

The Controversies in Contextual Theology Series  
Series Editor: Lisa Isherwood, University of Winchester

*Controversies in Feminist Theology*  
Lisa Isherwood and Marcella Althaus-Reid

*Controversies in Political Theology*  
Thia Cooper

*Controversies in Body Theology*  
Edited by Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood

*Transformations*  
Edited by Lisa Isherwood and Marcella Althaus-Reid

*Through Us, With Us, In Us: Relational Theologies in the  
Twenty-first Century*  
Edited by Lisa Isherwood and Elaine Bellchambers

*Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*  
Paul Hedges

*Controversies in Contextual Theology Series*

# Controversies in Queer Theology

Susannah Cornwall



scm press

IRA J. TAYLOR LIBRARY  
THE ILIFF SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
DENVER, COLORADO

© Susannah Cornwall 2011

Published in 2011 by SCM Press

Editorial office

13-17 Long Lane,

London, EC1A 9PN, UK

SCM Press is an imprint of Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd  
(a registered charity)

13A Hellesdon Park Road

Norwich NR6 5DR, UK

[www.scm-canterburypress.co.uk](http://www.scm-canterburypress.co.uk)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,  
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted,  
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,  
photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of  
the publisher, SCM Press.

The Author has asserted her right under the Copyright,  
Designs and Patents Act, 1988,  
to be identified as the Author of this Work

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available  
from the British Library

978-0-334-04355-3

Typeset by Regent Typesetting, London

Printed and bound by

CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

## Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
Introduction	1
1 What is Queer?	9
2 Is Queer Theology Synonymous with Gay Theology?	43
3 Is Queer Theology Inherently White or Western?	72
4 Is the Bible Queer?	114
5 Is the Christian Theological Tradition Queer?	147
6 Should Queer People Stay Christians?	191
7 Other Controversies in Queer Theology	224
Conclusion	251
<i>Works Cited</i>	257
<i>Index of Biblical References</i>	287
<i>Index of Names and Subjects</i>	288

## Introduction

In this book I seek to give an overview of work of the major scholars working in queer theology and queer biblical studies since the 1980s. There are certain questions which arise over and over again when considering the nature and utility of queer theology: questions about how to hold together ambivalent identities, about the extent to which any identity category is exclusive and essentialist, and about whether theology and biblical criticism informed by queer discourse represents a break with the Christian tradition or is in fact representative of a strand already existing within Christianity. Unsurprisingly, therefore, controversies in queer theology echo controversies in theology more broadly, especially those to do with who has the authority to make and disseminate theological assertions.

However, there is an additional complication to bear in mind: whereas some Christian theologies have sought to be normative and assimilationist and have asserted that theirs represents the most true or perfect understanding of a particular element of human talk about God, queer theologies have often rejected their own finality or incontrovertibility, because of a suspicion of absolutism or conceptual imperialism. Marcella Althaus-Reid characterized this as 'a queer theological praxis which by definition has the instability of a becoming and not the certainty of an arrival' (Althaus-Reid 2008, p. 109). This means that queer theologies are, almost by definition, less self-aggrandizing and less evangelical (with a small 'e') than some of the theological methodologies they seek to resist. To acknowledge the huge diversity and disagreement even between those whose theology and biblical criticism falls under the queer umbrella, as this book seeks to do, might seem to erode the utility

or persuasiveness of such an ambiguous trope. However, it is important to note from the outset that queer theology is, in some sense, an outsider discourse, and always stands in a difficult relationship to the ecclesiastical and academic mainstream even where it is not actively opposed. Even if it has been done largely by those whose university or seminary context renders them relatively cushioned and privileged, both economically and physically, in comparison to those who work 'on the ground', queer theology has sometimes been a dangerous label with which to be associated.

Many Christians consider themselves and their religion unproblematically to have succeeded, fulfilled or superseded the Judaism in which their own faith is rooted. However, Christian reflection on the Hebrew Bible is greatly indebted to both historical and contemporary Jewish research. Where I draw on Jewish scholarship, I do so with the acknowledgement that this cannot unproblematically be woven into a web of Christian discourse and with grateful thanks for the way Jewish theological discourse and biblical criticism help to show up for Christianity its mixed, jumbled and heterogeneous history. Although the remit of this present volume is to reflect upon controversies in queer *Christian* theology, it is worth mentioning recent exploration of the 'queer non-space' that is existence between religious categories, as well as across religious and secular queer theories. This is the context of Frederick Roden's 2009 edited volume, *Jewish/Christian/Queer*, in which the 'queernesses' of all three identities are read together: Christianity, a sometimes uneasy synthesis of Jewish and Greek thought; Judaism, simultaneously a religion and a race, and abjected by later Christian anti-Semitism; and queerness, marginalized by socio-sexual conservatism in some strands of both Judaism and Christianity. Roden argues that

[Q]ueer theology's strength is in its use of metaphor to authorize and explain difference rather than to make accommodations between past and present . . . I call for a similar stance towards history in order to release limits of fixed identity politics for both Jewishness and Christianity. (Roden 2009b, p. 7)

Roden suggests that the fact that both Judaism and Christianity contain queer theological strands in their traditions, but that these are much more often outrightly named as queer in Christian theology, is evidence of the way in which *all* Judaism is always already considered queer and other in a normatively Christian world (Roden 2007b, p. 7). The New Testament itself shows Paul struggling with questions about whether a Christian need also be a Jew: Paul the Jew suspects in Romans 1 that Gentiles are easily led into sexual temptation, drawn to queer desires that are 'against nature'; yet even God somehow transcends the natural order by including Gentiles in the fold of salvation in Romans 11 (Rogers 2009, pp. 19–21, 25). The religious and sexual queernesses of being a Gentile are themselves overturned by God's excessive soteriological performance. (For further essays on the associations between Judaism and queerness – and reflection on Judith Butler's ambivalent relationship with her own Jewish heritage – see Boyarin, Itzkovitz and Pellegrini 2003.)

The field of queer Muslim scholarship is younger and less well-established, but, as in Jewish and Christian queer theologies, Muslim women and people with non-heterosexual sexualities have come to claim that their own experience is a valid source of knowledge about God and human sex. Queer Muslim interpretation, in common with Jewish and Christian queer theology and biblical criticism, draws on particular scriptural texts as especially important or significant for finding queer precedent in the tradition. For example, the Qur'anic story of Lut (known as Lot in the Hebrew Bible), and his interactions with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, is reframed by Scott Sarij al-Haqq Kugle as a condemnation of greed and oppression rather than of homosexual activity (Kugle 2003, p. 214), and has become an important site of discourse in queer Muslim scholarship (Rouhani 2007, p. 173; Kugle and Chiddy 2009, pp. 143–4) – just as its counterpart in the book of Judges has for Christians and Jews who have identified the real 'sin of Sodom' as inhospitality. Amreen Ebrahim analyses the 14 terms used in a condemnatory sense in the Qur'anic Lut narrative and concludes, 'Same-sex indiscretions are . . . put on the same ethical plane as all sorts of inappropriate opposite-sex and non-sexual activities' (Ebrahim 1997,

p. 95); homosexuality is barely mentioned in the Qur'an in comparison to adultery, suggesting that it is rather unimportant (Ebrahim 1997, p. 99). Such progressive Muslim thought and activism are grounded, claims Omid Safi, in 'the Divine injunction to enact the justice (*'adl*) and goodness-and-beauty (*ihsan*) that lie of the heart of the Islamic tradition' (Safi 2003b, p. 1). As such, queer Muslim reframings are identified not as discontinuous with the will of Allah, but merely discontinuous with some of its distortions through the tradition. Queer Muslim identity is complicated by a need to query and, in some cases, hold together the apparently conflicting matrices of homosexuality, religious devotion, social obligation grounded in religious ideology and questions of citizenship and resistance to Western imperialist hegemonic discourses of both sexuality and capitalism (Rouhani 2007, pp. 173-5; Safi 2003b, p. 2). This is heightened by the fact that many Muslims consider homosexuality as peculiarly Western and not something which properly exists in Muslim societies (Kugle and Chiddy 2009, p. 146; Siraj 2009; Yip 2004; Habib 2010a). Queer Muslims thereby have to balance yet another possibly conflicting element of identity.

Queer Muslim theology and interpretation is moving away from apologetics toward proactively queer reading, grounded in activism: Ibrahim Abraham notes the work of the Muslim group Queer Jihad, whose members read the Qur'anic and Hadithic *mukhannath* (effeminate men) and *khasiyy* (eunuchs) as proto-queer figures (Abraham 2007, p. 4.6), and of other queer Muslim activist movements such as Al-Fatiha in the USA and Imaan in Britain (Abraham 2007, p. 4.2). For more recent reflections on specifically queer Muslim experience, see Shah 2010, Kelly 2010, Musić 2010, Khan 2010, Abraham 2010, Yorukoglu 2010, Atay 2010.

I have utilized more direct referencing, and longer quotations, in this book than are standard in a work of academic theology. This is done consciously, as a way in which to allow more voices than my own to remain audible. It is not possible to engage with every author as fully as I would like, and it would be unrealistic to expect every reader of the present book to be already familiar with those theologians and theorists to whom I can give only a superficial treatment. Dealing in breadth sometimes means compromising depth, and it is inevitable that glossing

an argument sometimes elides its sense; there are times at which only hearing someone's original words will do. I hope my readers will be encouraged to go back to the original texts from which I can only quote snippets and fragments, and to interrogate and celebrate them further. If there are moments when I have unwittingly misunderstood or misrepresented an argument or a motivation, then I can only apologize and hope that those I have wronged, or their advocates, will do me the privilege of letting me know so that this conversation might be a multivocal and ongoing one.

There is another important reason for letting the voices of those who have worked on questions of queer theology over the last few decades speak for themselves. I myself am a heterosexual woman, married to a heterosexual man. As far as each of us knows, we are female and male respectively. The chapters below will show that there is much debate over the extent to which a heterosexual person can be considered queer or can speak about queer theologians. Some people believe that a heterosexual can only ever be an ally to queer people rather than claiming queerness themselves; others say that queering is about a rejection of more than heteronormativity and that it is the responsibility and task of heterosexual married people just as much as others to queer discourses of regulatory race, class, gender and sexuality. I do not claim a right to speak on behalf of others: rather, I seek to speak *with* them, reflecting on how queer theology implicates and interrogates all Christians, whatever their sex, sexuality and gender identity. Nonetheless, I am aware that the society in which I live grants me certain privileges not afforded to those whose gender, sexuality and 'race' are often deemed non-normative or non-ideal. It is not my intention to patronize, misrepresent or equivocate about anyone else.

The theologians and biblical scholars whose work I draw upon come from a range of Christian (and some Jewish) traditions, and hold a range of identities. Many identify as lesbian or gay, others as heterosexual and some simply as queer. One of the things which queer theology has done so effectively, in common with feminist, postcolonial and other post-modern theologies, has been to highlight the importance of individual location and context in formulating theology. That non-heterosexual

people's experience qualifies them to respond differently, and legitimately, to the Bible, was one of the foundational assumptions in early lesbian and gay theology. A person's sexual orientation is often a fundamental part of the way in which they encounter and interpret texts. Even so, I have chosen not to segregate or, at times, identify queer, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) and heterosexual scholars, for I suggest that this risks reinscribing stereotypes about each group: rather, I have chosen to utilize their work thematically, in terms of its implications for queer theology. Grouping together scholars who (for example) critique white bias via queer theology, despite the fact that they themselves have diverse sexualities and identities, may be deemed naïvely to perpetuate an unhelpful universalism. Nonetheless, I believe that it would be just as naïve to suppose that knowing someone identifies as gay rather than heterosexual, or bisexual rather than lesbian, tells us everything about their allegiances and intellectual assumptions.

It is my privilege to reflect in this book on long theological careers, and theological work which has spanned several decades and is still ongoing. However, this also presents certain challenges. Some of the established scholars who have come to be so important in the field of queer theology, like Robert E. Goss and Elizabeth Stuart, started out by characterizing what they were doing as gay or lesbian theology, only latterly coming to utilize the queer label. For this reason, it will be important for the reader to note carefully the dates of work cited. I have attempted to draw special attention to work published prior to the mid-1990s, since it is possible and indeed likely that scholars' ideas, allegiances and even identities may have shifted in this time, and that they may no longer stand by opinions expressed some years ago. However, it is of course possible that ideas can change even over a much shorter period of time. Readers should be aware that I cite work important and influential at a given time, but this does not mean that its author still necessarily endorses it exactly as it was.

Ring in my ears during the preparation of this book have been two things: the television-mediated noise of the vuvuzela trumpets blown in celebration at the 2010 (Association) Football World Cup in South Africa; and the words of Elizabeth Stuart, describing the symbolic 'foot-

ball match' taking place between groups of Christians seeking to claim authoritative pronouncement on homosexuality and Christian ethics, while gay and lesbian Christians are confined to the sidelines 'watching scholars tackling each other for the ball of our lives' (Stuart 1995, p. 1). The fundamentalist and the conservative Christian, says Stuart, kick the ball into goals marked 'homosexuality is a perversion' and 'homosexuality is not chosen but is still condemned' respectively. The liberal dithers around with the ball, kicking it up and down the field, stands with it in the middle, makes a lukewarm pronouncement about homosexuality falling short of an ideal, and eventually 'scuttles off the pitch before the crowd and players can get him' (Stuart 1995, p. 1). Finally, the radical, who is well-versed in feminist theology and biblical criticism, suggests that lesbian and gay people, *too*, are well able to make serious commitments, and that lesbian and gay people, *too*, should be allowed to marry – as though this reflection of heterosexual relationship were the highest and most desirable mode of human love imaginable. It would be fair to say that the debate has moved on since 1995, with more overt support for non-heterosexual Christians from their allies and less commitment to heterosexual marriage as an ideal to which all must aspire. Nonetheless, those who reflect on issues of queer theology from a position of 'outsiderhood' – as I do myself – will do well to keep in mind Stuart's words as she concludes, devastatingly:

[The radical] awaits the adoration of the crowd but the only sounds are of splatters of rage coming out of the fundamentalist and the conservative, and the anxious perspiring of the liberal in the changing-room. The radical cannot understand it: he is hurt, he has risked his reputation, even his career, to speak out for lesbian sisters and gay brothers. He turns to the crowd: 'What *do* you want then?' he shouts in exasperation. And with one voice the answer booms: 'Can we have our ball back please?' (Stuart 1995, p. 2)

The queer theologies of recent decades, while not unproblematically an expansion of liberation theologies (for reasons we shall see below), have served and continue to serve a vitally liberative function in the lives

of queer Christians and others who have found themselves and their modes of life and love written out of signification. That queer theology has proven tenacious and vigorous enough to generate its own controversies and debates is testament to the commitment of those who have refused to let themselves be erased from theology's and biblical criticism's past and present. For all of those whose work is discussed and cited herein and for those whose theological exploration has never made it into writing but which has nonetheless been part of a groundswell of queer human-divine relationality, I give thanks.

# 1

## What is Queer?

The minute you say 'queer' you are necessarily calling into question exactly what you mean when you say it. There is always an implicit question about what constitutes 'queerness' that attends the minute you say the word. (Harper, White and Cerullo 1993, p. 30; quoted in Walters 1996, p. 838)

When we come to think about or analyse something – an idea, a phenomenon, a movement – we usually like to know a few basic things about it, in order to sketch out its limits and to help us contextualize it among all our other, existing knowledge. However, when we are dealing with queer theology or indeed the broader queer theory with which it is associated, things are not so simple. As we will see throughout this book, many of the controversies surrounding queer theology stem from attempts by various groups to say that the thing *they* do is queer theology, in a way that the things done by others are not – while simultaneously querying whether queer is something that can or should be defined at all. As such, the question 'what is queer theology?' is an open-ended one, which will be examined and re-examined throughout this book. But the very concept of queer has built into it from the start an idea of elusiveness, uncertainty, non-fixity, and a resistance to closed definitions. It is therefore extremely difficult to set out what exactly queer is.

Indeed, 'queer', an odd term which serves the treble function of noun, verb and adjective, is often characterized as being more a critique of the concept of identity or definition than an identity or definition in its own right. It is almost impossible to give a neat breakdown of queer

with which to start our journey. This elusiveness is significant in itself, as we will see. Nonetheless, it is possible to give some hints or pointers to the kinds of ideas addressed and encompassed by queer theologies and broader queer theories.

For some older speakers of English, the main connotation of the word 'queer' may still be a sense of oddness or strangeness, with a possible hint of wrongness attached. Indeed, in recent history, until the 1960s or thereabouts, this was the way the word was usually understood. 'Queer' first appeared in the English language in the sixteenth century (possibly borrowed from the German *quer*, meaning odd or oblique), carrying with it a sense of being across or against something. Phrases such as 'queer fish', used to mean an eccentric or unusual person, still exist and do not carry the specifically sexual implication that queer has latterly come to have.

During the early decades of the twentieth century, 'queer' came to be used as a derogatory slang term for a homosexual person or his/her activity. For many people, this sense is still the prevailing one. Why, then, we might ask, have an entire critical theory and, subsequently, a theological movement, arisen around what is basically an insult? It is not possible to pinpoint with any certainty when the term queer first started to be reclaimed by homosexual people as an empowering term, but it is evident that this trend was well underway by the 1980s, and was catalysed by the formation in the late 1980s and early 1990s of lesbian, gay and bisexual activism groups such as Queer Nation (which used the slogan 'We're here! We're queer! Get used to it!').

Queer critical theory has often been especially concerned with exploring the reasons why homosexuality is considered abnormal or perverse in many societies, and seeks to uncover or demystify the ways in which heterosexuality is made normative. In these terms, 'queer' is used to suggest that non-heterosexuality is, indeed, 'abnormal', but that 'normality' is not necessarily an unproblematically good or positive thing. Queer theology sometimes borrows terminology and methodological background from queer theory, resisting and interrogating heteronormativity (that is, the notion that heterosexuality is the best or only way for every individual and for societies) in specifically theological terms.

As we will see, however, this does not necessarily mean that queer theology equals lesbian and gay theology. For some people, queer and LGBT are basically synonymous; for others, queer's ability to question and resist various normativities is not just about sexuality, but about all kinds of dimensions of life and theological concern. Queer theology has been variously characterized as a theology of resistance to social norms (as by those who parody or reclaim the term historically used as an insult); a theology pertaining in particular to sex; a theology for lesbians and gay men, which seeks to justify their lifestyles; a theology accepting or endorsing a range of sexualities and genders; a successor to feminist and liberation theologies; a theology of deconstructionism; and a cynical attempt to 'twist' the 'biblical truth' about human sexuality. Queer theology is informed to varying extents by the underlying background work done in secular queer theory, though queer theologians and biblical scholars exhibit a wide range of familiarity and agreement with its tenets. This can be confusing: when one reads a theologian utilizing the language of queer, one might assume they are drawing on Judith Butler, Michel Foucault and other figures, whose work is significant within queer theory, but this is not always the case. For example, the theologian Elizabeth Stuart remarks of Robert E. Goss' writing in 1993's *Jesus Acted Up* that

his use of the term 'queer' may give the superficial impression that he has taken on board the full implications of a Foucauldian approach but in fact he uses the term as a short hand for gay and lesbians [sic] acting in transgressive coalitions. (Stuart 2003, p. 86)

Moreover, as we will see, theologians fall into different camps in terms of whether or not they consider queer a break with the Christian tradition. As Rachel Muers notes, some theologians who have utilized queer theory, such as Eugene F. Rogers, consider there to be a close affinity between queer hermeneutics and classic theological concepts such as participation in the Trinity. In this way, says Muers, Rogers and others consider that 'queer theology becomes more "orthodox", and more sympathetically engaged with a wide range of theological thought, than



the gay and lesbian theologies that preceded it' (Muers 2005, p. 445). By contrast, she says, other theologians such as Marcella Althaus-Reid consider queer theology basically deconstructive of theological orthodoxy, believing that it has generally been used to reinscribe oppressive norms of heteropatriarchal authority. Discussion of this tension and difference, shown to be simultaneously troubling and generative, will appear throughout this book.

In the following chapters I focus on some of the major themes arising in discussions of queer theology: is queer theology synonymous with gay theology? Is queer theology inherently white or Western? Is the Bible or the Christian theological tradition queer? Should queer Christian people, in all good conscience, remain affiliated with the Christian tradition at all? First, however, in this opening chapter, I outline some of the problems and ambiguities surrounding the use of the very word 'queer', particularly as this relates to theology. I address tensions surrounding the fact that queer as a movement has often refused to submit to categories of identity and explore whether this ontological aloofness renders queer too inherently 'slippery' to be theologically useful. The first half of the chapter covers some of the major ideas within queer theory that are important to understanding queer theologies; readers who are already familiar with the background and terminology of queer theory, or who are less interested in it, may wish to skip ahead. The second half of the chapter begins to focus on queer theologies specifically.

## Theoretically queer

### Definitions

David M. Halperin, the critical theorist, famously described queer as

by definition, *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers* . . . 'Queer' . . . demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative – a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men. (Halperin 1995, p. 62)

Halperin's 'definition' of queer is distinctly strange, in that it is entirely provisional. If queer is *whatever* is at odds with the dominant, then perhaps different things must be considered queer at different times and in different places, depending on what is dominant at those times and places. It is therefore not surprising that this book focuses on the areas of theology where 'queer' is shown most starkly to be indefinable, and to be used in many different ways, by its proponents. Alexander Doty gives a slightly narrower account of queer than Halperin's; for Doty, 'Queerness . . . is a quality related to any expression that can be marked as contra-, non-, or anti-straight' (Doty 1993, p. xv; quoted in Walters 1996, p. 835). This is, perhaps, a less unexpected picture of queer, identifying it as concerning sexuality in particular. However, as we will see below, for Doty (as for some other critics), being 'anti-straight' does not necessarily imply non-heterosexuality. Opposing heteronormativity (discussed in more detail below) is more subtle and complex than that.

Another famous portrayal of queer comes from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who suggests that queer can refer to 'the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, or anyone's sexuality aren't made . . . to signify monolithically' (Sedgwick 1993, p. 7). In other words, queerness concerns not just a homosexual resistance to heterosexuality, but a deconstruction of an unquestioned heteronormative picture even by those who are themselves attracted to people of another gender. In Sedgwick's account, knowing that someone is female does not mean we can also assume that they are feminine or that they desire sexual relationships with men. This multiplicity and openness is echoed in the many ways in which queer is claimed and characterized theologically, as we will see. Queer theology is not only controversial in contrast to a theological 'mainstream', if such a thing exists, but is also controversial internally, because it contains a plethora of interior arguments and contradictions.

Importantly, however, we must be aware from the outset that the existence of this difference in dissent does not point to the *failure* of queer theory or queer theology. Indeed, in some accounts, it is precisely the existence of dissent and uncertainty which gives queer its very

vibrancy and potential, since it is not fixed or static. Donald E. Hall, after Sedgwick, has noted that the etymology of the word queer, from the German and Latin *quer*, 'adverse', implies being *across* or *athwart* several categories, traversing several at once (Hall 2003, pp. 12–13). In this account, the very concept of queer resists definition, and refuses to be limited to just one category or just one classification: like the concept of God in apophatic theology, it is not possible to say quite what queer is, but much easier to recognize what queer is not. There is not a total consensus about what queer actually is, either from its proponents or its detractors. Nonetheless, at various times the term queer has been used more 'content-fully' than at others, which means (as we shall see in more detail below) that some people understand queer theology as basically synonymous with lesbian and gay theology, while others understand it quite differently.

#### Judith Butler

One of the most significant theorists whose work has been seminal to queer theory more broadly is Judith Butler, the author of texts such as *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993) which have become foundational in gender studies and critical theory. Like Teresa de Lauretis and others, Butler has expressed ambivalence about the efficacy of the actual terminology of queerness, in part because of the ways in which it can be misused. Using similar logic to that later expressed by Halperin, Butler insisted in 1993 that 'queer' could not be an identity in the same way as 'woman' or 'homosexual' were identities, even if it had begun to be seized upon in this way by some gay men at the time. Rather, it was a profoundly shifting, contingent term, and this was, in fact, important to its efficacy:

If identity is a necessary error, then the assertion of 'queer' will be necessary as a term of affiliation, but it will not fully describe those it purports to represent. As a result, it will be necessary to affirm the contingency of the term: to let it be vanquished by those who are excluded by the term but who justifiably expect representation by it. (Butler 1993a, p. 230)

In other words, says Butler, failure, inadequacy and obsolescence are built into queer from the start: as soon as it is defined or claimed by one group to the exclusion of others, it loses part of its capacity to critique and resist normativity. Rather, queer anticipates and holds within itself its own destruction, which is a tenacious denial of absoluteness. This, however, is what makes queer so profoundly *itself*:

That it can become . . . a discursive site whose uses are not fully constrained in advance ought to be safeguarded not only for the purposes of continuing to democratize queer politics, but also to expose, affirm, and rework the specific historicity of the term. (Butler 1993a, p. 230)

Butler believed that 'queer' had become essentialized in its usage by some of its proponents (as white, as lesbian and so on), and that this had enforced 'a set of overlapping distinctions' (Butler 1993a, p. 228) rather than uncompromisingly resisting definition. Butler was already aware that she and other theorists were being accused of 'depoliticizing theory' by resisting identity-based politics, which had been so important since the 1960s and 1970s in terms of black civil rights, gay civil rights, and second-wave feminism. Nonetheless, she insisted that critiquing the queer subject was 'crucial to the continued *democratization* of queer politics' (Butler 1993b, p. 19) since it meant no one's claim could be final and no one group could appeal to having been more excluded than others.

This notion of queer as opposed to identity has often been repeated and is often considered foundational to queer discourse. Queer's 'aggressive impulse of generalization' (Warner 1991, p. 16) has made it unpopular in some quarters, especially from those for whom identity politics based in sexuality has been an important locus of community. In fact, however, Butler herself was not as strongly anti-identity as she is often portrayed. Rather, Butler believed that queer ought not to be used to 'paralyse' the efficacy of claiming identities, *as long as* such identities were held in a resisting way that was profoundly aware of the problematic nature of power, and of the tendency of identities to be both prescriptive and exclusive (Butler 1993b, p. 20). Queer, she asserted,

could never be 'owned' exclusively, but 'always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes, and perhaps also yielded in favor of terms that do political work more effectively' (Butler 1993b, p. 19) – and probably in unanticipated ways. Despite its distinction from gay identity, then, queer could not finally reject identity categories altogether; to do so would itself be undemocratic and too prescriptive. Nonetheless, some critics felt that Butler herself essentialized some phenomena – such as transgender, linking it too unequivocally with a capacity to queer heterosexuality (see for example Prosser 1998). Controversially as far as some lesbian and gay critics were concerned, Butler asserted that queer could be a discursive rallying-point even for anti-homophobic heterosexuals (Butler 1993a, p. 230).

Indeed, in her later work, such as the 2004 book *Undoing Gender*, Butler showed more explicitly that queer theory does not oppose identity claims themselves, but rather *regulatory* identities, which exclude some people from certain spheres of politics (which is why even heterosexual people can be queer activists) and unproblematized or 'unmarked' identities. Butler owned that self-determination in performing and maintaining gender identity relies on the existence of 'a social world that supports and enables that exercise of agency' (Butler 2004, p. 7). Identity cannot be entirely done away with; particularly, perhaps, for people claiming a more than typically 'unusual' gender identity, like those who have publicly transitioned gender, 'a livable life does require various degrees of stability . . . A life for which no categories of identity exist is not a livable life' (Butler 2004, p. 8). Indeed, Butler argued that these identities are how we come to recognize one another, since bodies become intelligible via continually 'citing', or bringing to mind, certain familiar norms (just as drag queens might cite – and exaggerate – 'feminine' tropes such as elaborate hairstyling and the use of bright or glittery make-up).

What is most expedient in queer, then, suggests Butler, is not a wholesale rejection of identity and normativity, but a conscious and ongoing engagement with *undoing* them: Butler's 2004 book title, *Undoing Gender*, implies an unknotting of constricting categories of binary

gender; a playful 'revealing' of what, if anything, lies inside the seductively bright wrappings of the gender parcel; and an acknowledgement that gender is something both done (performed by an act of choice) and un-done or not-done (imposed from outside, not chosen). However, to acknowledge our constitution by norms not of our making, says Butler, does not mean such norms always have a 'final or fatalistic control' over us (Butler 2004, p. 15); desire and identity exceed their regulation, play with it, resist it and cede to it in turn.

It is this conscious and unconscious interplay which stops them from becoming static and which, says Claudia Schippert, 'leads to the queer theoretical project of attempting to expand the realm of what can be imagined – and what can become thus livable' (Schippert 2005, p. 92). Annamarie Jagose, in her introduction to queer theory, suggests that queer 'ceaselessly [interrogates] both the preconditions of identity and its effects' while itself being 'not outside the magnetic field of identity' (Jagose 1996, p. 132). Donald E. Hall concurs that queer theorizing necessitates temporary moments of becoming in which identity is solidified, followed by regular times of 'unbecoming' in which it is shown, once more, to be inadequate (Hall 2003, p. 109). As in Butler's account, this reproduces the provisionalities and uncertainties bound up in how queer is understood and how it projects itself.

### *Foucault, subjectivity and power*

Butler, Halperin, Sedgwick and other influential queer theorists all draw on mid-twentieth-century work by poststructuralist philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and (most frequently) Michel Foucault, particularly his *The History of Sexuality* trilogy. Poststructuralist thought holds that, rather than being stable, discrete subject-selves, humans' subjectivities are constructed by the meshes and layers of power and discourse taking place all around them. For Foucault, power should be understood not simply as the overt juridico-legal kind of power which publicly imposes itself on citizen-subjects, but as what he describes as 'power-knowledge' and what Antonio Gramsci had called hegemony. Ideas circulate (and are resisted) not in an authoritative, top-down way, but multiply and

cyclically. It is power-knowledge which regulates discourse, and its effects are imposed subtly and insidiously rather than overtly. Human subjects are thus profoundly produced and maintained by whatever is going on in a given culture or society. In this account, the concept of the subject-self is claimed to be incoherent and fictive. Rather, humans exist as many different, sometimes conflicting dimensions, all of which affect the way they interact with and interpret their surroundings. This is significant because it means that concepts like 'woman', 'lesbian', the 'heterosexual subject', the 'male subject' and so on are problematized: such identities are unstable and fuzzy, rather than something irreducible. No one facet of identity is primal or essential to the self; they are all contested, and it is *through* this uncertainty and looseness that human subjectivity emerges. Performativity is an effect of power-knowledge. This is picked up particularly strongly in the work of Butler, who insists that gender is performed rather than being something which supervenes in any definite way on sex (which is also contestable).

Both Butler and Foucault seek to show that the heteronormative is fictive, by denying the authenticity and incontrovertibility of historically privileged sexed and gendered roles. Foucault's analysis of 'the homosexual' as a nineteenth-century construction that is mutually dependent on the concept of 'the heterosexual' (the one cannot exist conceptually in the absence of the other), and of sexuality as having become so discursively significant that it is now understood as a fundamental category of personality, underpins subsequent scholarship seeking to question the incontrovertibility, naturalness or permanence of heterosexuality. Although he distanced himself from the poststructuralist label, Foucault's work is often recognized as part of a poststructuralist canon which asserts that the subject-self is not a coherent or stable entity so much as a palimpsest written and overwritten by social discourse and interrelation. Texts, historical figures and other entities are read multiply and uncertainly, influenced by the position and perception of the interpreter. 'Truth' is therefore polyphonic, existing and arising in and through multiplicities of interpretation. In terms of sexuality, this entails reframing sexuality as something produced and influenced by power dynamics, rather than something innate or unmarked. Foucault argues

that sexual identity, in common with other aspects of identity, is socially constructed via discourse. Since discourse is continual and contested, sexuality is constantly redefined. Schippert explains,

Viewing sexuality not as a natural attribute of a person, but rather as (one of) the constellations that give rise to the meaningful and intelligible construction of a modern self in the first place, queer theoretical scholarship moves away from strategies of liberating the oppressed or repressed part of an inherent sexuality, to placing greater significance on the critical examination of the discursive productions of sexual identity in its connection to other categories of meaning. (Schippert 2005, p. 91)

Foucault's analysis of power, especially in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1979) and *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (Foucault 1990), is particularly significant for queer studies, since it sets out a notion of power as arising from multiple sites and continually contested. This disturbs some of the binary tropes entrenched in structuralism, such as sign/signified and (importantly) heterosexual/homosexual and male/female. If power arises from everywhere, there is always the possibility that it can be transformed and redeemed. Power can generate as well as repress. This interpretation is not unproblematic: even the process of transformation involves exercising power and might thereby be understood as itself in thrall to systems of control. Liberation from social and conceptual imprisonment can therefore never be as simple as a 'good' oppressed person overthrowing a 'bad' oppressor. A continual re-examination of discourses of empowerment and emancipation is necessary, in order to identify elements which are themselves becoming oppressive – a process which occurs cyclically as queer theory and queer theology interrogate narratives of identity and culture.

Other tropes often picked out from Foucault and Butler, and held up as particularly important in queer studies, include the concept of queer as a critique of norms. Critiquing norms does not necessarily mean simply resisting them, though this will be important at times; rather, critiquing implies reflection on one's own relationship to norms and the

ways in which one refuses and/or reproduces them. Foucault identifies critique as the process of subjects questioning the mutual interrelations in the productions of power and of truth. Simply to reject a particular norm is not enough, for this alone does not begin to interrogate *why* and *how* norms are produced and maintained. All this is important in considering the relationship of queer theory to the dominant cultural discourse and of queer theology to 'mainstream' theology: using this kind of logic, queer can never be a simple rejection of heteronormativity<sup>1</sup> (for example), but must also be self-critical and self-interrogative, giving space to query normativity itself and reflect on the ways in which all motives are mixed and all structures of power are dubious

*Problematizing queer*

At least in the English language,<sup>2</sup> the term 'queer' has a history of being used as a derogatory insult for those who are homosexual, its etymologies including difference or oddness, suspiciousness, strangeness and being questioning or ruinous. In recent years, it has been 'reclaimed' by some of those people against whom it was formerly used as an insult, who have rejected the idea that *they* are wrong or illegitimate, but have said that what they do expressly seek to 'spoil', 'ruin' or 'jeopardize' is the heterosexual matrix and the imposition of solely heterosexual norms. Queer is often therefore now considered a positive and empowering term. This reclaiming or turning of the term queer might be considered a kind of appropriation, or catachresis, a term used in postcolonial discourse (especially by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) to denote 'the process by which the colonized strategically appropriate and redeploy specific elements of colonial or imperial culture or ideology. As such, it is a practice of resistance through an act of usurpation' (Moore 2006, p. 37; cf. Spivak 1991, p. 70). Indeed, I will show later that postcolonial theories of hybridity and resistance might be useful tools for queer theology to think with. However, Rebecca Alpert comments, 'For some of the wilderness generation, the term queer often has negative associations. They are not comfortable using a term in self-reference that has been used by those who have oppressed them . . . It is not easy to forget the

problems of the past' (Alpert 2006, p. 67). This is of particular importance to understanding the complex interrelations and overlaps between the term queer and the term gay as used by homosexual people. Queer is often understood as a more militant term, but Farhang Rouhani notes that it is problematic to characterize gay merely as mainstream and queer merely as radical in terms of politics. Rouhani says,

The implications of such a distinction are that gay politics capitulate and are inauthentic, while queer politics resist and are thus authentic. Such a valorisation of queer politics is simultaneously useful and deeply problematic . . . The politics of differentiation and authenticity in such a construction runs the risk of withholding the possibility of a critique of queer complicities. (Rouhani 2007, p. 169)

Knowing that people call themselves queer or belong to a queer group does not automatically mean they are more socially or politically extremist than people who identify as gay instead. Indeed, they may not be homosexual, but bisexual, heterosexual or something else.

The elusive nature of queer, then, is not a coincidence and has in fact been deemed ideologically crucial. As we have seen, it is, in some respects, problematic to conceive of claiming a 'queer identity', since queer upsets the very concept of identity-as-concrete even if it has also been linked to various identities at various times. Iain Morland and Annabelle Willox, for example, argue that it was the rise of HIV/AIDS in the early 1980s which transformed queer from what had basically been a gay-synonymous identity into a newly political strategy. Identity politics, which had been so important during the 1970s, proved irrelevant to the virus: although initially called a 'gay disease',<sup>3</sup> it soon became clear that people of diverse sexualities and gender identities were vulnerable. Morland and Willox suggest, 'Queer activism's necessity and urgency lay in its challenge to the notion that identities could classify people, keep them safe, and keep them alive' (Morland and Willox 2005b, p. 2). The boundaries of political identity were exposed by HIV/AIDS as weak or meaningless: identifying as heterosexual did not prevent one from being vulnerable to the virus. Anyone could contract it, regardless



of whether they considered themselves homosexual. This became crucial to the subsequent queer political movement which, while acknowledging the legitimacy of multiple sex, gender and political standpoints, also attempted to find 'a cultural diversity that surpasses the notion of identity' (Morland and Willox 2005b, p. 3). To 'be' queer, or even to speak of 'queer people', is, therefore, in this account, inadequate or at least ironic, for to do so fails to recognize queer's profound distinction from other political identity movements, as something which disturbs identity – or is even, for some commentators, *post*-identity.

Of course, this refusal to be tied down by categories of identity is a double-edged sword: while acknowledging the inadequacy and provisionality of political designations, as Halperin says, queer's lack of specificity 'has also become its most serious drawback' (Halperin 1995, p. 64), since some commentators argue that this might lay it too readily open to appropriation by people who do not find themselves in a marginalized position in society. Queer theory might, in other words, become yet another weapon in the hands of those who already have a whole arsenal of legitimacy, tradition and power on their side, rather than being 'reserved' solely for those who want to query the reality and hegemony of grand narratives and the norms reproduced through them. Moreover, some have argued that, without a clear identity or definition, queer might be used simply as a cipher for any non-normal sexual practice and might, as Sheila Jeffreys, Suzanna Danuta Walters and Elizabeth Grosz fear, be used to encompass phenomena such as paedophilia with no sense of moral judgement attached (Jeffreys 2003, p. 34; Walters 1996, p. 838; cf. Isherwood and Althaus-Reid 2004, p. 9). Grosz, for instance, claimed in 1994,

'Queer' is capable of accommodating, and will no doubt provide a political rationale and coverage in the near future for many of the most blatant and extreme forms of heterosexual power games. They too are, in a certain sense, queer, persecuted, ostracized. Heterosexual sadists, pederasts, fetishists, pornographers, pimps, voyeurs, suffer from social sanctions: in a certain sense they too can be regarded as oppressed. (Grosz 1994, p. 113)

This, however, is to ignore queer's frequent appeal to justice and freedom in sexual relationships, where freedom for all participants necessarily entails informed consent. Moreover, it is to misunderstand queer's lack of attachment to any one ideology. To resist and question a given norm does not mean endorsing its opposite norm. Rather, queer is about new and creative forms of morality which engage critically with all kinds of behaviour without giving trite, glib, pat answers about the way forward.

Many commentators argue that it is not desirable or possible to think about queer outside the context of lesbian and gay history, since, although queer usually resists regulatory identity, it is in opposition to heteronormativity and heterosexual identity specifically that queer has proven most incisive and resistant. Late-adopters of the concept may, it is argued, come to it too naïvely, not cognizant of its loaded history which is profoundly bound up with struggles for justice and safety (cf. Loughlin 2008, p. 149). As Alpert notes, 'The term queer resonates differently for people who lived through a time when everyone was hiding and when being labelled queer meant something much more threatening than the current generation could imagine' (Alpert 2006, p. 67). Yip and Keenan suggest, from a slightly different angle, that 'queering is about the mobilisation of lesbian and gay experiences . . . to counter heterosexist hermeneutics' (Yip and Keenan 2009, p. 94). Here, we might understand queering, activities which make or enact queerness, as having a necessary *grounding* in the biographies of those who have resisted or queried heteronormative theologies because of their own sexualities, but as *not* necessarily being limited either to sexual issues or to utilization only by those who identify as homosexual. Indeed, Schippert notes that queer resists all dominant discourses, of which heterosexuality is only one kind (Schippert 2005, p. 91). Once the hegemony of heteronormativity has been cracked by appeals to lesbian and gay life-stories, its stranglehold on other areas also begins to be loosened. This is reinforced in Butlerian terms by the assertion that, although gender is always operative within human relationships, it operates in different ways when these relationships are expressed via queer sexualities. The characterization of all men as sexual predators and all women as prey, for example, is thus grossly inadequate, and Butler rejects Catharine

MacKinnon's account of gender as 'the congealed form that the sexualization of inequality takes' (Butler 2004, p. 53).

Queer theory is highly conceptual, and has sometimes been criticized for being too intellectual and divorced from grassroots activism (a criticism also levelled at queer theology, as I discuss below). Its strong emphasis on deconstructing normativity – in all areas of discourse but particularly with regard to resisting essentialist conceptions of sex and gender – is grounded in highly analytical critical theory which may be somewhat opaque for those not versed in this style of intellectual discussion. Interestingly, queer theologians have often not engaged explicitly in their writing with Butler, Foucault and the other theorists whose work underlies queer theory. In some cases this lack of acknowledgement of critical theory may be motivated by a desire to make queer theology more accessible than queer theory has often been, even while retaining its emphasis on praxis (albeit not always realized) and resistance. However, it also seems that the use of the term queer within theology is much broader than within queer theory itself, and that in fact not every queer theologian is even familiar with queer theoretical discourse. This represents both a positive expansion of the ways in which the term is used and understood theologically, and a possible problem: if queer theologians do not use the term in the same way that queer critical theorists do, this may make queer theology less credible as an intellectual discourse and may limit the extent to which queer theology can credibly critique secular queer theory. This should be borne in mind both throughout the rest of this chapter, where I begin to set out some specifically theological queer concerns, and throughout the book in its entirety.

## Queering theology

### *More than sexuality*

As we have already seen, queer theology carries over from queer theory a certain absence of definition, a resistance to being neatly contained. Nonetheless, it is possible to point to some of the ways in which queer theology has been rolled out, and some of the especial areas of concern

associated with it. It is important from the beginning to note that queer theology has been treated with suspicion by theologians of many different stripes, not just those who might be considered particularly likely to oppose homosexuality. Marcella Althaus-Reid notes,

Disconcertingly, queer theologies have been criticized from opposite ends of the spectrum, from historical liberation theologians to conservative evangelicals . . . The historical feminist liberationists . . . have not even yet completely come to terms with gender issues beyond the equality paradigm. For them sexuality tends to be seen as a frivolous distraction from issues of social justice and women's rights in the Church. In a sense they see queer theologies as a luxury which only privileged women in academia can afford to pursue. At the other end of the theological spectrum conservative evangelicals view queer theologies as a source and consequence of all the evils and corruption in society. (Althaus-Reid 2008, p. 106)

Althaus-Reid makes clear that sexuality is a crucial element, under-analysed in classic liberation theologies, which queer privileges. However, this has sometimes been overstated, to the extent that one common conception is that queer theology is only or inevitably to do with sex. Within queer religious writing, comments Mark D. Jordan, queer often 'seems to cover any topic somehow connected with sex, gender and sexuality' (Jordan 2007a, p. 568). In the recent sociological collection *Contemporary Christianity and LGBT Sexualities* (Hunt 2009a), there seems to be a reiteration of the association of 'queer' with 'sexual', even if not exclusively *homosexual*; Hunt suggests that the shift within queer theology specifically has been from justifying LGBT desire and behaviour and 'towards the exploration of wider theological themes arising from these communities' (Hunt 2009b, p. 15), and it is significant that the volume in question contains several essays on bisexual and transgender Christianity (Toft 2009; Yip and Keenan 2009) as well as those on homosexuality.

To take another example, Thomas Bohache, in a 2003 essay, figures queer people as 'those identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual,

transgendered, intersexual, supportively heterosexual or a combination thereof (Bohache 2003, p. 9). Almost every possible sexual orientation is covered, so one might assume that almost every *person* is covered – which makes it slightly odd that Bohache chooses to categorize them according to sexuality at all. The fact he does not figure queer people as ‘those identifying as black Caribbean, black African, Asian, Chinese, another ethnic group, supportively white or a combination thereof’<sup>4</sup> (even though this would *also* cover everyone) is important, since it demonstrates that Bohache (and he is far from alone) understands queerness to map onto sexuality and gender identity more profoundly than onto other kinds of identity. To what extent this is problematic is discussed in much more detail in Chapter 3.

Indeed, even leaving the question of race aside for a moment, I have noted elsewhere (Cornwall 2010b) that many people with intersex conditions (for instance) have expressed strongly that they do *not* wish to be aligned with queer or to claim this as a political identity, and indeed that intersex is not an issue of sex, sexuality or gender identity at all, but is simply to do with having a specific medical condition. Similarly, many homosexual people are deeply suspicious of queer. It is therefore not possible unproblematically to imply that queer encompasses all or only those people whose ‘difference’ is marked out via categories of sex, sexuality and gender variation. Jordan notes that the overwhelming majority of early queer religious criticism – as represented in Comstock and Henking’s 1997 anthology, mostly comprising work produced between 1984 and 1996 – does *not* use ‘queer’ in the sense being hammered out within the secular queer theory of the time (that is, of a project of resistance to and querying of normativities of all kinds, even if gender performance is a common motif), but in a narrower sexual sense (Jordan 2007a, p. 568).

I will show in the following chapters that the use of queer theory within theology has come latterly to address more issues than specifically sexual ones, but that its image problem – the assumption or *perception* that queer theology is just to do with sex or, even more narrowly, just to do with homosexuality – may present a potential obstacle to its utility for theologians. This may occur because those who assume from the

outset that homosexuality is sinful, unbiblical and wrong are unlikely to be persuaded to take seriously a methodology or hermeneutic which they perceive to be inherently ‘about’ or ‘for’ homosexual people. They are therefore also unlikely to be convinced by gay-friendly apologetics or reading strategies if these are also presented through a queer theological or critical lens. Although it is positive and right that queer theology has been such a significant tool in reclaiming and emphasizing the goodness of the corporeal and the sexual as sites of God’s grace and interaction with human beings, it may be that queer theology needs to emphasize all the modes and arenas in which it speaks to *more than* the sexual, in order to be taken seriously as a methodological tool by less liberal Christians or those for whom a querying of sex and gender norms is too disturbing a way into hermeneutical suspicion. Conversely, however, it may be that to do so would be to undermine the very core of queer’s resistance, difference and outsiderhood, and that queer theology simply never will be acceptable or mainstream; this might in itself be considered methodologically and hermeneutically significant.

### *Affinities between theology and queer theory*

Mary Elise Lowe identifies six ‘insights’ that she believes queer theologies have taken on from secular queer theory. These are: a deconstructionist methodology; an assertion that all meaning is constructed; a concept of gender as performance; a belief in the instability of identity; an understanding of individuals as shaped by discourse; and a claim that the process of becoming *a* subject, and becoming subject *to* the norms disseminated via such discourse, occur simultaneously (Lowe 2009, p. 52). These affinities notwithstanding, theology’s relationship with queer theory and interpretation might seem rocky at best, especially given secular queer theorists’ sometimes vocal rejection of religious discourse and religious authority.

However, suggests Mark D. Jordan, there is a sense in which theological and queer theories do have profound likenesses, whether their respective adherents like it or not. Theology, he says, ‘lives at the boundary between theory and practice, speculation and advocacy’



(Jordan 2007a, p. 569). He goes on, 'Queer theology does come after queer theory by successful hybridization. It was also there all along inside queer theory – and, indeed, before queer theory, as its competing parent, its disciplinary root and rival' (Jordan 2007a, p. 573). Like theology, he suggests, queer theory is inevitably a *mixed* discipline, incorporating both critical analysis and activist praxis. Queer theory is in some sense theology's successor, having taken over some of the linguistic analysis which was historically theology's province – but queer theology also continues, standing contemporaneously with queer theory and persisting as a discourse which will not go away, since theological language and imagery will also not disappear from talk about bodies and sexes, however much atheist and secularist commentators might wish it would (Jordan 2007a, p. 573). This means that those who tread a tight-rope between queer theory and theology will not necessarily, perhaps, experience quite as much cognitive dissonance due to these allegiances as might be supposed.

Gerard Loughlin also suggests that there are close family resemblances between queer theory and theology. He engages directly with Halperin's understanding of queer as identity without essence, and comments, '[Gay's] range is often limited, as in "gay culture" or "gay rights"'. Queer, on the other hand, seeks and arguably has no such limits' (Loughlin 2008, p. 145). In part, this is because, as Kathy Rudy, Deryn Guest and others have noted, queerness is not inherently coincident with homosexuality but rather concerns a commitment to challenging multiple norms (see for example Rudy 1996a, p. 83, Guest 2005, p. 45). Anyone, therefore, can be queer. If this sounds dangerously universalistic, like a particularity subsuming everything within itself and eliminating difference and variation, then the danger may be mitigated by Loughlin's explanation that theology is inherently queer even and *especially* in its status as a discipline often deemed marginal or unimportant in the modern world. In actual fact, its grand-sounding 'unlimited' reach may look rather paltry in practice. Theology's current relative lack of influence, lack of authority and lack of reach in comparison with certain other times in its history is itself queer. Theological queerness, for Loughlin, is therefore not simply a question of queer theology disrupting

'mainstream' theology: rather, *all* theology is somehow simultaneously strange, weak and marginal, and potentially disruptive of a mindset which says it is possible to comprehend (or encompass) all the mysteries of the universe. Loughlin comments,

Even when theology was culturally dominant it was strange, for it sought the strange; it sought to know the unknowable in Christ, the mystery it was called to seek through following Jesus. And of course it has always been in danger of losing this strangeness by pretending that it has comprehended the mystery, that it can name that which is beyond all names. (Loughlin 2008, p. 144)

This danger, the danger of idolatry, is never far away; but the sense of mystery and haziness comes through in Christian history, most clearly in the apophatic tradition and the writings of the mystics. Loughlin holds that just as all we can properly say about God is that *God is*, so all we can say about queer is that *queer is* (Loughlin 2008, p. 151). Any closer definition risks tying God, or queerness, into small boxes or human-made distortions.

There are affinities with Loughlin's analysis in work by Cheri DiNovo, who suggests that because the Cross is somehow always 'over' Christians, to be a Christian is also to be 'under' a cross. Christians are thereby 'crossed out', X-ed out, and are by definition what-they-are-not, since they are always in a process of becoming. DiNovo figures this as particularly queer, and for her it is significant that Christ himself is also 'X-ed out', obliterated (at least temporarily) by a cross – and made profoundly 'indecipherable' because of the significance of his life and manner of his execution (DiNovo 2007, pp. 4–6). Christ himself, sometimes abbreviated to X, has a body which exists 'to give itself away to the other, for the other' (DiNovo 2007, p. 14). The Body that is the Church thereby becomes marginalized while siding with queer bodies which are also marginalized (DiNovo 2007, p. 18), but this 'X-ing out' is yet more inherent to Christianity. There are clear echoes here of Derrida's concept of erasure, whereby a word or idea cannot stand without calling upon a 'trace' of its opposite, the word or idea it contradicts. The hint

of this opposite constantly destabilizes the authority of the original concept: unhappiness only makes sense in light of happiness, and happiness (at least for anyone over the age of three) always comes with a bittersweet realization of its transience. Typographically, this erasure is symbolized by writing a word and crossing it out but letting both the word and the crossing-out remain legible. The strikethrough actually draws attention to the 'missing' word (see Derrida 1976, p. 7).

Of course, queerness itself has not always quite succeeded at such self-extenuating or 'crossed-out' apophysis: queer might well seek to 'outwit identity' and prescription, but even so, 'It can turn all too quickly from a positionality into another positivity, another identity' (Loughlin 2008, p. 149). This might be seen in such instances as the early 1990s activism group Queer Nation San Francisco, where queer was very clearly understood as another political identity both internally and by the media – which, argues Mary L. Gray, ultimately led to the group's downfall, since the adoption of a new fixed identity category did not adequately disrupt the stability of identity per se (Gray 2009, pp. 216–8; see also the final chapter of this volume). For Gray, Queer Nation San Francisco would have done better to resist media attempts at definition and to have allowed the meta-project of questioning the *concept* of difference – rather than of simply organizing around one *element* of difference – to set its agenda (Gray 2009, p. 230).

Marcella Althaus-Reid insists that queer theology, too, must be 'stubborn' in its refusal to become stabilized or fixed (Althaus-Reid 2008, p. 110). This built-in instability can seem frustrating, but what it means is that queer discourse has internal limits, a 'safety-valve', on its finality. Teresa Hornsby suggests, using the Butlerian notion that it is often all but impossible to tell the difference between the power one promotes and the power one opposes, that it is actually not possible to undertake a project or employ a methodology which is not somehow complicit in oppression even as it liberates: 'No doubt, as I write to dismantle, to deconstruct, to liberate, I also write to edify, to construct, and to oppress. Next year someone will be writing an article naming all the ways that this present project reinforces dominant destructive ideologies. Thank you, Judith Butler' (Hornsby 2006a, pp. 72–3). For Loughlin, the safety-valve

on queer discourse means that these potential problems for queerness are not insurmountable: queer might congeal around a given identity or ideology for a time, but it can also soften and flow again. Moreover, he suggests, even if it does have a propensity to 'solidify into a substantive identity' from time to time, it is still novel, different and 'outside' enough to be able to destabilize the heterosexual theological norms to whose contingency it most classically attests (Loughlin 2008, p. 150).

Loughlin's identification of theology as inherently and historically strange is picked up by Ninna Edgardh, who uses it to argue that queer theology is thereby a means by which to redetermine which stories are told about one as a community, and the stories one projects from one-self too (Edgardh 2009, p. 46). Building on this, and on Jane Shaw's and Elizabeth Stuart's essays in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, Edgardh builds an analysis of the political posturings surrounding the 2008 Lambeth Conference, from which the gay Episcopalian bishop Gene Robinson, of New Hampshire, was excluded – ironically, on the grounds of preserving the unity of the Anglican Communion, since not all the other bishops agreed that Robinson should be there (Edgardh 2009, p. 44). Edgardh concludes that queer theology provides tools for a radical reinterpretation of categories of identity, so that they are not to be rejected out of hand but rather understood (after Stuart) as sacramentally gifted, and interpreted rather than unchanging (Edgardh 2009, p. 48; Stuart 2007, p. 75; see also Valentine et al 2010).<sup>5</sup> In this way, she suggests, the Christian Churches might come to a place where they can hold together their unity-in-disunity as a testimony to the ways in which Christianity is an exemplar for how humans can live together in peace (Edgardh 2009, p. 42).<sup>6</sup> Edgardh's work represents a recent instance of queer theory and queer theology mutually reframing one another, where queer theology in its language of gift and sacrament is able to help critique queer theory's solidifying drift – even if the language of 'sacrament' as used by Stuart is sometimes so loose and imprecise as to fail to describe anything specific at all.

*Queering normativity: Queer theological discontinuity*

In the next chapter I will discuss some of the tensions surrounding the extent to which queer theology and LGBT theology supervene. It is important to note here, however, some reasons why queer's discontinuity with lesbian and gay theology might be considered so important. Claudia Schippert criticizes the early work of the theologians Robert E. Goss and J. Michael Clark for using 'queer' synonymously with 'gay', for in doing so, she says, 'conceptions of power are elided' (Schippert 1999, p. 52). In other words, she holds, in this early work insufficient account is taken of why and how gay theology might have ignored the specific concerns of lesbians, transgender people or people of colour – which is not necessarily helpful in reflecting on how queer theology might avoid the same pitfalls. Queer theory might seek to interrogate and demystify power relations, but that does not mean it is entirely immune from abusing power. Swapping 'gay' for 'queer' does not sufficiently disturb gay male hegemony if queer theology is made no more interrogative and self-critical than Schippert understands gay theology to have been. She comments,

Within the field of religion, a number of recent texts appropriate the term 'queer' – without too many troubling thoughts and more as a replacement for 'gay and lesbian' or maybe 'gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, etc.' However, foregrounding the promise of queer's lack of specificity regarding (gender-) identity, these approaches often elide the challenges 'queer' might pose to the methodologies or textual-political strategies employed. (Schippert 1999, p. 51)

Schippert goes on to claim that of the two main books with which she engages, Clark's *Defying the Darkness: Gay Theology in the Shadows* (1998) and Jeffrey Weeks' *Invented Moralities: Sexual Values in an Age of Uncertainty* (1995), both fail to properly deal with the uncertainty bound up in queer, a concept Schippert considers central to a truly radical notion of queerness. Weeks, she suggests, tries to contain it, and Clark merely sidesteps it (Schippert 1999, p. 51). It might be countered

that both these authors, but particularly Weeks writing in the early days of queer theological discourse, were simply focusing elsewhere than on theoretical queerness specifically. Nonetheless, for Schippert, Clark's idea of 'acting queerly' does not go far enough – perhaps because Clark and his partner's model of 'defiance to death' looks very much like an average middle-class, suburban, monogamous lifestyle, complete with mortgage, pets, garden and neighbourhood watch rota (Clark 1997, pp. 5–6). Clark, claims Schippert, merely integrates 'queer' into an existing liberation theological framework, but without properly working through the implications – that is, the sense that if queer is a rejection of normativity then it might have to be a rejection of (ethical) norms as well, since even liberal ethical imperatives can indurate into something static rather than remaining ever in process. Even a 'good' norm 'can be liberating in one context, [but] can also be used as tool of domination in the same or another context' (Schippert 1999, p. 48).

If this argument is right, suggests Schippert, then queer cannot be tacked onto or absorbed into gay, feminist and liberationist ethics, but must deconstruct and query these normativities just as much as it does everything else, including everything more ostensibly oppressive (Schippert 1999, pp. 50–1). Queer theory – and, by association, queer theology and queer biblical studies – is actually profoundly *discontinuous from* and *incommensurate with* the liberationist methodologies and hermeneutics with which it is often linked. (This is an important criticism and I will return to it throughout this book.) Goss and others also meet with Schippert's criticism for the same reason, since in texts such as Goss' *Jesus Acted Up*,<sup>7</sup> 'possible tensions and differences vis-à-vis "liberation" and conceptions of power are elided' (Schippert 1999, p. 52). Schippert's objections to queer 'normativity', and her assertions that queer does not 'succeed' liberation theology, are discussed in more detail in the final chapter of the present volume. It is enough simply to note at this point the problematizing of a forward trajectory from feminist and liberation theologies through to queer ones.

Indeed, queer theology's shared history with feminist theology might be just as problematic for its future as its shared history with gay theology, since (argue Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood) feminist the-

ologies have tended to focus too much on questions of equality, which, they claim, are inclined to solidify into a bland glossing-over of difference and thereby fail to challenge the heteronormativity at theology's heart (Althaus-Reid and Isherwood 2007, p. 306). While feminist theologies 'have traditionally seemed to imply the continuation of a process of evolution from a patriarchal ideological interpretation of Christianity' (Althaus-Reid 2008, p. 108), the move from feminist to queer represents more of a *discontinuity*, a rupture, since queer theologies – as understood by Althaus-Reid – seek to disrupt and overturn the existing paradigm rather than redeem it largely unchanged. In this account, just as women's theology cannot be an unproblematic 'continuation' of liberation theology, since liberation theology has taken insufficient account of the reality of minority sexual lives, so queer theology cannot roll out unproblematically from feminist and womanist theologies (Althaus-Reid 2008, pp. 108–9). Feminist theologies have not represented enough of a break with traditional patriarchal modes of writing and discourse (Althaus-Reid 2008, p. 113), but queer theologies must do.

### A thought experiment: queering death

Queer theology, like secular queer theory, has often focused on issues of sex and gender. As we have seen and will see further, this might be deemed problematic, especially if issues such as race and class are thereby elided. However, this does not mean that queer theology must be sequentially univocal, considering only one area at a time. Indeed, more recent criticism makes clear that it may queer sex and other phenomena all at once. Several theologians have explored the concept of queering death theologically, and a brief reflection on this topic shows us that the deep affinity between Christianity and queerness goes beyond matters of sex, even though sexuality can never be erased from the circumstances out of which humans relate to God and to one another. Christianity's queer stream might be picked up in its concern with the miraculous and its unwillingness to accept that anything is impossible with God (as per Matt. 19.26).

Elizabeth Stuart's queer reading of the Johannine resurrection account appeals to an event which is at once the end of sex and gender as we have known them, and the end of death:

The scene repeats with critical difference the creation of male and female and the bonds of marriage in Eden. Here in a different garden, the man does not return to dust but returns from dust to life, here male and female do not cleave unto one another but let go of one another. (Stuart 2004, p. 59)

By failing to live in this transformation, by clinging to static patterns of gender and sexuality, however, says Stuart, Christianity has 'found itself out of step with its foundational rhythm of death and resurrection' (Stuart 2004, p. 60). Death is necessary for Christianity because it is this which is the gateway to the afterlife, the 'space beyond heterosexuality and homosexuality' (Stuart 2004, p. 61), which precludes our present structures of sexual relationship and family life from being claimed as absolute. (Indeed, this is evident from the wider attestation of Scripture: there is to be no marrying or giving in marriage in heaven.) This analysis is clearly influenced by a Butlerian model of queer as a disruption of regulatory identities. But Stuart takes it further, beyond a resistance to heterosexual hegemony: in a Christian understanding, *death itself* is interrupted and subverted; at the very centre of Christianity is a profound queering of the discontinuity between life and death, the ontological and epistemic separation between God and God's creatures. Stuart says,

Whatever death now involves it does not herald the absence of God, the source of life, for there is now no place where God is not. Death is not in dualistic relationship to life any more than male is to female; in fact both death and life are deconstructed in the blaze of resurrection. (Stuart 2004, p. 62)

As she asserted in an earlier essay on sex, death and eschatology, 'Perhaps the time has come to focus . . . more on sex in the next days, which is a profoundly Christian methodology. Christianity is as much

about dangerous futures as it is about dangerous memories' (Stuart 1997b, p. 204). It is about asserting a hope in the belief that death is not the ultimate divider, but something that will be and has been conquered, so that we are not in fact forever divided from those we have lost (Stuart 1997b, p. 197). Queer people are already particularly well-versed in imagining and hoping for a life after oppression and fear, and Stuart suggests that these 'visions of "life after" resonate with and stir up some dangerous memories from the Christian tradition which together challenge so much theo-sexual orthodoxy' (Stuart 1997b, p. 198). Biblical assertion about the absence in heaven of anything that looks very much like nuclear families, marriages or monogamous couples is only one example.

But death is not only an end-of-life event, stresses Stuart: the symbol of baptism means that 'Christians are sacramentally united with Christ and the performance of his death and resurrection is repeated upon their own bodies' (Stuart 2004, p. 63). Christians are at once already dead and resurrected to life in the new creation, and still living through the dying-ness of this world; and, crucially, 'The Church is mandated as the body of Christ to live out this new reality in the midst of a world still being born into it' (Stuart 2004, p. 67). Christians, then, should live as people who are already freed *both* from the melancholy of gender and from the melancholy of death (Stuart 2004, p. 69). There is no longer any need to cling to ossified categories or tired typologies of gender and sex, not only because queer discourse has undermined them, but also because the Christian hope of a new creation and a life-beyond-death *has built into it* an obsolescence and a provisionality for existing regulatory identities. In this kind of thinking, as for Jordan and for Loughlin, queer is not something 'new', but a resisting strand which has been inside Christianity all along.

Importantly, this can be traced even in those theologians who have often been identified as part of the theological bastion which reinforces tired hegemonies of sexuality and gender. It can be seen, for example, in the project of resistance to human ideology inherent in the work of the famously gender-complementarian Karl Barth. For Barth, no human ideology can ever be final or ultimate because all human activity occurs

in a sphere already encompassed in (and therefore secondary to) the love and work of God:

Since [God's] sign-giving stands in the closest possible connexion with objective revelation, like that revelation it must be regarded as a divine act . . . The given-ness of these signs does not mean that God manifest has Himself as it were become a bit of the world. It does not mean that He has passed into the hands or been put at the disposal of men gathered together to form the Church. On the contrary, what it does mean is that in Christ the world and man have fallen into the hands of God. It means the setting-up of God's lordship, not of a sacral human lordship. (Barth 1956a, p. 227)

This has the advantage of removing God from any ideology or hegemony which might claim to be the sole and unique official mouthpiece of the deity – from a 'sacral human lordship' – leaving God's freedom always unmarred by the limitations of the fallibility of human amanuenses (as Barth also stresses in *The Epistle to the Romans*, his assertion that God cannot be subsumed into human culture or dogma). It is not unimportant that Barth and his translators chose to refer to God as 'He', nor that this strongly gendered view of God and humanity – and the anthropology he pins onto it – is where Barth has since met with some of his fiercest criticism (see for example Fiddes 1990, Blevins 2005, Cornwall 2010b). This, in fact, demonstrates a significant shift, namely the way in which gender norms and assumptions have become part of what is 'uncovered' and problematized in theological discourse over the eighty or so years since Barth's work was first published. Barth's account, and the language in which it is couched, has itself been shown to be a provisional and partial version of the story even as it testifies to God's over-againstness in relation to human ideology. In other words, Christianity's queerness (as a reflection or echo of God's queerness) is so profound and so irrepressible that it can break through even where it appears to be used in the service of maintaining limiting normativities. Like death, modes of discourse from which exception and difference have been written out are shown to be less than absolute.

Indeed, Grace M. Jantzen argues that it is exactly by queering such a seemingly inescapable and insurmountable problem as death that it is possible to conceive of a creative yet inchoate 'queer language' which, by focusing on natality and life rather than resignation to death and sinfulness (Loughlin comments that 'the trope of second birth – being "born again" – only occludes our first birth or natality' – Loughlin 2007b, p. 26), might be a site for a real remaking of categories of sex and gender too (Jantzen 2007, pp. 252–3). Where even the inescapability of death is diminished by its contextualization as a moment in eternity, human categories of sex and gender are shown up even more effectively as at least partial artifice. The subversion of sex-gender structures and the subversion of death, in Stuart's and Jantzen's accounts, occur simultaneously and are in some way inextricable. This is but one example of queer theology speaking to more than just sex, sexuality or gender, albeit by scholars whose grounding in theologies and philosophies informed by feminist and lesbian criticism has placed them well to query grand narratives and recognize discursive penultimacy (even if, in Stuart's case at least, a mainstream doctrinal and confessional commitment is retained). When grand narratives are questioned and resisted, every arena of human life and experience is interrogated.

## Conclusion

There is an important duality here: queer has been shown to be something which cannot be categorized or satisfactorily defined, yet it is at the same time claimed, especially by some recent queer theologians, as something whose reach is unlimited.<sup>8</sup> As this opening chapter has made clear, there is not a stable, unproblematic definition of queer with which we can work. However, we have noted that queer is often figured as a phenomenon or methodology in a state of *opposition to regulatory normativities*. We noted, too, that although queer theology should not necessarily be considered synonymous with lesbian and gay theology (for reasons made clear in the next chapter), historically and currently it is strongly associated with questions of gender and sexuality, particularly as these pertain to *non-normative (and often non-heterosexual) gender*

*and sexuality*. For this reason, much of the subject matter addressed by queer theology and biblical studies has been sexual. However, as we have begun to see and as we explore in more detail later, queer theological methodologies should not be considered relevant to sex alone. Indeed, we saw in the work of Jordan, Loughlin and others that all aspects of theology might be understood as somehow queer, since they stand over against mainstream human ideology and (claims Loughlin) refuse to be subsumed by it.

We noted that queer has sometimes been called an ethically empty referent, since it rejects any static link between signifier and signified, and seeks to resist and critique regulatory discourse, including normativity. The question of whether it actually is ethically empty – and whether or not this is a problem – is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. However, it will be salient to bear in mind a suggestion and two questions. The suggestion is this: if queer is suspicious and interrogative of all human ideology and regulatory identity, then queer might have to be considered something more devastating and more of a break with the past than its apparent close relatives, gay, feminist and liberation theologies. Although queer theologies might be considered liberating for queer people, queer theology is not simply another kind of liberation theology. The questions are these: have the queer theologians writing over the last decade in particular been any more successful than those of the 1980s and early 1990s at negotiating queer in its definitional recalcitrance rather than freezing it into another regulatory identity? Has queer shown itself in practice to be a truly different methodology for theologians, or simply one cut from the same basic cloth as feminist and liberationist theologies and perhaps, therefore, unable adequately to critique or interrogate them?

As we move toward considering in more detail some of the controversies surrounding queer theology, then, I aim to show that this field is still in flux, and to begin to explore the implications of employing queer methodologies across theological work. To be queer is to be contested as well as to contest, since queer insists that all identity and ideology is provisional and unfinished. Throughout the volume, then, I deal not in certainty but in suggestion, and try to show that controversies in queer



theology are evidence of dynamic movement which is highly creative and fecund. The fact that there are so many voices at this table demonstrates the breadth of theologians and other commentators invested in querying metanarratives based in exclusion and demarcation, even if this does not always play out in identical ways. Queer theological discourse is still in its genesis, and much exciting and important work remains to be done.

## Notes

1 It is important to note from the outset that heteronormativity implies not merely heterosexual eroticism, but the assumption that heterosexuality is the only or most legitimate form of sexual relationship or social structure. Cultural critics Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner describe heteronormativity as 'the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organized as a sexuality – but also privileged. Its coherence is always provisional' (Berlant and Warner 1999, p. 355).

2 Although 'queer theology' is now discussed in other languages, including Dutch and German, the term is usually 'borrowed' from the English. The 'new' use of queer in these languages does not always have a built-in sense of 'crossing' or being 'athwart' or 'against' as in English. See Cornwall 2010a, pp. 24–5.

3 Before the AIDS designation became widespread, the condition was sometimes called GRID, gay-related immune deficiency (see for example Zimmerman and Zimmerman 1996, pp. 200, 202–3; Hall 2003, p. 51).

4 These are the racial categories usually used in my own British context; the US categories would read something like 'American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; White; some other ethnic group, or a combination thereof' (see for example <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/race/racefactb.html>). This varies further in other countries depending on their racial and ethnic demographics.

5 Valentine et al's sociological analysis of the interactions of pro-LGBT groups (such as the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement (LGCM), Changing Attitude, Integrity, and the Inclusive Church Network) and anti-LGBT groups (such as Anglican Mainstream) at Lambeth 2008 shows the ways in which negotiations of group identity feed back into the Church of England's and Anglican Communion's broader understandings of themselves. Valentine et al comment that LGCM's strategy of handing out rainbow ribbons in the conference 'Market-place' was designed to visibly mark out supporters, but that 'it was evident that a number of the wearers had accepted them without recognizing their symbolism'

(Valentine et al 2010, p. 931). This might be figured as an ironic echo of heterosexual normativity, paradoxically 'colonizing' non-supportive bodies as visible sites of outward endorsement; or it might be understood as an undermining of symbolic tokens of support since these can be reinterpreted and have their meanings elided. Importantly, suggest Valentine et al, 'the LGCM sought to mobilize its supporters by forcing them to "come out" symbolically by wearing the ribbon, as well generating a wider perception of numerical significance through the tactic of indiscriminate ribbon distribution' (Valentine et al 2010, p. 931). Note that the pro-LGBT groups sought to distinguish themselves not only from anti-LGBT groups but also from one another, especially where one group's tactics were considered too oppositional or confronting (Valentine et al 2010, p. 934).

6 However, it is significant that, a year after Lambeth 2008, Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, expressed regret that the Episcopal Church in the USA had ignored a three-year moratorium on appointing openly gay bishops by the election as bishop in 2009 of the lesbian priest Mary D. Glasspool in Los Angeles. Williams suggested that Canon Glasspool's appointment would shatter the agreed 'period of gracious restraint in respect to actions which are contrary to the mind of the Communion' (<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2650>), and it seemed for a time that this would finally lead to the Episcopalian Church in the USA formally seceding from the Anglican Communion. However, Glasspool was consecrated as a bishop in May 2010. Philip Giddings and Chris Sugden, convener and secretary of the conservative Anglican Mainstream group, issued a statement calling for the Episcopal Church to withdraw or be excluded from the Anglican Communion's representative bodies ([www.anglican-mainstream.net/2010/05/15/statement-from-anglican-mainstream-following-the-consecration-of-mary-glasspool-as-suffragan-bishop-of-los-angeles-usa/](http://www.anglican-mainstream.net/2010/05/15/statement-from-anglican-mainstream-following-the-consecration-of-mary-glasspool-as-suffragan-bishop-of-los-angeles-usa/)). Although their theological and hermeneutical sympathies are in many respects very different, it is likely that Williams was still feeling the legacy of his last-predecessor-but-one, Robert Runcie, who stated during the debate over Revd Tony Higon's Private Member's Motion on sexual morality to the General Synod in 1987 that to provide a less-than-united message on sexuality was dangerous. Runcie said, 'I do not deny, and cannot, that homosexual acts are condemned in the biblical and Christian tradition. It is our duty to teach the Christian ideal to our children and not to confuse them with options' (audio archived by London Broadcasting Company/Independent Radio News at <http://radio.bufo.ac.uk/lbc/index.php/segment/0014600163007>). Higon's original motion had asserted that 'fornication, adultery, and homosexual acts are sinful in all circumstances', but the motion eventually passed by 403 votes to 8 had been softened by Malcolm Johnson's amendment to state that, like fornication and adultery, 'homosexual genital acts fall short of [the] ideal and are to be met by a call to repentance and the exercise of compassion'. Rowan Williams wrote the following year that the Synod had been

'simultaneously cajoled and panicked' into passing the resolution: 'Well-meaning "liberals", equally afraid of the harshness of the original motion (about which the less said the better) and of getting involved in a genuinely theological debate on sexuality, joined hands with some of the most disturbing elements in the contemporary Church of England, those who are determined to make it an ideologically monolithic body, to produce a vote which has, in practice, delivered much of what the original motion aimed at. This shabby compromise has been held up by bishops as representing the "mind" of the Church, and accorded something like legislative force' (Williams 1988). Much frustration has been expressed in recent years at Williams' apparent stepping-back from his formerly open liberal views on homosexuality in order to preserve the unity of the Anglican Communion.

7 The title cites the political activist organization ACT UP, the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power, founded in New York in 1987.

8 However, even if this broader understanding of queer as going beyond sexual (and especially homosexual) concerns is happening in theology per se, it is not necessarily happening in queer critical reflection on religion more broadly, from disciplines such as literary criticism. Even in recent volumes such as 2007's *Catholic Figures, Queer Narratives* (Gallagher, Roden and Smith 2007), 'queer' basically equals gay and lesbian. There is a distinct absence here of some of the names familiar from and central to secular queer theory (de Lauretis, Halperin, Butler et al) with whom Althaus-Reid, Goss and other queer theologians and biblical scholars engage. In part, this is because the *Catholic Figures* writers are consciously drawing on historical literary sources instead, reflecting on novels by authors such as Oscar Wilde, James Joyce and Radclyffe Hall; however, it is also significant that any 'classic' queer theoretical underpinning is either so far assumed as to go without saying or else absent altogether. Although the focus of the volume is literary rather than critical-theoretical, the fact that the term 'queer' can be used therein without explicitly outlining its genealogy is an important testament to the term's new broader application.

## Is Queer Theology Synonymous with Gay Theology?

The totality of the meaning of queer will always be more or less than or different from its synonymity with lesbian/gay, and . . . its force, in fact, resides in the way it can be both conflated with lesbian and/or gay and used to disrupt that conflation or deconstruct lesbianness and/or gayness. (Barnard 2004, p. 10)

We want a world where gays are not only tolerated, but where the practices and sensibilities of gay and lesbian communities can be associated with long-standing goods of the Christian tradition. We want a world where gay and straight are not significant terms, especially in relation to theology. Why then, I ask, write a book about gay and lesbian identity projects? And why name it *Gay and Lesbian Theologies* when what is really desired is something like post-gay and lesbian theologies, or post-identity Christian politics? (Rudy 2004, p. 109)

### Queer's genealogy in gay liberation theology

I showed in Chapter 1 that queer theory's genealogy in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) political movements is considered by some commentators to be an irreducible and ineluctable aspect of its characterization. This is also true of queer theologies, as I will explore in more detail in this chapter. Many of the writers who have subsequently come to categorize themselves and their theologies as queer started out by doing what they identified at the time as gay liberation theology,