

## TRANSGRESSION AS A METAPHOR FOR QUEER THEOLOGIES

*Theology in the United States, therefore, has undergone a shift from using a melting pot model, in which theology as officially understood sought a dominant or common human experience, to a model that values the collage of different faces, voices, styles, questions, and constructs. Black theologies, Asian-American theologies, feminist theologies, womanist theologies, theologies from gay men and lesbian women, and theologies offered from the perspectives of the disabled are all present on the scene today. Where once such differences were either ignored or belittled as "special interests," theology today is increasingly understood as having its vitality only insofar as its traditional sources embrace new voices and their differences.*

—Rebecca Chopp and Mark Taylor<sup>1</sup>

Queer theory emerged in the 1980s from AIDS activism and a new wave of political activism to counter the backlash of the new right under the Reagan and Bush presidencies. The radical politics of difference — influenced by the French postmodernists such as Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault — challenged the politics of gay and lesbian identities. A gay/lesbian academic conference, the Politics of Pleasure, held at Harvard University in 1990, brought AIDS activists and gay/lesbian academics together. The debate over whether gay and lesbian identities were essential or socially constructed was nearing its conclusion, and the social constructionists gained prominence as the popularity of Michel Foucault was on the rise. There was a synergy at the conference between street activists and academics, for queer theory was undergoing its birth pangs. The deans of queer theory — Eve Sedgwick, David Halperin, and Judith Butler — shaped its birth, giving it a contentious edge in deconstructing the ethnic model of identity politics that was shaped by Stonewall and that continued into gay/lesbian activism in

1. Rebecca S. Chopp and Mark Lewis Taylor, *Reconstructing Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 4.

the 1980s. Queer theory was an academic and political Stonewall whose significance continues to impact translesbigay academics and politics. It also challenges and will change theology.

Heteronormativity, a neologism, was coined as a new category when queer theory defined itself as an academic-cultural movement. It became a term to describe the dominant sex/gender system that privileges heterosexual males while it subordinates women and disprivileges gender/sexual transgressors. For many people, gender and sexuality are only intelligible within a heterosexual matrix. This heteronormative understanding creates a gender/sexual fundamentalism that pathologizes gender and sexual differences and fails to accept the fluidity of gender and sexual identity.

The ethnic model of the gay/lesbian movement split into two directions, typified by the publication of Andrew Sullivan's *Virtually Normal* and Urvashi Vaid's *Virtual Equality*.<sup>2</sup> Sullivan subscribes to heteronormative thinking, replicating an assimilationism by articulating a homonormativity that ignores cultural, gender, sexual, and racial differences. Conservative gays and lesbians try to assimilate into society. Thus, there are good gays who fit into society and outrageous gays who break the homonormative code. Urvashi Vaid, on the other hand, moved from an ethnic model of gay/lesbian identity to an inclusive model of gender, sexual, cultural, racial, and ethnic differences within a moral vision of creating a more just society. Her model allows for queer fluidities and differences to be mainstreamed.

Heteronormative theology is not the only orthodoxy. Lesbian and gay theologies a decade ago seldom mentioned bisexuals and never even addressed the transgendered. In the American Academy of Religion, the largest professional association of religious scholars, the Lesbian Feminist Issues Group in Religion and the Gay Men's Issues Group in Religion were formed to promote gay and lesbian voices in religion. During the last ten years, many of the major lesbian and gay theological books arose from papers delivered at the annual conferences each November. These lesbian and gay theologies have underscored their struggles against the hetero/homosexual categories, making significant scholarly contributions and critiques based upon affirmative lesbian and gay identities.

Many gay and lesbian theologians have, however, fallen into a trap that makes hetero/homo sexual preferences the exclusive metacate-

2. Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995); Urvashi Vaid, *Virtual Equality* (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

gories of sexual identity. There are other homosexuals who do not fit into the categories of heterosexual, lesbian, and gay. The idea of a unitary gay or lesbian identity has been fundamental to the formation of gay/lesbian theologies. But these theologies have framed identity on the assumption that gays are like an ethnic group; we have minoritized our identity based on our homoerotic desires and attractions. But do our sexual attractions to men unite us like an ethnic group? Or as we probe beyond this surface of ethnicization of sexual desire, do we find a great deal of difference and hybridity?

Cultural critic Steven Seidman notes recent critique of the ethnic model:

The dominant ethnic model of identity and community was accused of reflecting a narrow white middle-class, Eurocentric experience. The very discourse of liberation, with its very notion of a gay subject unified by common interests, was viewed as a disciplining social force oppressive to large segments of the community in whose name it spoke.<sup>3</sup>

The minoritization of male sexual identity does not neatly fold into the categories of gay normativity. Neither bisexual men nor female-to-male transsexuals nor the intersexed fit neatly into our gay template. Elias Farajaje-Jones speaks of an "in-the-life" identity for a range of African American males attracted to the same gender or both genders.<sup>4</sup> Hispanic American, Asian American, and Native American men have social constructions of identity that may not easily be subsumed under the category of gay since it is frequently constructed as white, middle-class male. Gay identity can be as confining as "closetedness" in its minoritization and elision of the social-cultural differences of same-sex desire while privileging white gay males.

While gay/lesbian theological works have concentrated mainly on questions of homosexuality, queer theory has expanded its realm of investigation to sexual desire, paying close attention to cultural construction of categories of normative and deviant sexual behavior. Queer theory expanded the scope of its queries to all kinds of behaviors linked to sexuality, including gender-bending and nonconventional sexualities.

3. Steven Seidman, "Identity and Politics in a Postmodern Gay Culture: Some Conceptual and Historical Notes," in *Fear of a Queer Planet*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 125.

4. Elias Farajaje-Jones, "Breaking Silence: Toward an In-the-Life Theology," in *Black Theology*, ed. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 2:139-59.

It analyzed sexual behaviors, all concepts of sexual identity, and categories of normative and deviant. These formed sets of signifiers, which created constructed social and cultural meanings. Queer theory is a set of ideas based around the notion that identities are not fixed and do not entirely determine who we are. As a field of inquiry, queer theory shifts the emphasis away from specific acts and identities to the myriad ways in which gender and sexualities organize and even destabilize society.

Queer theory claims that sexual categories shift and change. It differs from earlier gay/lesbian identity politics by arguing that sexual identity and even the gender templates are not fixed but rather elastic. Here are some examples that threaten identity categories:

A woman marries a man, but years later she realizes her deep attraction to women and then comes out as a lesbian. Several years later she realizes that she is bisexual and comes out again.

A colleague of mine came out in divinity school as a lesbian. Now she and her lesbian lover of many years are gaytrans males. Butch dykes are now identifying as transmales. There are lesbian leather boys and lesbian daddies who perform a wider range of masculinity than heterosexual males.

In Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, Roy Cohn describes himself to his doctor as a heterosexual man who has sex with guys.<sup>5</sup> There are many ethnic men who do not identify as gay or bisexual because they take on the penetrator role in sexual intercourse with other men. They self-identify as heterosexual. Or the group of married men, who identify themselves as heterosexual, get together for sex.

A queer man who loves men may sleep with a close woman friend to conceive a child or just because they are close. They maintain joint custody and raise the child together. Or the British journal *Gay Times* announced, "Sex between gay men and lesbians is coming out of the closet. . . . Now people talk openly of their opposite sex-same sexuality lovers."<sup>6</sup> If self-identified lesbians and gays are partnered sexually, how do they then define themselves?

5. Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on American Themes, Part One: Millennium Approaches* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1992), 45.

6. Quoted in Marjorie Garber, *Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 46.

There are heterosexual women who identify as gay men. They dress in gay fashion and date men. The trendy gay male ghetto culture has become less about sexual liberation than brand-name and cultural style.

Postmodern sexualities demolish the neat social categories of sexuality and gender with multiple subjectivities and fluid desires. Gay, lesbian, bi, trans, and hetero do not have the stretch to comprehend the fluidity of desires and identities. Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimmel have produced *Pomosexuals: Challenging the Assumptions*, a volume on postmodern sexualities, inclusive of "multiple subjectivities" and fluid desires. None of the contributors fits into neat gender or sexual categories. The editors comment, "Pomosexuality (postmodern sexuality) lives in the space in which all other nonbinary forms of sexual and gender identity reside—a boundary-free zone in which fences are crossed for the fun of it, or simply because some of us can't be fenced in."<sup>7</sup>

People change their sexual identities over the course of a lifetime. Bodies draw on a wide variety of gender performativity. Some change gender without changing embodiment while others later change their embodiment. Some queer folks disrupt the gendered meaning of their genitals by mapping out a new terrain of gendered performativity by decoupling gender from their genitals, while others couple their performativity to a change of genitals. Transgendered people may often feel themselves in contrast to their physical bodies and genitals.

Many folks refuse to be categorized into a sexual identity while others have accepted their narrative identities. People cross from normative spaces into "queer" ones when they do not line up in expected ways—when a man wears a dress or desires men. Provincetown annually celebrates a weekend of heterosexual transvestite men and their partners. Bisexuality destabilizes the notion of sexual identity as fixed while transgendered identities render gender instable as a category of citation. Thus, sociologist Steven Seidman observes, "Queer theory, the aim is not to abandon identity as a category of knowledge and politics but to render it permanently open and contestable as to its meaning and political role."<sup>8</sup>

7. Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimmel, eds., *Pomosexuals: Challenging Assumptions about Gender and Sexuality* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1997). See also C. Jacob Hale, "Leatherdyke Boys and Their Daddies: How to Have Sex without Women or Men," *Social Text* 15, nos. 3 and 4 (fall-winter 1997): 223–39.

8. Steven Seidman, ed., *Queer Theory/Sociology* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 12.

### Queer studies

Queer studies thus represent a paradigm or discursive shift in the way some scholars view sexual identity. Queer studies attempt not to abandon identity as a site for knowledge and politics but to problematize fixed and hegemonic notions of identity:

Queer theory is suggesting that the study of homosexuality should not be a study of a minority — the making of the lesbian/gay/bisexual subject — but a study of those knowledges and social practices that organize “society” as a whole by sexualizing — heterosexualizing or homosexualizing — bodies, desires, acts, identities, social relations, knowledges, culture, and social institutions.<sup>9</sup>

Queer theorists argue that identities are always multiple, hybrid, provisional, or composite and that an infinite number of identity markers can combine to form new sites of knowledge. For queer theorist Michael Warner queer is a transgressive paradigm, representing “a more thorough resistance to the regimes of the normal.”<sup>10</sup> Likewise, David Halperin states, “Queer, then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative — a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or who feels marginalized because of her or his sexual practices.”<sup>11</sup> Michael Warner, David Halperin, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and other theorists perceive the queer paradigm as resistance to normativity, including heteronormativity and gay and lesbian normativities.<sup>12</sup>

Queer is often understood as critically nonheterosexual, transgressive of all heteronormativities and, I would add, homonormativities. “Queer” turns upside down, inside out, and defies heteronormative and homonormative theologies.<sup>13</sup> I use “queer” theologically, not only as an identity category but also as a tool of theological deconstruction, for

9. *Ibid.*, 13.

10. Michael Warner, introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet*, xxvi.

11. David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford, 1995), 62.

12. See Warner, ed., *Fear of a Queer Planet*; Steven Seidman, ed., *Queer Theory/Sociology*; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

13. For a sampling, see the following authors' discussion of queer: J. Michael Clark, *Defying the Darkness: Gay Theology in the Shadows* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1997), 6; Robert E. Goss, *Jesus ACTED UP* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), xix, 55–57; Goss, “In-surrection of the Polymorphously Perverse: Queer Hermeneutics,” in *A Rainbow of Religious Studies*, ed. J. Michael Clark and Robert E. Goss (Las Colinas, Tex.: Monument Press, 1996), 16–19; Warner, introduction, xxvi; Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, 60–66.

“queer” as a verb means “to spoil or to interfere.” Heteronormative theologies exclude me except in their hermeneutics of abomination while gay/lesbian normative theologies exclude those who do not neatly fit into the categories. When I queer or spoil an already spoiled hetero- or gay-normative theological discourse, I have transgressed the boundaries of normativity that are embedded in particular discourses and practices. In traditional theological language, queering has a prophetic edge in its critiques.

I want to address the hermeneutical role of normative transgression in emerging queer theologies and for the future development of hybrid queer theologies. In other words, I want to queer the template of gay normativity. In *The Mythology of Transgression*, cultural critic Jamake Highwater describes several negative metaphors for transgression: as abomination, deformity, and science. He perceives some positive metaphors of transgression, such as sensibility, culture, and revelation. The commonplace understanding of transgression is a violation of morality. Highwater asserts:

[T]he word “transgression” is generally understood to mean an action that is morally subversive. A transgression is closely associated with the religious idea of damnation. Therefore, we do not admire those who transgress. We reproach them as sinners. And the more “terrible” the transgression, the more we reproach them. We may ridicule them, disdain them, beat them, imprison them, or we may even kill them. But the worst of all punishments is doubtlessly our attempts to redeem them, to change them from their sinful ways to our blessed ways.<sup>14</sup>

The Latin *transgredior* means “to pass over, to go beyond, or to advance.” *Transgredior* is an action that carries a person across fixed boundaries or beyond borders. Transgression destroys traditional boundaries or undermines established paradigms by revealing their fragility and instability. It challenges modes of regulating discourse: Who is canonically allowed to speak? Who is allowed entry? Who is denied access? Who can speak for me?

Michel Foucault understood transgression as resistance to normalizing practices of master narratives. Foucault said in an interview, “To resist is not simply a negation but a creative process.”<sup>15</sup> Transgression

14. Jamake Highwater, *The Mythology of Transgression: Homosexuality as Metaphor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 42.

15. Quoted in Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, 60.

is not merely a rebellious act but a Foucaultian liberative action driven by the imagination of alternative possibilities and hopes. Along with Highwater, I comprehend transgression primarily as "an act that brings about transformation."<sup>16</sup> Transgression is essential to the hermeneutical development of queer theologies and queer hybrid theologies.

I am going to focus on the need for transgressing or queering my own normativity as a white, gay male who writes queer theological discourse from a privileged, middle-class location in a midwestern U.S. university. I propose that future queer theologies not only will transgress the binary divisions of hetero/homo, gay/lesbian, and male/female but will develop new hybrid sexual theologies that free the signifiers from the tyranny of normative signifieds. I want to transgress even my own signifiers from the logic of gay normative identity. Mine becomes one queer site among many others for constructing theology and requires dialogue with other sites of identity.

### Queering gay boundaries

Michel Foucault's treatment of homosexuality as a strategic positionality instead of a psychological essence initially inspired queer studies. Foucault suggested that gays should resist categorization and undermine all reifications of sexual identity. David Halperin observed, "Foucault's approach also opens up, correspondingly, the possibility of a queer politics defined not by the struggle to liberate a common, repressed, preexisting nature but by an ongoing process of self-constitution and self-transformation — a queer politics anchored in the perilous and shifting sands of non-identity, positionality, discursive reversibility, and collective self-intervention."<sup>17</sup> Foucault's legacy is a constant, postmodern subversion of the paradigm(s) into ever-widening margins of conversation. "Queering" or transgressing the queer is concerned to include everyone and to speak for no one in particular. Let me further problematize gay identity with two concrete examples.

One of my undergraduate students at Webster University had announced to a gay group that he was a "bisexual gay." A veteran gay activist who had grown up in the Stonewall era told him emphatically, "You can't be both. You got to be one or the other." For that veteran activist, my student was uttering sheer nonsense, messing up his conceptual category of gay identity. My student muddled the category of "gay"

16. Highwater, *Mythology of Transgression*, 43.

17. Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, 122.

with its fixed markers and normative boundaries by not conceptualizing in either/or dichotomies but affirming his identity within "both/and" categories of bisexual and gay. His inclusive queerness questioned established gay boundaries; it transgressed fixed identity templates of straight, bisexual, and gay. Is identity so easily confinable to fixed markers that frame the self, body, desire, and actions? Or may it be more fluid, hybrid, or contestable than we ever imagine? Can ambiguity, liminality, and diversity be included in a new queer discursive shift and subsequently in a queer theological discourse?

Another example that subverts my own identity categories concerns a lesbian bouncer at a gay bar. I came to know her as a butch lesbian who dates women. She questioned her identity as a woman and as a lesbian, realizing first that she was male-identified and that she was a male trapped in a female body. But her crossover from female to male may not end where I might first anticipate, for she became a gaytrans male dating gay males. He now lives on the border regions of gender categories and sexual identity, an immigrant transgressing a culture of gendered and sexual citizenships. My attempts to understand her transition within the logic of binary gender were short-circuited like a Zen koan. Understanding emerges from the narrative histories of transsexuals themselves.

Transgendered writers Leslie Feinberg and Kate Bornstein have critically interrogated our gendered categories, suggesting that much of our gender difficulty is comprehending gender as a reified essence, with a limited range of normative expressiveness.<sup>18</sup> They trouble our gendered conceptions with fluid possibilities and new potentialities of transgendered by living in interstitial cultural spaces. They denounce the binary logic of heterosexist and gay/lesbian constructions of gender, abandoning the talk of gender boundaries.

Postmodern sexualities complicate even the identity of heterosexuality. Yale professor Laurie Essig speaks of "heteroflexibility," the newest variation of heterosexual identity. It is a semantic strategy adopted by college students to keep their sexual options open. She describes the heteroflexibility of her students:

This means that the person has or intends to have a primarily heterosexual lifestyle, with a primary sexual and emotional attachment to someone of the opposite sex. But that person remains

18. Leslie Feinberg, *Transgendered Warriors* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994); Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

open to sexual encounters and even relationships with persons of the same sex. It is a rejection of bisexuality since the inevitable question that comes up in bisexuality is one of preference, and the preference of the heteroflexible is quite clear.<sup>19</sup>

Here postmodern heterosexuals can envision indulging in homosexual sex. Essig divides society into the categories of heteroflexibility and heteroridity and homoflexibility and homoridity. Such a grid is a reworking of the essentialist and constructionist debates around sexual identity. Essig envisions a postmodern, queer world beyond the mire of the rigid binaries of "hetero" and "homo" with multiple subjectivities and fluid sexual desires.

These examples trouble heterosexuals as well as many gays/lesbians who think in reified binary constructions of gender and sexual orientation. They upset residual essentialist understandings of gender. They also upset those binary thinkers in religious discourse—whether Jewish, Christian, or Islamic—who are already grounded in all-encompassing religious narratives that are used to sustain a regime of compulsory heterosexuality and fixed, hierarchical gender relations. Postmodern thinkers have been welcomed in the academy without much turmoil, but queer postmodern theologians are marginalized because they threaten the very gender and sexual codes upon which those master narratives have been constructed. I want to look at postcolonial theory that advances beyond the aesthetics of postmodern deconstruction for a thorough queer discourse as the basis for future queer sexual theologies.

Some postcolonial theorists introduce a notion of hybridity that undermines the normative categories of modernity and postmodernity of the First World. Homi Bhabha writes about hybridity:

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.<sup>20</sup>

19. Laurie Essig, "Heteroflexibility," *Salon Magazine*, November 15, 2000.

20. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 4.

Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity and interstitial space allows for liminal spaces in which cultural differences can be articulated. When applied to the categories of gender and sexual orientation, hybridity and interstitial space allow for the movements between fixed categories of sexual orientation and gender as well as admitting the tensions between cultural identity markers. Hybridity becomes conscious practice, allowing for interaction between identity categories and markers. The notion permits the emergence of new identities from cultural dis-identifications and the emergence of sexualities that rigid gender- and sexual-orientation stereotypes prohibit.

For theology, queering becomes a productive style of theological practice and discourse that can disorganize our normative categories. Queer desire crosses all identity and gender boundaries; it is ineffable, an ever-shifting transgressiveness that uncovers ever-new hybrid identities. For example, asserting an African American "in-the-life" or Native American "two-spirited" identity does not adequately articulate the differences that have to do with religion, geography, relation to gay, white males, gender, class, age, ability, education, and so on. Frank Browning's latest book, *A Queer Geography*, investigates how geography shapes homoerotic desires and identities, demonstrating what anthropologists and cultural historians have argued for some time how cultures organize structures of sexual identity.<sup>21</sup>

Queer theory has deconstructed the colonial category of "gay" as white, North American, middle-class, late-capitalist, and even middle-aged. Gay identity seems too hardened, too mainstream a category for adequate queer theological reflection, and too inflexible for developing a full queer politics of difference. It is the same critique that I would make of heteronormative theologies and postmodern theologies. Queer has widened my self-definitions by navigating me into uncharted waters where I engage in conversations with people whose identities are shaped by particular markers and personal experiences quite different from my own. These experiences are challenging, engaging, and ever-widening. I find myself theologically committed to engage and learn from different worlds, cultures, histories, and communities. Queering is

21. Frank Browning, *A Queer Geography: Journeys towards a Sexual Self* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1996); Rudi C. Blyes, *The Geography of Perversion* (New York: New York University Press, 1995); Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, eds., *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer, *Sexuality and Eroticism among Males in Moslem Societies* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1992); David E. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

ultimately opening space to new immigrant identities to articulate their own perspectives, quite radical and even challenging to my own.

I am prepared to argue that my own theological positions, like identity categories, are only tentative and that they need to be subverted from a gay/lesbian paradigm into uncharted territories and geographies of diverse sexual and gender hybridities. If I am to take "queer" as a serious paradigm for theological discourse and practice, I need to engage not only bisexual and transgendered voices but also the voices of the intersexed and of men and women of color who share homoerotic desires. In *Jesus ACTED UP*, I wrote from a queer perspective that was limited to gay and lesbian voices. I remember a bisexual student from Eden Seminary who challenged me, "Where is my bisexual voice?" That comment greatly troubled me while I fumbled for an explanation of my postmodern commitments to particularity and apologetically pointed to the voices that have shaped my queer theological practice. At the 1994 Freedom Celebration in San Francisco, I encountered a transsexual, Victoria Kolakowski, who challenged my gendered categories and ever since has mentored me to an awareness of transsexualism and theological discourse.<sup>22</sup> How many others could raise the same question from social locations of the ethnic, the underclass, the illegal immigrant, or other communities?

In a recently coedited volume, *Our Families, Our Values: Snapshots of Queer Kinship*, my commitment to hybridity led me to recruit multicultural, multigendered, and multisexual voices from Christian, Buddhist, Wiccan, and Jewish perspectives.<sup>23</sup> By no means does this volume exhaust the sexual and gendered fluidities of multicultural and multireligious queer identities. It only begins the process of uncovering sexual and gendered hybridities. Mona West and I were committed to include translesbian perspectives in our anthology, *Take Back the Word*. Our inclusion of diverse perspectives was good, but not good enough. There is always the need to include other forgotten voices.

My evolving queer perspective is committed to deregulate heterosexual as well as gay hegemony by articulating a variety of gender and sexual differences: lesbians, gays, bisexuals, drag queens, transsexuals, transgendered, leather folk, and even queer heterosexuals. Queer sig-

22. Victoria S. Kolakowski, "Toward a Christian Ethical Response to Transsexual Persons," *Theology and Sexuality* 6 (March 1997): 10-31; Kolakowski, "Eunuchs and Barren Women: Queering the Breeder's Bible," in *Our Families, Our Values: Snapshots of Queer Kinship*, ed. Robert E. Goss and Amy Adams Squires Strongheart (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1997), 35-50.

23. See Goss and Strongheart, eds., *Our Families, Our Values*.

nifies not only those attracted to the same gender or both genders but also anyone who defies the dominant structures of normative sexual templates or even the normative templates of the gender system.

### *Critiques: new transgressions and hybridity*

There is much current debate in and around queer studies; much of the debate revolves around the assimilation of tendencies of segments of the gay community into mainstream culture. Sociologist Steven Seidman, however, criticizes queer theory for "denying the differences by either submerging them in an undifferentiated oppositional mass or by blocking the development of individual and social differences through the disciplining compulsory imperative to remain undifferentiated."<sup>24</sup> Seidman and other critics have raised vital questions whether a liberation movement can build political cohesion based on the violations of normative structures. On the other hand, queer raises questions about the nature of our social identities as multicultural, multigendered, and multisexual. Its critics like Seidman and others fear that queer will elide hard-fought differences. Objections to queer theology find similar criticisms from some lesbian and gay theologians in their failure to engage different notions of postmodern sexualities and genders. While admittedly queer does muddy the distinctions among sexual-identity categories and the differences between men and women, it also raises epistemological questions about the stability of these templates of sexual and gendered identity. It subverts our normative assumptions about identity and gender while articulating the varied particularities of emerging hybrid voices. In its transgressions, queer discursive practice may decolonize our identity and gendered templates because multigendered and multicultural sexual identities navigate us into a radical inclusion of voices that trouble heteronormative- and gay-normative theological discourse. Engaging in what appears to be "Balkan-style," carnivalesque dialogues of diversity subverts our attempts at universal but exclusionary theological discourse. They force us to deal with the plurality of social context and personal narrative histories about sexual desire.

Will queer theologies remain queer, or will queer theologies ultimately transgressively reinscribe themselves into some new hybrids? If queer theologies remain open-ended theological discourses that participate in a creative dialogue with the various hybrid subcultures of

24. Seidman, "Identity and Politics," 133. See also Seidman, introduction to *Queer Theory/Sociology*, 1-29.

desire and gender, of outsiders and insiders, of diverse social locations, then new sexual and gendered hybrid theologies will emerge. Let me speculate on some new transgressions. Bisexual theologies will certainly undermine gay/lesbian and heterosexual theological discourse. Both gay/lesbian and heterosexual theologies subscribe to the politics of otherness with an either/or paradigm while bisexual theologies represent a subversive alternative to either/or thinking. They stress a both/and method that undermines either straight or gay methods of theological reflection and promote mediating methods to bridge hetero and gay theological discourses. Veteran gay/lesbian theologians have a difficult time disprivileging their own discourse and allowing the multiple voices to disrupt their discourse.

As we immerse ourselves in the narrative histories and theological discourses of Asian American homosexual men, bisexual womanists, or biracial female-to-male transsexuals, we may learn about sexualities in the plural, their instabilities, and the different social/cultural constructions of hybrid sexual identities. We may also learn about the multidimensional and multicultural perspectives of sexual identity. Hopefully, we may expose all traces of privilege within our own theological discourse, any traces of American white supremacism, centrism, sexism, classism, or biphobia. Thus we may become more responsible in making new hybrid voices accessible.

Transgendered theologies, likewise, raise some profound questions and presumptions about gender. Gender-bending and intersexuality threaten a society that maintains gender rigidity. Transgendered and intersexual activists are only recently raising their voices to further widen the sex and gender liberation movement. While transgendered theology is only in its infancy, we can expect it to undermine heteronormative and gay/lesbian normative constructions of maleness and femaleness with new interstitial gender spaces.

The development of bisexual and transgendered theologies will offend some by their inclusiveness, moving beyond binary thinking of hetero/homo and deconstructing rigid gender boundaries. Bisexual and transgendered theologies will threaten far more those gays who want to assimilate into mainstream society. There are many ways to be queer, and future queer theologians will connect those ways with the networks of power relationships that shape race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, class, physical conditions, age, and our relationships to the earth. Rather than assimilate, future queer theologies will mainstream and celebrate sexual/gender diversities, shifting theological practice into uncharted intersections of sexual, gendered identities. During the

twenty-first century, queer theologies will undergo profound changes as the contextual translesbigay theologies emerge from postcolonial Asia, Latin America, and Africa, critiquing and disorganizing our queer categories.

Queer theologies, I may conclude, will not ever abandon identity and gender as categories of knowledge or liberative practice but will render them open and contestable to various meanings that promote coalitional politics. Queer discursive practice will challenge our theological discourse based on a narrow regime of sexual and gendered truth by undermining our identity templates of heterosexual/homosexual and gender categories of male/female. Can we meet the challenge of being mentored by new queer voices? The challenge is unsettling, but I find it also thoroughly queer. Let me quote queer theorist Michael Warner:

Queer politics has not just replaced older modes of lesbian and gay identity; it has come to exist alongside those older modes, opening up new possibilities and problems whose relation to more familiar problems is not always clear. Queer theory, in short, has much to do just in keeping up with queer political culture. If it contributes to the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age, it may make the world queerer than ever.<sup>25</sup>

Queer theory aims not to abandon sexual and gender identity as an epistemological category but to render it more flexible, permanently open to revision, and changeable.

### Postscript

Postmodern sexualities and new gender constructions become a paradigm for reconstructing Christian practice and traditional theology. They represent a millennial paradigm shift in theological discourse, or what Michel Foucault has described as the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges."<sup>26</sup> Sexual and gender diversity provides a new paradigm for reinvesting the dead doctrines and practices of an erotophobic, gender-rigid Christianity. Queer sexual theologies have begun to concentrate on several questions: how sexuality and spirituality are connected; the fluidity of sexual identity and gender constructions; sexual relationships; rereading the biblical texts and the Christian tradition from a queer perspective; how spirituality and sexuality affect our attitudes and

25. Warner, introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet*, xxviii.

26. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 82.

practices toward God, self, and neighbor; how the church relates to sexuality/gender in mission, worship, sacraments, and rites. The erotic spiritualities of translesbigays have the potential to revitalize Christianity.

A queer theology can proceed only from critical analysis of the social context that forms our experience, our struggles, and our emergent, innovative, and transgressive sexual practices. Such a theology is an organic or community-based project, including our sexual contextuality, a commitment to radical inclusion, and the realization that our theological arguments are always tentative and open to revision from new contextualities and new emerging voices.

I am grateful to be in a church where queer inclusion is a primary value. Within my church there is a transgendered support group that meets. My learning about transgendered issues has been accelerated by my supervision of one of our clergy's doctoral dissertation on transgendered theology. I am convinced that the only way I can remain faithful to my vocation as a queer theologian is to remain open and to listen to the narrative histories of peoples different from myself. Oppressed, excluded, and marginalized peoples must remain as my mentors while I mentor younger queer theologians to transgress my theology.

T. WELKE

## FROM GAY THEOLOGY TO QUEER SEXUAL THEOLOGIES

*And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters will prophesy, and your young men [and women] shall see visions, and your old men [and women] shall dream dreams.*  
—Acts 2:17

In attempting to envision what future directions queer Christian praxis and theology may take in the twenty-first century, I have no particular clairvoyant gifts to offer. But I can make some reasonable speculations by examining how the translesbigay Christian movement came into existence, its organizational developments, and directions for theological growth and practice. At the heart of my speculations is the belief or rather the hope that queer Christianity may partner with progressive elements of various Christian denominations to form a new church committed to a sexual reformation of Christianity and committed to justice-love.

The lesbian/gay Christian movement developed during the radical 1960s and the revolutionary 1970s to solidify theological growth. Theological growth has accompanied the organizational growth and complex development of the queer movement in the twenty-first century. Groundbreaking for the emergence of gay theology was Derek Bailey's *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* in the mid-1950s.<sup>1</sup> Bailey, a heterosexual scholar, traced the development of homophobia from the biblical texts through the formation of Christian practice and theology in the early and late Middle Ages. Homosexual theology started in the late 1950s with Robert Wood's *Christ and the Homosexual*, followed by the blossoming of homosexual theology in the 1970s with such works as Tom Horner's *Jonathan Loved David*, John McNeill's *The Church and the Homosexual*, and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott's and Letha Scanzoni's *Is the*

1. Derek Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1955; repr. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1975).

# QUEERING CHRIST

*BEYOND  
JESUS  
ACTED  
UP*

**ROBERT E. GOSS**

