

## Chapter Two

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# **A Genealogy of Queer Theology**

**H**ow did queer theology come into being? Although the term "queer theology" is fairly new, LGBT-positive theological works actually have been in existence since the mid-1950s. This chapter will review the evolution of queer theology over the last half-century. Note that the term "queer" is being used here in a broad sense; that is, it is being used as an umbrella term to describe theology by and for LGBT people.

In particular, this chapter will review four different strands in the evolution of queer theology: (1) apologetic theology, (2) liberation theology, (3) relational theology, and (4) queer theology. The first strand, apologetic theology, can be summarized by the phrase "gay is good." Its primary purpose is to show that one can be both LGBT and Christian. The second strand, liberation theology, goes beyond mere acceptance and argues that liberation from the oppressions of heterosexism and homophobia is at the very heart of the gospel. The third strand, relational theology, centers upon the notion that God is found in the "erotic"—that is, in the midst of mutual relationship with another. The fourth and final strand, queer theology, challenges the notion that binary categories with respect to sexuality (for example, homosexuality vs. heterosexuality) or gender identity (for example, female vs. male) are fixed and impermeable.

It is important to note that these four strands of queer theology are not intended to divide the history of queer theology into distinct theological "eras." Rather, they are roughly chronological ways of describing certain trends in the development of queer theology over the last fifty years. Furthermore, these four strands are not mutually exclusive. That is, any given work of queer theology may contain one or more of these strands. For example, certain books relating to transgender theology might

be considered queer theology because they challenge essentialist and binary conceptions of gender. However, such books might also be considered apologetic theology to the extent that they are arguing that "trans is good" and that one can be both a transgender person and a faithful Christian.

## Four Strands of Queer Theology

### Apologetic Theology

The first strand in the evolution of queer theology is apologetic theology. As noted above, this strand can be summarized by the slogan "gay is good." That is, these early theologians were primarily concerned with showing how LGBT (or, more accurately, gay and lesbian) people can be faithful Christians without the need to hide or change their sexuality, and how the Christian church should accept gays and lesbians as full members.

The first major work to rethink the traditionally negative relationship between Christianity and homosexuality was Derrick Sherwin Bailey's *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, published in 1955 in the United Kingdom. Bailey, an Anglican priest, wrote the book because he wanted to "state as accurately and to examine as fully as possible" biblical and church attitudes toward homosexuality from the early church to the Middle Ages. Bailey concluded that the Western Christian tradition about homosexuality was both "erroneous" and "defective" because it had disregarded what Bailey called the "biological, psychological, or genetical" condition of "inversion," which was a term used to describe people who had a gay sexual orientation. That is, Bailey argued that the condition of inversion is an "inherent" and "apparently unalterable" condition that is itself "morally neutral." Because the invert is "impelled by his condition" to engage in same-sex acts, these acts should no longer be viewed as "acts of perversion." As such, Bailey believed that the Western Christian tradition "can no longer be regarded as an adequate guide by the theologian, the legislator, the sociologist, and the magistrate."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, vii, 168, 172–73.

Although it may seem surprising that a work such as Bailey's was published as early as 1955, there have been lesbian and gay church communities in existence since the 1940s. For example, the LGBT church historian Heather White has documented the founding of the Eucharistic Catholic Church in 1946 in Atlanta by a group of Catholics who had been denied the Eucharist because they had self-identified as homosexual. The group was led by a former Catholic seminarian who had been dismissed from seminary for having sex with another man. The group advertised as early in 1954 in *ONE Magazine*, a publication of the nascent "homophile" movement.<sup>2</sup>

In 1960, the openly gay Congregationalist minister Robert W. Wood published *Christ and the Homosexual (Some Observations)*, which was a groundbreaking work of gay theology. Wood suggested that the church should be true to its "message of love" by initiating "positive acts of concern" for the homosexual. Some of these positive acts would include encouraging the "homosexual" to "participate in Church activities." Wood also urged the church to "rethink[] the theological position on homosexuality" and the conditions under which same-sex acts might be moral. Wood concludes that homosexuality can in fact be moral if it "permits full expression" of one's personality and allows oneself to bring forth all of one's "redemptive love, mature adjustment and creativeness."<sup>3</sup>

Following the publication of Wood's book, a number of significant events occurred in the 1960s with respect to LGBT people and Christianity. In June 1964, the Council on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH) was established in San Francisco. The CRH was formed by a coalition of Protestant ministers and leaders from the gay community, and it recognized the need for dialogue between gay activists and communities of faith. In 1966, the national board of the YMCA published a book by H. Kimball Jones called *Toward a Christian Understanding of the Homosexual*, which challenged the "prejudices which have marred the vision of Christians through the ages" by presenting

<sup>2</sup> Heather Rachelle White, "Proclaiming Liberation: The Historical Roots of LGBT Religious Organizing, 1946–1976," *Nova Religio* 11, no. 4 (2008): 103–4.

<sup>3</sup> Robert W. Wood, *Christ and the Homosexual (Some Observations)* (New York: Vantage Press, 1960), 119, 207.

an "unbiased understanding" of homosexuality.<sup>4</sup> In 1967, the prominent Anglican process theologian Norman Pittenger published a 64-page booklet through the SCM Press called *Time for Consent?: A Christian's Approach to Homosexuality*—expanded to a book with the same title nearly a decade later—in which he presented a sustained argument as to why the church should "alter its attitude to homosexuals."<sup>5</sup>

In October 1968, the Reverend Troy Perry, a Pentecostal minister who had been expelled from his denomination for being gay, founded the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) with twelve other people in his living room in Southern California. A few weeks before, Perry had placed an ad in *The Advocate*, a gay magazine. MCC has since grown into a worldwide denomination ministering to LGBT people and their allies in over thirty countries around the world. Perry later wrote about his journey as both a minister and a gay man in his 1972 autobiography, *The Lord Is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay*.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1970s, a number of key works of apologetic theology were published. In 1976, John J. McNeill, a Jesuit priest, published *The Church and the Homosexual*, which had the stated purpose of reassessing the "traditional moral theology on the question of homosexuality within the Roman Catholic community."<sup>7</sup> McNeill had published a number of articles on homosexuality and Catholicism going back as far as 1970, but this book led to his silencing by the Vatican and his ultimate dismissal from the Jesuits.

In 1978, Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott published *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?: A Positive Christian Response*. Scanzoni and Mollenkott discussed the historical, biblical, scientific, and ethical bases for accepting gays and lesbians in the church, and they challenged Christians to accept homosexuals as their neighbors, just as Jesus had accepted the Samaritans, who also were outcasts in their day.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> H. Kimball Jones, *Toward a Christian Understanding of the Homosexual* (New York: Association Press, 1966), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Norman Pittenger, *Time for Consent: A Christian's Approach to Homosexuality* (London: SCM Press, 1976), vii.

<sup>6</sup> See Troy Perry, *The Lord Is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay* (Los Angeles: Nash Publishing, 1972).

<sup>7</sup> John J. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual*, 4th ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>8</sup> See Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?: A Positive Christian Response*, rev. and updated ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).

Apologetic theology reached its height with the publication in 1980 of John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. In that book, Boswell argued that the early church was not as uniformly homophobic as the tradition would have us believe. According to Boswell, it was not until the thirteenth century that the Christian church started to treat same-sex acts with hostility and intolerance.<sup>9</sup> Although Boswell was an academic historian, his work had an apologetic dimension in that he wanted the church to accept gay people for who they are, and, conversely, for gay people to recognize that they can be both Christian *and* gay.

### Liberation Theology

The second strand in the evolution of queer theology is liberation theology. This strand is modeled after the various liberation theologies that came into being in the late 1960s (for example, Latin American liberation theology and black liberation theology), which were based upon the Exodus narrative of the Israelites being freed from their slavery in Egypt. The primary concern of this strand was not just acceptance of queer people by the church, but also the demonstration of how queer liberation—that is, freedom from heterosexism and homophobia, as well as the freedom to be one's own authentic self—is at the very heart of the gospel message and Christian theology.

Like the liberation theologies of Gustavo Gutiérrez and James Cone,<sup>10</sup> the liberation strand of queer theology argued that God was not neutral and in fact had a preferential option for the poor and oppressed. For example, in 1968, the Anglican priest H.W. Montefiore published a controversial essay, "Jesus, the Revelation of God," which suggested that Jesus' celibacy might have been due to his being a homosexual. If so, Montefiore argued, this would be "evidence of God's self-identification with those who are unacceptable to the upholders of 'The Establishment' and social conventions." That is, just as

<sup>9</sup> See Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 301–2.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973); James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1970); James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

liberation theologians had argued in other contexts, Montefiore argued that God's nature was "befriending the friendless" and "identifying himself [sic] with the underprivileged."<sup>11</sup>

This focus on liberation theology appeared in other publications as well. For example, the September 1972 issue of *The Gay Christian*, a newsletter of the Metropolitan Community Church of New York, featured a number of articles about "gay theology." Howard Wells, the pastor of MCC New York at the time, wrote a provocative piece called "Gay God, Gay Theology" in which he described how the gay community has the right to refer to God—whom he called "our liberator, our redeemer"—as our "gay God." Wells rejected the notion of a God who would oppress gay people. Specifically, Wells said that any God who does so and "is blind to the enslavement of gay people" is nothing more than an "oppressive idol."<sup>12</sup>

In 1974, Sally Gearhart and William R. Johnson edited an anthology called *Loving Women/Loving Men: Gay Liberation and the Church*. In that volume, Johnson wrote an essay called "The Good News of Gay Liberation," in which he argued for the liberation of lesbians and gay men in the church. He noted that the "passive acceptance of injustice is no longer possible" for lesbian and gay people, and that the cry of "No more!" is especially applicable to the Christian church. Johnson proposed a number of goals for the church toward liberation, including the affirmation of same-sex relationships, electing gay people into church leadership positions, encouraging gay people to enroll in seminaries, and developing a "totally new theology of sexuality which would reflect the validity of same-sex relationships as well as other relationships and life styles."<sup>13</sup>

These early works of liberation theology were followed by a number of works in the late 1970s and 1980s with an unapologetically liberative bent. These works included *Towards a Theology of Gay Liberation*, a collection of essays published in

<sup>11</sup> H.W. Montefiore, "Jesus, the Revelation of God," in *Christ for Us Today*, ed. Norman Pittenger (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1968), 110.

<sup>12</sup> Howard R. Wells, "Gay God, Gay Theology," *The Gay Christian: Journal of the New York Metropolitan Community Church* 1, no. 5 (September 1972): 7–8.

<sup>13</sup> Bill Johnson, "The Good News of Gay Liberation," in *Loving Women / Loving Men: Gay Liberation and the Church*, ed. Sally Gearhart and William R. Johnson (San Francisco: Glide Publications, 1974), 91–92, 115–16.

1977 and edited by Malcolm Macourt, which included an essay about the relationship between Christian liberation and gay liberation and how the two "must impinge upon one another for better or for worse" because both deal with society as a whole.<sup>14</sup> Another work of gay liberation theology during this period was *Gay/Lesbian Liberation: A Biblical Perspective*, written by George R. Edwards and published in 1984, which argued for a biblically based theology of liberation for gays and lesbians.<sup>15</sup> In 1989, J. Michael Clark, a gay theologian, published *A Place to Start: Toward an Unapologetic Gay Liberation Theology*, in which he argued for "(re)constructing a gay liberation theology" that would rethink methodological issues as well as the importance of experience as a source for theology.<sup>16</sup>

The gay liberation strand of theology continued into the 1990s. In 1992, Robert Williams published *Just As I Am: A Practical Guide to Being Out, Proud, and Christian*. In that book, Williams contended that, consistent with the teachings of "Liberation Theology 101," only lesbians and gays can determine for themselves what constitutes sin and morality. For Williams, "any straight cleric's" attempt to define sin for gays and lesbians is "patriarchal and condescending" and ultimately "blasphemy."<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, in 1995 Richard Cleaver wrote *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology*, in which he noted that the Latin American model of liberation theology demanded that lesbians and gay men—and not "religious experts"—work out a theology of "homosexuality" for themselves.<sup>18</sup> In sum, what all of these works shared in common, from the 1960s through the 1990s, was the assertion that the gospel and the Christian faith demands that queer people be liberated from the bondage of heterosexism and homophobia.

<sup>14</sup> Giles Hibbert, "Gay Liberation in Relation to Christian Liberation," in *Towards a Theology of Gay Liberation*, ed. Malcolm Macourt (London: SCM Press, 1977), 91.

<sup>15</sup> See George R. Edwards, *Gay/Lesbian Liberation: A Biblical Perspective* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> J. Michael Clark, *A Place to Start: Toward an Unapologetic Gay Liberation Theology* (Dallas, TX: Monument Press, 1989), 27.

<sup>17</sup> Williams, *Just As I Am*, 151–52.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Cleaver, *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 12.



## Relational Theology

The third strand in the evolution of queer theology is relational theology. This strand was developed primarily by lesbian theologians as a response to the silence in gay male theology about women's issues and the importance of feminist theological reflection. This strand of queer theology focused not so much on issues of acceptance or liberation, but rather finding God in the midst of the erotic—that is, mutual relationship—with another person.

Lesbian theological voices first started to emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the beginning, these writings were primarily apologetic in nature. For example, in 1969 Barbara B. Gittings wrote an essay called "The Homosexual and the Church" in which she argued that it was the duty of the Christian church to welcome lesbians and gay men. She argued that the church should "make an affirmative, active effort to accept and welcome the homosexual, unreservedly and openly . . . and to equality in the worship of his [sic] God."<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, Gittings wrote only about the "homosexual" in generic terms and did not make a distinction between lesbians and gay men.

In 1971, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon—the founders of the Daughters of Bilitis, which was the first social and political group for lesbians in the United States—wrote "A Lesbian Approach to Theology." In that essay, Martin and Lyon challenged various stereotypes about lesbians, including the stereotype of a "predatory, masculinized woman who spends all her time seducing young girls." Martin and Lyon, who also worked with the Council on Religion and the Homosexual in San Francisco, argued that the "despairing homosexual" must understand that "he [sic] too is a child of God."<sup>20</sup>

In 1974, Sally Gearhart wrote an essay, "The Miracle of Lesbianism," which was published in the *Loving Women/Loving Men* anthology. This essay was an important step toward the development of relational theology because it focused upon

<sup>19</sup> Barbara B. Gittings, "The Homosexual and the Church," in *The Same Sex: An Appraisal of Homosexuality*, ed. Ralph W. Weltge (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969), 155.

<sup>20</sup> Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, "A Lesbian Approach to Theology," in *Is Gay Good?: Ethics, Theology, and Homosexuality*, ed. W. Dwight Oberholtzer (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 216, 219.

the importance of *relationships* for lesbians. For Gearhart, the "cause" of lesbianism is nothing more than a self-love that "expresses itself in love of other women and thus in rebellion of a woman-hating society." Being a lesbian is a "mind-set, life-style, a body of experience" of being truly "woman-identified," whether or not that is expressed in terms of a physical relationship with another woman. As such, Gearhart argued that lesbians can be reunited with their heterosexual sisters through feminism.<sup>21</sup>

A significant turning point in relational theology occurred in 1989 with the publication of *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* by Carter Heyward. In that book, Heyward draws upon Audre Lorde's view of the erotic as sacred and argues that God is not extrinsic to sex or gender, but rather "is immersed in our gendered and erotic particularities." For Heyward, God exists in the connection that women have with "body and nature and darkness and moisture and dirt and sex."<sup>22</sup> What was distinctive about Heyward's work was that not only did it draw upon her embodied experiences as a lesbian, but it also was a different way of doing theology.

Following Heyward, a number of lesbian theologians have also focused on relationality in their theological works. This included Mary E. Hunt, the cofounder and codirector of Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER), who in her 1991 book *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship* articulated a theology of friendship in which she argues that human friendship (whether or not including "genital expression") is a "useful paradigm of right relation for the whole of creation."<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Stuart, a lesbian theologian at the University of Winchester, articulated an agenda for the broader Christian church in her 1995 book *Just Good Friends: Towards a Lesbian and Gay Theology of Relationships* that included the need to practice an ethic of friendship and to "sacramentalize" friendship.<sup>24</sup> Both Hunt and Stuart focused on

<sup>21</sup> Sally Gearhart, "The Miracle of Lesbianism," in Gearhart and Johnson, *Loving Women/Loving Men*, 128, 133.

<sup>22</sup> Heyward, *Touching Our Strength*, 103.

<sup>23</sup> Mary E. Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 2.

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, *Just Good Friends: Towards a Lesbian and Gay Theology of Relationships* (London: Mowbray, 1995), 236.

friendship as a central theme for constructing their respective relational theologies and where God is ultimately found.

Even gay male theologians and ethicists in the 1990s were influenced strongly by theologies of relationality. These included Gary David Comstock, the former Protestant chaplain at Wesleyan University, who in his 1993 book *Gay Theology Without Apology* argued that we should think of Jesus more as a friend and not a master.<sup>25</sup> These also included Daniel T. Spencer, a professor at the University of Montana, whose work in lesbian and gay ecological ethics in his 1996 book *Gay and Gaia: Ethics, Ecology, and the Erotic* was expressly grounded in the "erotic" and the "deep sense of interconnection" as articulated by relational theologians such as Carter Heyward.<sup>26</sup> Finally, this included scholars such as Marvin M. Ellison, a gay ethicist at Bangor Theological Seminary, who constructed an ethic of sexuality in his 1996 book *Erotic Justice: A Liberating Ethic of Sexuality* that affirmed the "godly power of loving body touch."<sup>27</sup>

Finally, much of the somber theological reflection by gay male theologians that arose in the 1980s out of the HIV/AIDS pandemic can be understood in relational terms. For example, John E. Fortunato in his 1987 book *AIDS, the Spiritual Dilemma* described the spiritual journey as a union with God. Fortunato proposed that the only way to deal with the anger and pain of unjust natural evils such as HIV/AIDS is, paradoxically, through "acts of loving—of tending the sick and dying, of comforting the bereaved, and of striving to find a cure."<sup>28</sup>

### Queer Theology

The fourth strand in the evolution of queer theology is queer theology itself. This strand is based upon the theoretical work of queer theorists such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Specifically, queer theology challenges the essentialist notions of sexuality and gender identity, and it argues that these concepts are not so much "fixed" but

<sup>25</sup> See Gary David Comstock, *Gay Theology Without Apology* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> See Daniel T. Spencer, *Gay and Gaia: Ethics, Ecology, and the Erotic* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Marvin M. Ellison, *Erotic Justice: A Liberating Ethic of Sexuality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 120.

<sup>28</sup> John E. Fortunato, *AIDS, the Spiritual Dilemma* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 118.

rather socially constructed through language and discourse.<sup>29</sup> As noted above, a constructivist view of sexuality and gender identity doesn't deny the fact that there are individuals who are born with same-sex attractions and/or gender variant identities and who remain that way throughout their lives. It does mean, however, that the cultural meaning and significance of such sexual attractions and gender expressions are fluid depending upon a particular time and place.

By definition, these queer theologies include bisexual and transgender theologies because these discourses inherently deconstruct binary notions of sexuality (that is, bisexual discourse challenges the heterosexuality vs. homosexuality binary) and gender identity (that is, transgender discourse challenges the male vs. female binary) in favor of a more fluid understanding of sexuality and gender identity as points along a spectrum or continuum.

This challenging of essentialist notions of sexuality in a theological context can be traced at least as far back as 1973, to Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. In that work, Daly rejects the "heterosexuality-homosexuality" dichotomy as "destructive" because these are still "patriarchal classifications" that reinforce the "sex role system." For Daly, the category of "homosexuality" is still "not radical enough" because the sex of one's partner ultimately still matters with respect to that category. Furthermore, according to Daly, the term "homosexual" is used as a "scare term" to "intimidate those who even appear to deviate from the norms dictated by role psychology" and, as such, is actually an "instrument of social control."<sup>30</sup>

One of the earliest discussions of queer theory in the specific context of LGBT theology occurred in 1993 with Robert E. Shore-Goss's *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto*. Shore-Goss uses the term "queer" throughout the work and also refers to Foucault's work and the constructed nature of

<sup>29</sup> For an overview of the theoretical issues relating to queer theology, see Laurel C. Schneider, "Homosexuality, Queer Theory, and Christian Theology," in *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism: A Critical Reader*, ed. Björn Krondorfer (London: SCM Press, 2009), 63–76.

<sup>30</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 24–27.

sexuality in an appendix.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, it is fair to say that Shore-Goss's overall work was still grounded in a liberationist conception of lesbian and gay identity. In 1997, Gary David Comstock and Susan E. Henking edited *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology*, which expressly acknowledged the influence of queer studies upon the works in that anthology.<sup>32</sup> Also in 1997, Mark Jordan published *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* in which he builds upon queer theory to caution against an essentialist reading of gay and lesbian identity. Specifically, Jordan argues that when "we lesbians and gays think of ourselves as members of a tribe, as a separate people or race, we echo medieval theology's preoccupation with the Sodomites."<sup>33</sup>

Queer theology came of age in 2000 with the publication of Marcella Althaus-Reid's *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*. In that book, Althaus-Reid set forth a shocking "indecent theology"—including discussions of the scent of Latin American women who do not wear underwear, being in bed with the Madonna, engaging in french kissing with God, and doing theology in corset-laced leather boots—that unmasked the heterosexual and patriarchal assumptions of traditional liberation theologies.<sup>34</sup> In the same year, Laura Dykstra published an essay, "Jesus, Bread, Wine and Roses: A Bisexual Feminist at the Catholic Worker," which reflected upon her experiences as a Roman Catholic bisexual woman.<sup>35</sup>

Since *Indecent Theology*, there have been a number of works that have examined queer theology from a more systematic perspective. In 2002, Shore-Goss published *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up*, which contained a chapter, "Transgression as a Metaphor for Queer Theologies," which explored more fully the intersections of queer theory and theology.<sup>36</sup> In 2003, Elizabeth Stuart published *Gay and Lesbian*

<sup>31</sup> See Robert Goss, *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 181–90.

<sup>32</sup> See Gary David Comstock and Susan E. Henking, eds., *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Continuum, 1997).

<sup>33</sup> Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology*, 163.

<sup>34</sup> See Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*.

<sup>35</sup> See Dykstra, "Jesus, Bread, Wine and Roses," 78–88.

<sup>36</sup> Goss, *Queering Christ*, 223–38.

*Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference*, which was a chronological history of LGBT theology and discussed how her own views on queer theology have evolved over time.<sup>37</sup> In 2007, Gerard Loughlin published *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, which was a provocative collection of essays on the intersections of queer theory and theology.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, there have been an increasing number of works on transgender theology in recent years. The earliest works, written in the 1990s, involved cross-dressing and transvestism. For example, Eleanor McLaughlin, an Episcopal priest, published an essay on christology and cross-dressing in 1993 called "Feminist Christologies: Re-Dressing the Tradition."<sup>39</sup> This was followed in 1996 by *Cross Purposes: On Being Christian and Crossgendered*, which was a monograph written by Vanessa Sheridan under the name of "Vanessa S."<sup>40</sup>

An important milestone with respect to transgender theology occurred in 2001 with the publication of Virginia Ramey Mollenkott's *Omnigender: A Trans-Religious Approach*, which was a comprehensive discussion of the problems with the bi-gender system in the context of Christianity and Judaism as well as other world religious traditions.<sup>41</sup> This was followed in 2003 with *Transgender Journeys*, coauthored by Sheridan and Mollenkott.<sup>42</sup> In the same year, Justin Tanis published *Trans-Gendered: Theology, Ministry and Communities of Faith*.<sup>43</sup> In 2004, Leanne McCall Tigert and Maren C. Tirabassi edited a volume of essays called *Transgendering Faith: Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality*.<sup>44</sup> Most recently, Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, a feminist liberation theologian at the University of Winchester, edited an anthology on transgender theology called *Trans/Formations*, which was published in 2009.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>37</sup> See Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies*.

<sup>38</sup> See Loughlin, *Queer Theology*.

<sup>39</sup> See Eleanor McLaughlin, "Feminist Christologies: Re-Dressing the Tradition," in *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol: Essays in Feminist Christology*, ed. Maryanne Stevens (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 118–49.

<sup>40</sup> See Vanessa S., *Cross Purposes: On Being Christian and Crossgendered* (Decatur, GA: Sullivan Press, 1996).

<sup>41</sup> See Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Omnigender: A Trans-Religious Approach* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001).

<sup>42</sup> See Virginia Ramey Mollenkott and Vanessa Sheridan, *Transgender Journeys* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003).

<sup>43</sup> See Justin Tanis, *Trans-Gendered: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> See Leanne McCall Tigert and Maren C. Tirabassi, eds., *Transgendering Faith: Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2004).

<sup>45</sup> See Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, *Trans/formations*; For a Jewish perspective, see Dmurza, *Balancing on the Mechitza*.

## Future Trends: Intersectionality and Hybridity

Where is queer theology headed in the future? One noticeable trend is the increasing focus by queer theologians on issues of race, class, and other factors in addition to sexuality and gender identity. These issues are grounded in notions of intersectionality from critical race theory, as well as hybridity from postcolonial theology.<sup>46</sup> As in the case with queer theology, these works are less concerned with fixed identities and identity politics, but rather with the ways in which these identities are fluid and constantly changing, depending upon the power dynamics of a given social context.

Some queer theologians of color who have addressed issues of intersectionality and hybridity include Renée L. Hill, Elias Farajajé-Jones, and myself. Hill, a lesbian African American Episcopal priest, has written about developing a "multireligious, multidialogical" process that arises out of her own "multiply intersected life." For Hill, this means examining sources from other religions in the African Diaspora, including Islam, Santeria, Akan, Yoruba, Vodun, Buddhism, Judaism, and Humanism. She notes that black liberation theologies need to be "knocked off-center" by entering into a "multidialogical process."<sup>47</sup>

In addition to Hill, Elias Farajajé-Jones, a bisexual and biracial theologian at the Starr King School for Ministry, has written about the lethal intersections between homophobia, biphobia, AIDS-phobia, sexism, and heterosexism within the African American community. According to Farajajé-Jones, these oppressions arise out of a "Eurocentric interpretation of Christianity, which is rooted in an either/or view of the world" that is "quite literally killing us." He concludes that a truly prophetic black theology would join the struggle against "heteropatriarchy, the source of multitudinous forms of oppression."<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> For some recent theological works on hybridity, see Brian Bantum, *Redeeming Mulatto: A Theology of Race and Christian Hybridity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010); and Patrick S. Cheng, "Rethinking Sin and Grace for LGBT People Today," in Ellison and Douglas, *Sexuality and the Sacred*, 105–18.

<sup>47</sup> Renée Leslie Hill, "Disrupted/Disruptive Movements: Black Theology and Black Power 1969/1999," in *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone's Black Theology and Black Power*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 147.

<sup>48</sup> Elias Farajajé-Jones, "Breaking Silence: Toward an In-the-Life Theology," in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume II, 1980–1992*, ed. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 158.

Finally, much of my own theological reflection has related to my multiply intersected life as a queer Asian American theologian. For example, I have written about the experiences of LGBT Asian Americans due to multiple naming, multiple silencing, multiple oppression, and multiple fragmentation.<sup>49</sup> Like Hill, I cite the importance of reclaiming other religious traditions—for example, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Hinduism—as well as other rites, rituals, and sacred spaces.<sup>50</sup>

As Robert Shore-Goss has written, one danger of queer theology is a "gay theological hegemony" that excludes other voices in "various shades of contextualities." In other words, Shore-Goss encourages LGBT theologians to be in dialogue with the diverse contextual and liberation theologies that have emerged since the 1960s, including Latin American, black, womanist, Latina/o, Asian, Asian American, Native American, disability and other theologies. Shore-Goss has encouraged the development of new "shades, variants, and tonalities" in queer theologies, and that is precisely what many queer theologians of color are seeking to do.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> See Patrick S. Cheng, "Multiplicity and Judges 19: Constructing a Queer Asian Pacific American Biblical Hermeneutic," *Semeia* 90/91 (2002): 119–33.

<sup>50</sup> See Patrick S. Cheng, "Reclaiming Our Traditions, Rituals, and Spaces: Spirituality and the Queer Asian Pacific American Experience," *Spiritus* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 234–40.

<sup>51</sup> Goss, *Queering Christ*, 253.





## Study Questions

1. What are the four strands in the evolution of queer theology? Are these categories mutually exclusive or not?
2. How would you characterize the main purpose of apologetic theology? Liberation theology? Relational theology? Queer theology?
3. Which strand of queer theology speaks the most strongly to you? Which strand is the least appealing to you? Why?
4. Have you ever used apologetic arguments to defend a theological position or doctrine?
5. What is the importance of liberation to you and your community? How is the Christian gospel consistent with liberation?
6. How does the relational strand of queer theology help to ensure that women's (and, in particular, lesbians') voices are heard?
7. What do you think about the emergence of bisexual and transgender theologies? How do such theologies challenge sexual and gender binaries?
8. What are some future trends of queer theology, particularly with respect to intersectionality and hybridity?