as the stories of intersex people who have been made to feel excluded due to binary liturgical language and how this creates liturgical violence, see (Budwey 2023, chp. 5).
- 22 For a discussion of images of God and Jesus Christ that are outside of the sex/gender binary, see (Budwey 2023, pp. 137–50).
- 23 While many of these services fall under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella, it is important to acknowledge that not everyone outside of the sex/gender binary identifies as such.
- 24 Additionally, there are organizations such as enfleshed (<https://enfleshed.com/liturgy/lgbtq-related/> accessed on 29 June 2022) and Q Worship (<https://www.qworshipcollective.com/> accessed on 29 June 2022) that offer liturgical resources around trauma, healing, and worship for those in the queer community.
- 25 It is important to acknowledge that not all intersex and transgender people identify outside of the sex/gender binary.
- 26 A video of the service may be viewed here: https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=312541587280581 (accessed on 29 June 2022). For more information on the Saint Wilgefortis Mission, a mission to the transgender community, see here: <http://cacina.org/index.php/17-parishes-and-missions/161-saint-wilgefortis-mission> (accessed on 29 June 2022).
- 27 A video of the service may be viewed here: <https://peoplespresbyterian.org/events/evening-prayer-for-saint-wilgefortis-day/> (accessed on 29 June 2022).
- 28 The English translation of the Latin prayer is: "Hail, holy servant of Christ, Wilgefortis, you loved Christ with all your soul; as you spurned marriage to the king of Sicily, you kept faith to the crucified Lord. You suffered the torments of imprisonment by order of your father; a beard grew on your face, a gift you obtained from Christ because you wished to be His; you confounded those who wished you to marry. When your impious father saw you thus deformed, he raised you up on the cross, where you quickly in your virtue gave back your pleasing soul, commended to Christ. Therefore, we reflect on your memory with devout praise, O virgin; O blessed Wilgefortis, we request you to pray for us" (Friesen 2001, p. 59). The original Latin can be found in (*Acta Sanctorum 1868*) (available online at <https://archive.org/details/actasanctorum32unse/page/n99/mode/2up> accessed on 29 June 2022). The prayer may be found on p. 64 of the book which is volume 32, July part 5, and the section on Wilgefortis begins on p. 50, "De S. Liberata alias Wilgeforte virgine et martyre". I recognize the difficulty of the language of deformity (*deformatam* in the original Latin) in this prayer and how this would be harmful to those who identify outside of the sex/gender binary, particularly to intersex people who are told their bodies are 'deformed' and need to be 'corrected' or 'fixed.'
- 29 I especially recognize here the importance of allowing transgender people to identify with a gender (woman and/or man) that is different from the one in which they were assigned/raised, as well as all those who choose to not identify with any gender.

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