

**Cornwall, Susannah (2011). *Controversies in Queer Theology*. London: SCM, 294 pp. (paperback).** “Susannah Cornwall is Honorary Research Fellow and Occasional Lecturer in theology at the University of Exeter” (Backflap). She says: “I myself am a heterosexual woman, married to a heterosexual man....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” (5).

“*Controversies in Queer Theology* provides a broad overview of historical and ongoing developments in the field. Susannah Cornwall shows how queer theology grew out of earlier lesbian and gay theologies and how it has come to address concerns not limited to sexuality specifically. Drawing on work from both theological studies and biblical criticism, Cornwall assesses questions of debate and dissent, including: Is queer theology inherently white or Western? Are the Bible and Christian theological tradition queer? Should queer Christian people in all good conscience remain affiliated with the Christian tradition at all? Is queer theology too intellectual or theoretical to be of any use in non-academic settings? Do queer theology’s deconstructionist tendencies mean it is incapable of providing ethical guidance on the ground? Suitable for readers with no prior knowledge of queer theory, the book provides an accessible but rigorous assessment of this emergent theological area” (Backflap).

Susannah Cornwall has written a wonderfully helpful and challenging book with a marvelous 30-page bibliography of “Works Cited”—and often summarized (257-86)—including, for instance, 9 works of Ken Stone of Chicago Theological Seminary. I was thus surprised to note the lack of any references to his colleague, Ted Jennings, who also has been a major contributor to the development of queer theologies (see my reviews, including that of Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, much cited in Jennings’ *Jacob’s Wound* 2005). Also lacking are references to the outstanding gay Catholic theologian James Alison. Regarding Islam, in her Introduction (1-8), Cornwall comments: “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”; here she mainly cites two works of Scott Sarih al-Haqq Kugle (p. 3). Had she been able to include Kugle’s latest monumental work, *Homosexuality in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010), she might have modified her description of this more recent addition to the spectrum of queer theologies.

Significantly, for biblical studies, in her Introduction Cornwall points out: “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 ([Eugene] Rogers 2009, pp.19-21, 25)” (3). Later she elaborates: “Eugene F. Rogers...notes that God as portrayed in Scripture sometimes seems to act in queer ways, as when the God of Israel in expanding the history of salvation to non-Jews behaves ‘promiscuously’, acting ‘against nature’ in showing solidarity with the Gentiles who unbeknownst to Paul, would become far more numerous as Christians than Jews would—and yet, who in doing, ‘does not supersede or replace but queers himself’ (sic)” (152, citing Rogers 2009:26; see Hanks *Subversive Gospel*, Pilgrim/Wipf&Stock, 2000/08:92; “Romans,” *Queer Bible Commentary*, SCM, 2006:587-88; *Evangelio Subversivo*, Epifanía, 2010:148, 158).

**1 What is Queer?** (9-42). Cornwall points out that “the word queer, from the German and Latin *quer*, ‘adverse’, implies being *across* or *athwart* several categories, traversing several at once” (14) but that in other languages, such as Dutch and German [and Spanish], “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” (40). “Queer is often figured as a phenomenon or methodology in a state of *opposition to regulatory normativities*” (38; see Mafalda below). As Cornwall indicates, influential queer theorists all draw on mid-twentieth-century work by poststructuralist philosophers (Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault) who hold 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” (17). Related and similar would be what Jacques Ellul termed “majority propaganda,” which he insisted, is much more dangerous than the “minority propaganda” commonly opposed by societies and governments of all sorts (see the common fear of “gay propaganda” compared with the heterosexist “common places” we all imbibe from infancy).

**“A thought experiment: queering death”** (34-38). “Several theologians have explored the concept of queering death theologically... the deep affinity between Christianity and queerness goes beyond the matters of sex.... 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)” (34). In Elizabeth Stuart’s queer reading of the Johannine resurrection account: “The scene repeats with critical difference the creation of male and female and the bonds of marriage in Eden [Gen. 2–3]. 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.... 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.... 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” (2004:59, 62 and 197, cited 2011:35).

**2 Is Queer Theology Synonymous with Gay Theology?** (43-71). “Victoria S. Kolakowski, a transgender woman, states, ‘I find it...ironic that the most compelling...argument for gay and lesbian affirmation in the Christian Scriptures may come from teachings about the transgendered eunuchs, because transgendered people are second-class citizens in the Queer Christian community’ (Kolakowski 1997:49)... The biblical eunuchs are transgender ancestors, *not* homosexual ones, says Kolakowski, for gay people to ‘appropriate’ them is to elide their specific trans-ness (Kolakowski 1997, p. 47; Kolakowski 2000)” (58-59). Tricia Sheffield suggests that “more attention could usefully be given to the tensions of experiencing two natures in [Jesus’] one body, which...is analogous to the tension of the two ‘natures’ in transgender people” (61). “The existence of intersex means that the male-female binary is not a stable or universal one. This presages a further implication: theological norms grounded in binary maleness and femaleness, and masculinity and femininity as superimposed on them, cannot be absolute or incontrovertible” (62; despite the arguments against ordination of women!).

**3 Is Queer Theology Inherently White or Western?** (72-113). “I discuss the accusations...that Western queer theologians’ overemphasis on issues of sex and sexuality is hegemonic and fails to engage adequately with questions of ethnicity and ‘race’” (73). See her Note 1: “Many scholars believe that race is an arbitrary category which is based more in social assignment of significance to certain characteristics than to actual differences in biology: ‘There are no generic races precisely because “race” is a metaphor, a social construct, a human invention whose criteria for differentiation are neither universal nor fixed but have always been used to manage difference’ (Gibel Mevorach 2007, pp. 239-40)” (111).

**3.1 Theoretical privilege: the question of access to queer theoretical discourse** (74-81). “What is to keep queer from instantiating the same old exclusions of race and class? Why are so many of the purveyors of queerness white, male (or gay male identified) and economically privileged? (Walters 1996, p. 864)” (74). “Queer theory is *theory*, which ‘is accessible primarily to those with a university education and...references previous intellectual work which itself is class-inflected’ (Hall 2003, p. 90)” (75).

**3.2 To steal a title: sex, race and God** (81-85). “‘Gay experience tends to get universalized as white’...(Comstock 2001, p. 213),” which makes queer biblical interpretation “less credible” (2011:81).

**3.3 Outside-in: ethnicity and otherness** (85-87). Patrick Cheng “follows Kathy Rudy in reading Galatians’ emphasis on freedom from legalism and outmoded patterns of identity as prophesying a Christian community where faith, rather than gender or sexual orientation, is primarily significant (Cheng 2006a, p. 626)” (86). “Queer theology and biblical scholarship...might also provide means to querying dominant discourses of male beauty [for example Joseph, David, Absalom].... Divine endorsement of male beauty cannot be understood as unproblematically cohering with the dominant norms of a culture” (87).

**3.4 Identifying tensions: the black African American case** (87-99). “In this section I focus in more detail on one [well-documented] case, that of black African American Christians who also identify as queer, and the problems they face,” some preferring to characterize their theology as “in-the-life” rather than “queer” (88, citing Elias Farajajé-Jones). Horace Griffin notes the irony that “black Christians who reject the biblical interpretation of non-white races as ‘cursed to slavery’ still tend to accept readings condemning homosexuality, although such injunctions could be understood as time-bound and culturally specific, just as those legitimizing slavery are (Griffin 2006, p. 65; 2001, pp. 113-4)” (93-94).

**3.5 Christology: a site of mediation?** (99-104). Patrick Cheng appeals to the story in John’s Gospel about the crucified Christ instructing John and Mary to recognize each other as a new family: “It reveals to us the Jesus Christ, who, in the midst of suffering brings together ethnic community and marginalized sexuality... The theme of *marginalized sexuality* is present in the Beloved Disciple who is described by the Fourth Evangelist as the one ‘whom Jesus loved’... Thus, at the moment of his greatest suffering, Jesus creates a new ‘family’ that is a hybrid of both his ethnic identity and his marginalized sexuality (Cheng 2001, p. 19).” (100; see similarly Michael Vasey, 5.4 (a), below).

**3.6 Conclusion and Notes** (104-110). “Questions of sex and...race are always inextricably related.... Queer theology is not inherently white and Western—that is, it is not condemned to be white and Western, nor to exclude non-white cultures—but it must recognize that its genealogy in Western lesbian gay and feminist theologies (and, most significantly, in Western Christianity) may prejudice it in this direction” (104-05).

**4 Is the Bible Queer?** (114-46). **4.1 Queer traces** As Cornwall says, “There is much debate, among queer scholars and others, about the extent to which biblical texts themselves are to be understood as promoting a particular heteronormative idea, and the extent to which this sense has been read back into the Bible by its overwhelmingly heteronormative interpreters down through the centuries” (115). She sums up such readings as coming to one of three broad conclusions:

(1) “The Bible does not really condemn what we now understand as homosexual activity, especially loving and committed homosexual relationships” (115). Passages which appear in translation to condemn homosexuality “are actually condemning other more specific acts, such as anal rape, cultic prostitution, or male-male sex between men who are heterosexual rather than homosexual” (115).

(2) “The Bible *does* condemn what we now understand as homosexual activity. However, this condemnation was contingent on the time and culture in which the texts were produced.... The Bible is still a normative text for us today, but the bigger imperative of love and justice throughout the Bible should be our guiding principle, not a few scattered texts about homosexual activity” (115-16).

(3) “The Bible *does* condemn what we now understand as homosexual activity. However, it is an ancient, remote text and should in no way be considered normative for us today, so there is no need to explain away the ‘clobber passages’ or ‘texts of terror’, which are simply abhorrent” (116).

[If we expand the perspective to include “others” who are not queer, of course, we have the popular fourth option: that the Bible condemns all homosexual/same-sex activity and we/the church should continue to do so, denying ordination/church membership—sometimes even still seeking to perpetuate the death penalty on innocent victims, victims of rape and/or child abuse, as in Leviticus 20:13 (see Robert Gagnon 2001, 2003).]

**Robert Goss and Amy Adams Squire Strongheart, ed., *Our Families, Our Values* (1997).** Some essays point to queer traces in the Bible, for instance Ruth (1:16). “And, perhaps, more surprisingly...the Epistle to the Romans...shows Paul greeting a large number of ‘unusual’ households not headed by a married man (Hanks 1997, pp. 139, 142-3 [only three married couples out of 28 persons greeted!])” (116).

**Eugene Rogers** (2009:19-33) “has noted that even Paul of Tarsus might be understood as promoting certain queer principles, as when he diminishes the importance of biological procreation by setting it in a context of resurrection (Rogers 2009, p. 30)” (116).

**Ken Stone** (2005 and 2008) notes that historically such texts as Genesis 1–2 were sometimes used “to promote celibacy and asceticism, rather than marriage and reproduction” (117-118).

**Jane Shaw** (2007:215-29), “Reformed and Enlightened Church”, in Gerard Loughlin, ed., *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body* [Oxford: Blackwell]. Cornwall summarizes Shaw’s important article, which shows that the concept of “complementarity” is modern (beginning in the eighteenth century) and not to be read back into the creation accounts of the Hebrew Bible (118-120). [Unfortunately, the uninformed reader is given no clue that Shaw here refutes Robert Gagnon, the main protagonist opposing gay ordination in the American denominational battles (he is not even listed in Cornwall’s bibliography). Thus, while the back flap describes Cornwall’s work as “accessible” to the non-specialist, here the reader lacking expert guidance may have no idea of the relevance and importance of the treatment.]

**4.2 Queer ancestors** (120-25). **Gerard Loughlin** (2008, p. 146) “argues that ‘same-sex affections and affiliations..., non-heterosexual structures, unexpected affinities’ are...‘oddly central’ to the Christian tradition that has latterly marginalized them” (120). See Nancy Wilson on Ruth and Naomi, Lydia in Acts 16, the centurion and his beloved slave (1995/2000); Timothy Koch, however, objects to Wilson’s making eunuchs (“whose lives were sexually and socially circumscribed”) his queer ancestor (137 [although literal eunuchs could not procreate, they had a reputation for diverse sexual activity!]). For Ken Stone (121-24) “The homosexual is...positioned with respect to the heterosexual in something resembling the way that the Canaanite was positioned with respect to the Israelite” (121). Moreover, “Stone persuasively shows that Jesus’ hermeneutical strategy in the Sermon on the Mount might be figured as queer” since in Matthew 5:38-42 Jesus is “shifting his audience’s attention from what has been spoken and heard in the past to what needs to be spoken and heard now” (124).

**4.3 Further queer readings** (125-34). “The 2006 volume *The Queer Bible Commentary* represents an extraordinary achievement: it is a collection of 44 essays by 30 contributors, all of whom write their commentary from the perspective of queer theology and/or biblical criticism” (125). Jennifer L. Koosed’s reading of Ecclesiastes/ Qohelet “intersperses her reflections on the queerness of Qohelet with autobiographical interjections.... Koosed’s departure from the mores of commentary is conscious and invokes the queerness she finds in Qohelet itself” (125-26). Timothy Koch’s commentary on Isaiah (126-128) begins with Isaiah 6:5-8 where he explains: “This is the seraphic task of those of us engaged within biblical studies on behalf of the LGBT community: to choose the right [burning] coal for the right situation” and that “this is part of a strategy of empowerment and agency for disempowered readers,” which involves “a conscious over-writing of the ‘text itself’ or ‘text-as-it-is’, precisely in order to subvert or make different its perspective” (126). “Like the contributors to *The Queer Bible Commentary*, the authors in Goss and West’s 2000 edited collection *Take Back the Word* seek not only to pull out certain ancestors and proto-queer or queer-friendly characters from the Bible, but to reframe the whole way the Bible is read” (128).

“One of the most discrete readings in existence is that by Stephen D. Moore, who explores the queerness of the Song of Songs, and of the [homoerotic!] allegorical commentaries written on it.... By the nineteenth century, says Moore, carnal readings of the Song of Songs had all but superceded allegorical ones: it came to be read as a staunchly heterosexual poem of morality in marriage (129): ‘Allegorizing [the Song] only had the effect of turning it into something yet more unthinkable: not just the torrid expression of a sizzling sexual relationship between a horny young woman and her hunky young man...but the expression of an erotic relationship between two *male* lovers instead... The austere expositor’s attempt to evade the perilous embrace of the Song’s female lover through allegory plunges him instead into the arms of another love, a *male* love, not less – God or Christ’ (Moore, *God’s Beauty Parlor; And Other Queer Spaces in and Around the Bible*, 2001, pp. 27-8)” (131).

**4.4 Dangerous texts?** (134-41). “The Bible is always likely to remain dangerous for queer people in some respects, precisely because its open-endedness means that it will always be used oppressively by certain interpreters even if sympathetic strands also exist within it” (135-36; see Mary Ann Tolbert, cited 134-35). Jaime Ronaldo Balboa (2003 PhD thesis) argues that “‘a truly queer project, namely celebrating difference and diversity in reading,’” should replace traditional “logocentric” readings that seek to establish a single true meaning for a text: “This reading has affinities with Koch’s suggestion that conservative and liberal wrangling for the ‘truth’ of ‘what the Bible *really* says about homosexuality...are nothing but a ‘pissing contest’ (Koch 2001 p. 12)” (140). [Perhaps even more to be celebrated is the diversity in biblical teaching directed at different historical contexts, as in the case of the texts on eunuchs; Koch’s pejorative metaphor to describe efforts to refute traditional employments of clobber texts may reflect the privileged academic setting where professors may dedicate months and years to changing their students’ approach to the Bible; however, in non-academic pastoral situations, vigorous challenge to traditional homophobic employment of clobber texts, sometimes in a single consultation, may be necessary to avoid suicides.]

**4.5 Conclusion and Notes** (141-46). “‘To ‘queer’ a scripture is to render it unusual and non-normative, to shake it up and see how it might be reconfigured’ (Boache 2006, p. 493)” (141). Marcella Althaus-Reid “seeks to assert that the God of the Bible was queer all along, even if this God’s queerness has been hidden or locked away by those whose authority and powers would be threatened if the doors of these closets were flung wide” (142 [see the works of Howard Eilberg-Schwartz and Ted Jennings, not included in this volume]). “The project of queering a biblical text is simultaneously, and always, about queering the reader” (142). “Just as the death of Christ which profoundly changes the epistemic distance between God and humanity coincides with the curtain in the Temple being torn in two from top to bottom, so the tearing of outmoded binary tropes also changes what God and human beings can do and be for one another” (142, citing Ken Stone 2001b, 24, 32). “Experiments in queer reading such as *The Queer Bible Commentary* (2006) demonstrate that even texts of terror can be read queerly if this is what the reader seeks to do” (143).

## **5 Is the Christian Theological Tradition Queer?** (147-190).

**5.1 Queer God** (148-153). “‘The Queer God is the God who went into exile with God’s people and remained there in exile with them’ (Althaus-Reid 2004a, p. 146)... In *The Queer God* (2003), Althaus-Reid’s notion of an economically and politically subversive deity is fleshed out. She holds that a truly queer God, who prefers the needs of the poor and marginal, has been displaced by mainstream theological heterosexual metanarratives of desire, lack and power.... There is nothing ‘natural’, she suggests, about the concretized Pe of theology with colonial, capitalist structures of power and legitimacy, which play out in ecclesiastical and social structures of authority and ‘decentness’.... Althaus-Reid’s invitations to reflect on God as faggot and whore, as a deity both pornographic and suicidal, are disturbing and effective because such images are so far removed from the God of so-called traditional family values enforced and reproduced by mainstream theologies” (148). “For Althaus-Reid...God is incarnate in every human life, present in communities of struggle and resistance. Christian emphasis on God’s radical fleshiness is hardly new; but figuring God as an orgy, an omniseual deity...who refuses to stand over against human bodies and stories of God-seekers, is still profoundly disquieting.... What is disturbed by queering God is not solid theological truth, but a hetero-normative distortion of theology” (148-49; for Eugene Rogers’ comments on God’s acts against nature in Romans 11, see Introduction).

**5.2 Tradition I: queer art** (153-164). “Recent books by Kittredge Cherry ([*Art That Dares: Gay Jesus, Woman Christ, and More*] 2007) and others identify a queer strand in some...Christian devotional art, including...Christa pieces [the Christ figure as female]...and images of Christ which overtly portray him as homosexual or as an object of homosexual devotion” (153). “Leo Steinberg’s *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*...demonstrates an undeniable accent on the genitals of Christ in the Catholic art of the Renaissance.

**5.3 Tradition II: queer history** (164-170). “Perhaps the most popular Father to have been claimed as queer is the Cappadocian, Gregory of Nyssa”, although many commentators are “playful, tongue-in-cheek and consciously imaginative with what they claim figures like Gregory to do or be.... Something like this is going on in the phenomenon of camp, which by appropriating a behavior, mode of dress or pattern of speech in an exaggerated and overdone manner,

calls into question its initial and often unremarked, meaning and significance” (165-66). In Martín Hugo Córdova Queros’ queer reading of “The Prostitutes also go into the Kingdom of God: A Queer Reading of Mary of Magdala” (2006) he asks “why, in historical theological interpretation, women like Mary Magdalene must be made decent, and denied their carnality, before they can be considered exemplary” (168-69; see Hanks 2000/08:15).

**5.4 Queer traits and affiliations** (170-184). “Far from being a distortion of ‘true’ Christianity...some aspects of queer...might be understood as particularly indicative of its emphasis on love and justice” (170):

(a) *Friendship and hospitality* (171-77). “Kathy Rudy (1996b)...has suggested that people who are not involved in monogamous heterosexual relationships or nuclear families may be better placed to extend friendship and welcome to others, since they are not tied into discrete, inward-looking units in the same way.... Their difference allows them more easily the kind of community envisaged by Christ, grounded in friendship and loyalty to many members of a community, not just one’s partner and biological children. Rudy suggests that polyamorous relationships, or the ‘casual sex’ practices of some gay men who have sex with multiple partners, are profoundly challenging to the assumption that the nuclear family model is the best and even most Godly way. She rejects the notion that such acts of sex are anonymous or non-relational, asserting rather that they initiate those concerned into a larger community identity into which, in turn, they wish to invite others (Rudy 1996b, p. 10)... Of course, this polyamorous vision is somewhat idealistic...and...may negate the potency of intimacy in same-sex relationships which sex with multiple partners risks eliding.... However, Robert E. Goss makes a particularly interesting reading of the gender codes in Ephesians 5 in light of polyamory: When the church is understood as a collective of countless men and women, married and unmarried, with a variety of sexual orientations and gender expressions, then Christ becomes the multi-partnered bridegroom to countless Christian men and women... Christ is polyamorous in countless couplings and other erotic configurations... The lover is a sexual outlaw (Goss 2004, p. 61)... Perhaps the most fully outworked queer theology from friendship is that by Elizabeth Stuart (1995). She, too, insists on querying the assumption that ‘promiscuity’ is inherently bad: indeed, *God* loves ‘promiscuously’ [see John 3:16].... Only friendships, rather than marriages, are shown in the Bible to be ‘equal, mutual and just relationships’ (Stuart 1995, p. 173)... As Rowan Williams [later Archbishop of Canterbury] comments in his review of [Stuart’s] book, ‘the apparently clear line between *eros* and friendship is illusory; we are looking at different forms of one passion – the passion of life-giving interconnection’ (Williams 1996, p. 124). This erotic force and desire propels us both to reach out in friendship and to touch sexually (Stuart 1995, p. 81)” (171-73). Michael Vasey emphasizes that relationships need not be marital to be covenantal and that gay persons may have particularly strong networks of friends; he cites the example of Jesus’ beloved disciple and Mary - “‘the love of friends creating bonds of kinship’ (Vasey 1995, p. 234)” (173).

“The trope of friendship and hospitality is expanded further by Goss in the context of the culture of bare-backing... deliberately engaging in anal sex without using condoms” (173-76).

[**Excursus:** Heterosexual couples commonly trust one another and enjoy sex without birth-control devices—otherwise the human species would soon cease to exist! So to absolutely deny the same possibility for same-sex couples would create a double-standard, implying that same-sex couples can never be trusted to communicate honestly their HIV status and act responsibly. Counselors often attest, however, that in many cases, same-sex couples have become HIV positive and died, due to lack of honesty in communication—and although the same occurs with heterosexual couples, many believe less frequently. Though we lack reliable statistics, I would suggest that the previous experience of persons of a homosexual orientation may make truthfulness in the sexual area particularly difficult. Since adolescent discovery of their minority status, many commonly have had to “live a lie,” pretending to be heterosexual and regarding any inquiry about their sexuality as an unwarranted invasion of their privacy. Whether from anti-sodomy laws or simple socio-cultural hostility, the price of truthfulness in many places may be imprisonment, violence, even death. Few would condemn their lack of truthfulness in such situations, just as few would condemn those Europeans who lied to Nazi inquisitors in order to protect the lives of their Jewish friends. As homophobia becomes less common and less violent, we may hope for a time when persons of homosexual orientation do not enter sexual relations with a long background of protecting themselves by living a lie, which hopefully would make sexual honesty more common and those involved more trustworthy. Meanwhile, although Goss may be correct to insist that same-sex couples can have such a quality of relationship as to justify a decision to abandon safer sex practices, since the purpose of same-sex relations is never procreation, most counselors would prefer to advise caution and not assume responsibility for any decision the couple may make.]

(b) *Counter-cultural Catholicism* (177-84). “Both Roman Catholicism and Anglo-Catholicism within Britain have sometimes been understood as particularly tolerant of homosexual orientation in particular, even where this goes against the official tenets of church teaching” (177). “Even today there appears to be a noteworthy correlation between homosexual orientation and Catholic (Roman or English) denominational affiliation. Much of the best-known queer theology done since the 1980’s in Britain has come from established Catholic scholars such as Elizabeth Stuart and Gerard Loughlin [also James Alison, strangely omitted in this volume; see John Boswell of Yale in the USA, where 30-60% of Roman Catholic priests have been estimated as gay] (182).

**5.5 Conclusion and Notes** (184-90). “‘Queer theology...is a theology from the margins which wants to remain at the margins.... Terrible is the fate of theologies from the margin when they want to be accepted by the centre!’ (Althaus-Reid and Isherwood 2007, p. 304).... *Christianity itself* is counter-cultural and anti-hegemonic.... The ambiguity of the Christian tradition means that it cannot be simplistically claimed by any one side. It is neither queer nor anti-queer, or rather, it is both.... Queer theologies are becoming more and more mainstream.... Does the growing acceptance of queer theology as a serious theological discourse risk domesticating it, removing its ‘teeth?’” (184-88; see note 14 on *rejunte*, “the name given to the forms of ‘family’ which occur in the slum dwellings of Buenos Aires, where children, parents, step-parents, ex-partners and sundry...individuals are forced to share cramped, vulnerable accommodation.... In such jeopardous circumstances, where promiscuity and incest are common, privacy scarce, and ‘personal space’ unknown, familiar relationships are also always shifting” (190; [cf. the slaves in tenement house churches in Romans 16]).

**6 Should Queer People Stay Christians?** (191-223). “‘Christendom has not only been the worst of my personal past but also the best of it; and the need to deal with the former requires a reappropriation and transformation of the latter. I will not become a more flourishing person by cutting off my roots’ (Jantzen 2001, p. 276-7)” (191).

## **7 Other Controversies in Queer Theology** (224-250).

**7.1 Queer as an empty referent: is a ‘queer ethics’ possible?** (225-31). “‘Shippert asserts...‘that norms need *not* automatically become normativities,’ and that ‘we can describe specific practices that enact and deploy norms but do not depend on negative screens....’ (Shippert 1999, p. 53)” (227). Althaus-Reid and Isherwood recognize that “queer theology *cannot* set out to be totally non-normative – *even where normativity as a rule is regarded with suspicion* – since this would be to close off an area of possibility and render it irredeemable” (230). See Grosz (1994, p. 113): “‘Heterosexual sadists, pederasts, fetishists, pornographers, pimps, voyeurs, suffer from social sanctions: in a certain sense they too can be regarded as oppressed’” (22).

**7.2 Queer self-indulgence** (231-34). Queer theology is accused of self-indulgence, “linking sex too strongly with transcendence and subsuming God within sexual pleasure” (231). Thus Christopher Hinkle suggests that “likening orgasm to mystical experience is dangerous not because these things are in fact *not* similar, but precisely because they are... It is therefore possible that ‘one will become overly attached to the [sexual] experiences, gradually allowing the pursuit of them to replace the desire for God’ (Hinkle 2007, p. 194)”; → Hanks, **Song of Songs**.

**7.3 Queer as anti-Christian** (234-38). “Queer and Christianity are often read as possessing a mutual antipathy: ‘On the one side there are Christians who think that queer studies offends Christianity, while on the other there is a suspicion that a too close association with Christianity will contaminate queer studies’ (Althaus-Reid 2008, p. 107)” (237). Bob Goss notes that “‘queer theorists often condemn the Christian tradition as irrelevant, violent or oppressive’ (Goss 2002, p. 247)” (235).

**7.4 Queer on the ground: preaching, praxis and pragmatism** (238-42). “Another perceived problem with queer theology and queer biblical criticism is that they are too intellectual and therefore too removed from ‘theology on the ground’ and the everyday lives of those Christians not involved in academic theological and/or theoretical study.... Ken Stone gives a pragmatic warning....‘what shall be the point of preaching sermons so controversial that we may soon no longer have a pulpit? In the real world...only preachers who can keep a pulpit have any chance to effect transformation’ (Stone 2007, p. 164)” (239).

**7.5 Queer as apolitical** (242-247). Deryn Guest critiques queer theology as excessively absorbed in academic theory (242-43), while others insist, “‘Queering theology is not a rhetorical pastime but a political duty’ (Althaus-Reid and Isherwood 2007, p. 305)” (224). “Queer theology is indeed political, because it is committed to sexual and social justice: in its exposure of unjust social, economic and religious systems...it *is* political theology and is an ‘agent for transformation’” (243).

**7.6 Conclusion and Notes** (247-50). “The kinds of criticisms leveled at queer theology are by no means exclusive to it: accusations of obfuscatory intellectualism, apoliticism and self-indulgence might be applied just as much to other critical theories” (247).

**Conclusion** (251-56). “The existence of so many controversies within queer theology and the theory in which it is grounded, should be taken as evidence not of their imminent failure, but of their potential to provoke questioning and resistance to the ‘given’ (251).... Controversies in queer theology point to dynamism, vibrancy, and the generation of a new mode of theological life which is long overdue” (256).



**Mafalda:** 1 Where are WE? 2 Here, do you see? 3 But then WE LIVE UPSIDE DOWN!  
4 !My God! !! I think from now on I'm going to feel more **attachment-to/fondness-for** this floor!

"These people [men] who have turned the world upside down have come here also" (Acts 17:6).

Like geography and laws, human languages are constructed by the people with the most power and thus commonly reflect the ideology, viewpoints and preferences of the oppressors.