Queering Religion, Religious Queers

Edited by Yvette Taylor and Ria Snowdon
“The book sets itself the certainly difficult but fascinating task of combining what has been so far discussed as largely antagonistic categories—religion and sexual orientation. It does so eloquently, fulfilling a gap in the academic literature, as well as responding to a political and ethical need to engage with difference and intersections along the complex spectrum of identity”.

—Ana Cristina Santos, University of Coimbra, Portugal

“The social and spatial accommodation of both religious and sexual identities has become a significant political flashpoint for societies and their governments in the contemporary West and beyond. This important collection addresses the intersections of religious and sexual identities for individuals, religious institutions, and socio-legal systems. Collectively, the chapters explore these intersections across a breadth of belief systems and geographical contexts. The authors ask vital questions about methodologies, institutions, locations and intersecting affirmations. This collection will be of interest to scholars, teachers, students and policy-makers concerned with understanding the varied landscapes, tensions and accommodations arising from the intersections of religion and sexuality”.

—Andrew Gorman-Murray, University of Western Sydney, Australia
Queering Religion, Religious Queers

This collection considers how religious identity interplays with other forms and contexts of identity, specifically those related to sexual identity. It asks how these intersections are formed, negotiated and resisted across time and places (UK, Europe, USA, CND, AUS, Global South): ‘contradictions’ are both privately and publically inhabited in the context of legislative change and increasing, but often competing, socio-legal recognition. Questions around ‘queer’ engagements in same-sex marriages, civil partnerships and other practices (e.g. adoption) have created a number of provoking stances and policy provisions— but what remains unanswered is how people experience and situate themselves within sometimes competing, or ‘contradictory’, moments as ‘religious queers’ who may be tasked with ‘queering religion’. The presumed paradoxes of ‘marriage’, queer sexuality, religion and youth combine to generate a noteworthy generational absence. This leads to questions about where ‘religious queers’ reside, resist and relate experiences of intersecting religious and sexual lives.


Ria Snowdon is a Research Associate, working alongside Yvette Taylor on an ESRC funded project ‘Making Space for Queer Identifying Religious Youth’. She completed her Arts and Humanities Research Council PhD at Newcastle University. In 2003 she received the Henry Croucher Memorial Prize in History.
Routledge Studies in Religion

For a full list of titles in this series, please visit www.routledge.com

8 Negative Theology and Modern French Philosophy
Arthur Bradley

9 Law and Religion
Edited by Peter Radan, Denise Meyerson and Rosalind F. Atherton

10 Religion, Language, and Power
Edited by Nile Green and Mary Searle-Chatterjee

11 Shared Idioms, Sacred Symbols, and the Articulation of Identities in South Asia
Edited by Kelly Pemberton and Michael Nijhawan

12 Theology, Creation, and Environmental Ethics
From Creatio Ex Nihilo to Terra
Nullius Whitney Bauman

13 Material Religion and Popular Culture
E. Frances King

14 Adam Smith as Theologian
Edited by Paul Oslington

15 The Entangled God
Divine Relationality and Quantum Physics
By Kirk Wegter-McNelly

16 Aquinas and Radical Orthodoxy
A Critical Inquiry
Paul J. DeHart

17 Animal Ethics and Theology
The Lens of the Good Samaritan
Daniel K. Miller

18 The Origin of Heresy
A History of Discourse in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity
Robert M. Royalty, Jr.

19 Buddhism and Violence
Militarism and Buddhism in Modern Asia
Edited by Vladimir Tikhonov and Torkel Brekke

20 Popular Music in Evangelical Youth Culture
Stella Sai-Chun Lau

21 Theology and the Science of Moral Action
Virtue Ethics, Exemplarity, and Cognitive Neuroscience

22 Abrogation in the Qur’an and Islamic Law
By Louay Fatoohi
23 A New Science of Religion
Edited by Gregory W. Dawes and James Maclaurin
24 Making Sense of the Secular
Critical Perspectives from Europe to Asia
Edited by Ranjan Ghosh
25 The Rise of Modern Jewish Politics
Extraordinary Movement
C. S. Monaco
26 Gender and Power in Contemporary Spirituality
Ethnographic Approaches
Anna Fedele and Kim E. Knibbe
27 Religions in Movement
The Local and the Global in Contemporary Faith Traditions
Robert W. Hefner, John Hutchinson, Sara Mels and Christiane Timmerman
28 William James’s Hidden Religious Imagination
A Universe of Relations
Jeremy Carrette
29 Theology and the Arts
Engaging Faith
Ruth Illman and W. Alan Smith
30 Religion, Gender, and the Public Sphere
Edited by Niamh Reilly and Stacey Scriver
31 An Introduction to Jacob Boehme
Four Centuries of Thought and Reception
Edited by Ariel Hessayon and Sarah Apetrei
32 Globalization and Orthodox Christianity
The Transformations of a Religious Tradition
Victor Roudometof
33 Contemporary Jewish Writing
Austria after Waldheim
Andrea Reiter
34 Religious Ethics and Migration
Doing Justice to Undocumented Workers
Ilseup Ahn
35 A Theology of Community Organizing
Power to the People
Chris Shannahan
36 God and Natural Order
Physics, Philosophy, and Theology
Shaun C. Henson
37 Science and Religion
One Planet, Many Possibilities
Edited by Lucas F. Johnston and Whitney A. Bauman

38 Queering Religion, Religious Queers
Edited by Yvette Taylor and Ria Snowdon
Queering Religion, Religious Queers

Edited by Yvette Taylor and Ria Snowdon
Contents

Foreword Outing Religion in LGBT Studies
JODI O’BRIEN

Foreword Queering Religions, Religious Queers: A Geographical Commentary
ANDREW GORMAN-MURRAY AND CATHERINE J. NASH

Introduction
YVETTE TAYLOR AND RIA SNOWDON

Section 1: Queer Productions, Methods, and Occupations

1 Que(e)rying Methodology to Study Church-Based Activism: Conversations in Culture, Power, and Change
KAREN E. MACKE

2 Queering Secular Jewish Culture(s)
NAOMI BRAINE

3 Sexuality, Migration and Identity among Gay Iranian Migrants to the UK
RUSI JASPAL

4 Is it Possible to Be Queer and Catholic? Overcoming the 'Silence of Sodom'
DOMINIC WETZEL

Section 2: Queer Contestations: Past, Present, Future

5 Unpacking Queer Secularity: Queer Kids, Schools and Secularism in Toronto, Ontario, Canada
DAVID K. SEITZ

JEFF MEEK

7 Queer Travels: Intersections for the Study of Islam, Sexuality, and Queer Theory
GEORGE IOANNIDES

8 'Mindful of the Words Spoken': The Shifting Narratives and Identity Work of Former Ex-gays
S. J. CREEK

Section 3: Queer Locations: Centres and Peripheries

9 Sacralizing Queerness: LGBT Faith Movements and Identity Deployment
JASON J. HOPKINS

10 When Religion Reshapes Identities: Young Moroccan Adults, Sexual Behaviour and Islamic Modernities
VULCA FIDOLINI

11 Islam, Homosexuality and Gay Muslims: Bridging the Gap between Faith and
Sexuality
ASIFA SIRAJ

12 Coming Out under Prohibition: Ordination and Queer Identity in Mainline Protestantism
JOHN J. ANDERSON

Section 4: Queer Affirmations? Keeping the Faith

13 Hidden Desires: Hinduism and Sexuality
SHAMINDER TAKHAR

14 Complicity and Control in Compositions: Queers Overcoming Victimization in Christian Families
PEIK INGMAN

15 Reconceiving and Recontextualizing Religious Identity: Lesbian Mothers and Transracial Adoption
JULIE J. KILMER

Contributors
Index
Outing Religion in LGBT Studies

Jodi O’Brien

In 1991 I wrote a dissertation on the Mormons. The study was based on ethnographic and historical research and framed within a rational choice theoretical perspective. Titled the ‘The Mormon Ethic and the Spirit of Cooperation’ the research was my attempt to explain the relatively high rates of contribution and community participation among Mormons; practices that were seen as the basis for the church’s rapid growth and expansion. In retrospect, two aspects of this dissertation process stand out as a disturbing combination of academic hubris and scholarly naiveté. The first was the lack of acknowledgement of religion and religious studies in organizing the project and conducting the research. I was being trained as a sociologist in the subfield of rational choice theory and collective action whereby beliefs, including religious beliefs, were seen merely as a source of behavioral incentives and disincentives. From this scholarly perspective, religion was something that could be reduced to a logical model of value. I wrote an entire dissertation on the success of Mormonism as a social movement without the benefit of any training—other than what I picked up myself along the way—in religion. At the time and in one of the top-ranked PhD programs in the United States, this lack of grounding in religious studies was not considered a problem. Religion, per se, didn’t matter.

The second troubling aspect of the process is that nowhere in this nearly 300-page dissertation did I mention the fact that I had been raised a Mormon. Like many young queer people growing up in religious families, I fled what felt like a deeply oppressive environment as soon as I was able. By the time I landed in graduate school, I had renounced Mormonism so completely that it didn’t even occur to me that my extensive insider knowledge was a hugely significant factor in the way I was able to conduct my dissertation research.

My personal eclipsing of religion reflects the general scholarly and political climates of the time. Secularization was the trend across Europe, the UK and most regions of the US. Acknowledged or acceptable scholarship on contemporary religion in the social sciences focused on the rise of ‘religious individualism’ (i.e. religious affiliation as a form of cultural capital, [Roof 1999]), religious ‘cults’ as a basis of deviant behavior and, occasionally, religion as a source of political influence. Although this would change by the later 1990s, in the ’80s and the early ’90s fundamentalist politics were, momentarily, in retreat (Fetner 2008). The general attitude was a disinterest in religion and, for the most part, this zeitgeist was reflected in a secularized academy.
Religion Matters

Religion matters both as a personal and political force, but secularizing trends have blinded us to its influence and have delayed or diverted complex culturally informed understandings. Underneath this dismissive upper strata in the social sciences, foment was taking place, albeit in relative obscurity. Paradoxically, some of the richest studies—studies that illustrate both the personal and institutional dynamics of religion—emerged from LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans) studies of religious experience. Melissa Wilcox (2006) notes that some of the earliest queer theory emerged in conversations between religious studies and queer theory scholars about the religious-based social activities and organizations that began to appear in midcentury and proliferate into the 1970s. She remarks further that, despite the tendency to accord only passing attention to religion in general, the social sciences have actually been quite productive in generating studies on LGBT experience and religion (83). The earliest of these focused on the rise of the Metropolitan Community Church and tended to be highly homophobic. Pathologizing as they were, these studies may at least have alerted readers to the fact that gay churches existed.

Despite the steady proliferation of social science research on LGBT religious experiences and organizations since the 1970s, this work more or less existed underground until the late 1990s (the exception were heterosexist studies that examined ‘the homosexual’ in various institutional settings, including religion). The reasons for this included the dismissal of religion in general as a suitable topic of inquiry within the social sciences, as well as the routine marginalization of LGBT studies. Scholarly inroads in this area were further discouraged by the general distrust that LGBT groups exhibited toward religion: religions were anti-gay, and good gays were not religious. In 1997 William Tierny remarked that queer theorists were fond of seeing themselves as ‘outlaws’. To the extent that this is the case, Wilcox observes that ‘religion scholars (even those of us who are queer) all too often have appeared as queer theory’s academic in-laws: claiming to be “family,” barging in at inopportune moments, always managing to mess up the guest room’ (2006, 74).

The past decade has seen an incredible surge in these studies and their increasing legitimacy in various academic circles (as well as the continuing relevance in the communities and political circles for which they are often intended). In part this is due to a growing awareness that religious organizations and beliefs and practices are hugely influential in global events—we can no longer afford the hubris that religion doesn’t matter. The intersection of LGBT studies, queer theory, and religion also has the potential to contribute significantly to our understanding of personal and political experiences of both oppression and transformation. LGBT studies of religion are so rich because they occur at a site in which personal, familial, organizational, and cultural levels come together to reveal persistent and significant tensions, especially for marginalized groups and individuals.
In 1994 I embarked on an ethnographic study of queer identified Christians. This study was one of the first among a gathering wave of qualitative social science studies aimed at understanding the experiences of these people and the congregations that supported them (see O’Brien 2004, 2005, 2007). The impetus for the study was various Pride Parades where I noted the unease or even disdain expressed by many observers toward participant groups such as gay Mormons (Affirmation) and gay Catholics (Dignity). Apparently gay Christian was anathema to the secular, urban-based, contemporary queer experience. Knowing they also likely faced considerable oppression in their religious communities, I was deeply curious about these gay Christians who seemed so out and proud on both counts. Who were they and how did they manage their ‘double stigma’, I wondered.

At the time, I was no less well-informed about religious studies, but I had written a paper recanting my dissertation (‘Confessions of a Lapsed Rational Choice Theorist’) in which I critiqued myself and rational choice theory for the vacuous approach to culturally based forms of self-understanding, value, and motivation. Newly afire with my commitment to rich, descriptive ethnography, I set out to understand how gay Christians made sense of themselves and their ‘predicament’. Five interviews into the project, I knew that my idea of ‘double stigma’ was completely off-base. It just didn’t resonate with the people I was interviewing. Instead, they talked passionately and at length about the ‘contradiction’ of being Christian and gay. They weren’t trying to resolve this contradiction; rather the contradiction defined how they saw themselves and their path in life. Grappling with the contradiction was an occasion for articulating an empowered new sense of themselves and their role in their religious communities.

Through this project, I came to understand how much religion matters, not just as a forge toward a more articulated sense of personal meaning and belief, but as basis of sociopolitical ideologies and expectations, and, perhaps most importantly, as a site of inclusion and exclusion. I learned that religion does not necessarily equal oppression and that secularization is not necessarily the only route to emancipation from limiting structures of gender and sexuality.

One of the aims of this volume is to disrupt the notion that religion = oppression and secularization = emancipation. Scholarly discourses on religion, especially LGBT studies of religion, usually equate sexual emancipation with secularism (see Scott 2009 and Seitz, this volume, for a fuller critique). In reality, people don’t live this dichotomy so discretely: religious beliefs and practices intersect with family, community, and cultural arrangements in complex ways that cannot be reduced to this simple axiom. For example, Dominic Wetzel (this volume) asks, is it possible to be queer and Catholic in this day and age? For him, as for many of the queer Catholics, or ‘quercs’, he interviews, secularization doesn’t necessarily bring enlightenment. For them the question is how to preserve the truth and vision of the best social justice
inspirations of our upbringing—the church of dissent—without worrying too much about what religious or secular hierarchies think. Jason Hopkins (this volume) illustrates a similar theme in his examination of LGBT faith movements within US Christianity. Many queer identified members of Christian churches have developed strategies of adaptation and resistance that have not only enabled them to be fully out in their congregations, but their actions serve as a basis for these congregations to stretch heteronormative theologies of sexuality and the body (Cf. O’Brien 2004, 2005).

The potential queering of religious practice and belief is also evident in the case studies conducted by Vulca Fidolini and David Seitz in two different Islamic environments. In both cases, contemporary queer attitudes and practices are destabilizing conventional gender and sexuality patterns within the religious community. The studies are important correctives to fetishized, ‘geographical imaginaries’ that portray an ‘enlightened west’ against a sexually repressive orient (Seitz, this volume). They also demonstrate that religion, identities, and communities are mutually constitutive in complex and profound ways.

(Re)visioned social identities, practices, and organizational forms are forged in the crucible of tension and contradiction. Religion matters precisely because it is such a crucible; a site through which personal meaning and beliefs, practices of inclusion and exclusion, and sociopolitical expectations and ideologies are wrought. This complexity is the focus and the promise of this volume. Karen Macke captures this complexity in her definitional comments in the opening chapter. She offers “que(e)rying” as a distinct model of research that integrates ethnographic methods with queer theory and praxis’. ‘Que(e)rying’ is a methodological strategy oriented toward the dialectical relationship between sex, gender, sexualities, and religious practices, organizations, and cultures. In this approach, both religion and identity are thrown into relief, and by extension, secularization as an unquestioned (but legitimated) cultural and academic standpoint is also destabilized.

Heuristic for Studying Queer Religiosity

As I noted previously, until the past decade, the crossover between religious studies and LGBT and queer studies has been scant, and, where it has been more prevalent, rarely acknowledged within specific academic disciplines. As a mere glance at the bibliographies for the various chapters in this book will attest, queer religious scholarship has taken off in the past decade. However, Wilcox points out that while the topics of queer religiosity and the queering of religion have become more recognized and legitimated, rarely is there discussion across the areas theology and the study of sacred texts, historical studies, and social scientific studies (2006, 78).

I teach in a (relatively progressive) Jesuit University that reflects these trends.
Perhaps not entirely comfortable with the idea of ‘queering religion’, many of my colleagues are very eager to pursue new directions in the intersection of gender, sexuality, and religion. Although they may not be completely aware that much of the new scholarship is informed by queer perspectives, they do bring another form of notable intersectionality to the table: the ability to talk across domains such as theology, history, and social science–based ethnographies. My conversations with these colleagues have challenged me to formulate a heuristic that provides an intersectional approach to the contemplation and study of religion, gender, and sexuality. I find the following approach useful as a means of synthesizing studies from theology and history with ethnography for a fuller understanding of contemporary dynamics in the queering of religion. Religion matters (1) as a significant basis for self-meaning and understanding; (2) as a major socio-historical force that reflect variations in cultural dominance and political climates; and (3) as a basis for determining inclusion and exclusion across families, communities, networks, and organizations. In the following, I comment briefly on each.

**Religion and Self-Understanding (Scripts)**

Cultural discourses provide us with scripts for who we think we can be and what we think we can do. For the most part, religious discourses provide especially vivid and engaging narratives. Well-established religions offer deeply meaningful cosmologies that weave together spirit, intellect, body, and community; they provide maps for charting the course of our lives, and religious participation offers transcendence from everyday banalities and fears (Fortunato 1982). From this perspective, the question is less about why people participate and more about how the homosexual, who in most major religions is irrevocably cast off, reconciles her or his position within this system of self-understanding. Fortunato refers to this as the ‘gay predicament’. In his recent book, *Recruiting Young Love: How Christians Talk about Homosexuality* (2011), theologian Mark Jordan traces the history of Christian characters that are offered through the traditional scripts (the Sodomite, the Virgin Martyrs, etc.). As the characters change, so do the scripts: most recently from the Sodomite who should be exiled to the ‘afflicted homosexual’ who should be treated with tolerance (see also Jordan 1997).

Contemporary theologies and interpretations of sacred texts reflect an increasing engagement with religious narratives on gender and sexuality. This can be seen as a direct result of decades of social unrest and action regarding homosexuality and the role of women in contemporary churches. How self-identified religious lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people reconcile the ‘gay predicament’ depends, in large part, on the scripts available to them. In earlier decades, the predominant choice was to either renounce the religion and exit (accept the exile) or wear the ‘cloak of
shame’ (remain with the religion and be closeted). One of the most significant impacts of the queering of religion is a shift away from ‘sin’ and ‘abomination’ in the religious script of homosexuality (cf. Jordan 2011; Wilcox 2003, 2006). In 1976, in defiance of the official protest from the Catholic Church, priest John McNeill published *The Church and the Homosexual* and called on gay Catholics to see their ‘predicament’ as a ‘gift from God’. Although few had access to this book at the time, most studies and firsthand narratives of self-identified queer Christians indicate that they undergo a shift in self-understanding that occurs when they find a way to recast themselves from sinner to contemporary martyr whose role it is to help their religious community find its way to a bigger, more accepting god.

The Internet has been a central force in shifting the script and providing struggling queer-identified youth with alternative characters in their religiously informed self-understanding. Rather than suffer in silence, or heed the traditionally scripted interpretations of religious family and friends, young people now have access to a myriad of websites that offer multiple, complex, and very queer readings of scripture. They can recast themselves in nuanced ways that allow them to reconcile their queerness and their religiosity in a self-affirming and communally engaging manner.

**Cultural Dominance, Political Climates, and Persecution**

Religion matters as a basis of cultural dominance. The extent to which a community or region is characterized by a strong common adherence to a particular religious ethos shapes both the degree and form of acceptability exhibited toward non-conforming gender and sexual expressions. Tom Linneman (2003) developed the concept of ‘political climates’ to explain the variation in attitudes toward homosexuality across regions. He intersects religion and social action to demonstrate that in areas characterized by general secularism, religious groups have a heightened sense of diminishing morality and increased threat to their lifestyles. Persecution is a rallying cry and the oppressors are those who do not submit to ‘natural law’ as it pertains to the social organization of the family. From this perspective, homosexuality becomes a sort of anti-totem symbolizing the decline of morality. Anti-gay activism is not just about politics; it’s a deeply emotional ritual around which to gather, renew faith, and shore up community. Political climates provides an explanation for the rise of anti-gay legislative initiatives in seemingly secular areas such as Oregon, Washington, and Colorado in the 1990s where Christian evangelicals rallied to fight what they perceived as a form of persecution by the majority.

Conversely, geographical regions and environments with a strong religious dominance may have large numbers of gay or lesbian identified members attending relatively conservative churches (e.g. the US ‘Bible Belt’ region; see Barton 2012).
Paradoxically, religious cultural dominance in these regions may afford a veneer of tolerance toward gender and sexual variant expressions, but the tolerance is a cover for institutionalized bigotry. People tend to exhibit individual decency, but this should not be interpreted to mean a shift in religious (cum political) attitudes about the general acceptability of homosexuality. These are the regions in which the platitude ‘love the sinner but hate the sin’ is fully embraced by church-goers who honestly believe that they are right both to tolerate gays and also deny them civil rights. In the context of religious cultural dominance, ‘tolerance’ reinforces an us/them, second class status.

For LGBT scholars of religion, these cultural and regional variations are significant in shaping both the political climate and the form and tone of political action. The question vis-à-vis the possibilities of queer religiosity is how this intersects with a politics of containment. Where religion is culturally dominant, LGBT religious participation is likely to be tolerated (even encouraged) as long as the ‘sinner’ remembers her or his place. Participation may be high and convey cultural capital or belonging, but doesn’t necessarily reflect shifts away from heteronormative theology and practice. In relatively secular regions, fundamentalist religious groups are more likely to feel a sense of persecution and to engage in anti-gay action in the belief that this will inhibit the decline of morality as they see it.

This trend is particularly evident across the United States today where the discourse of persecution is often employed by well-established conservative watch groups, such as the Liberty Counsel, which, following the overturn of DOMA (Defense of Marriage Act), has issued a campaign to label the US Supreme Court as un-American. (‘It has strayed from the hearts and beliefs of the American people. It is no longer a legitimate court’.) The framework of political climates and shifting cultural dominance suggests that as regions become increasingly secular, the underlying religious ethics that have permeated law and politics without contest begin to come under scrutiny. For liberals, this may signal a more progressive politics, but for those accustomed to the expectation that their religious values—especially heteronormativity as rooted in the natural laws assumptions of a traditional gender division based on sexual reproductivity—are mirrored in civic policy, the shifts are unsettling and deeply threatening.

Inclusion and Exclusion

Religion matters especially as a citadel of belonging. Religious acceptance and participation conveys legitimation within families, communities, and societies. There are many subject areas ripe for this exploration. Two strike me as timely and highly relevant: examinations of ex-gay ministries and explorations of the religious-based groups that support progressive movements directed at the expression of gender and sexuality. In each case, the orienting concept is inclusion or exclusion. What are the
terms of full belonging as indicated through theology and practice? Do these
thelogies and practices reflect a queering of religiosity or homonormative variations
on the entrenched heterosexuality on which most major religions are based?

**Ex-gay Ministries**

Ex-gay ministries and the accompanying ‘reparative therapies’ provide a rich vein for
LGBT scholars of religion to mine. Several excellent studies (e.g. Creek, this volume)
document the narratives of self-meaning that compel participants to strive so earnestly
to ‘pray the gay away’. These studies highlight the importance of religious belief and
community as a basis of belonging. From the perspective of many gay Christians,
same sex desire is an affliction that exiles them from family, friends, neighbors, and
community. The raging debates about the legitimacy of these ministries, in particular
reparation therapies, reflects a controversy that is rooted in the understandable (if
problematic in the eyes of many observers) desire of gays and lesbians to do anything
it takes to be fully integrated into their families and communities.

In terms of scholarly trends, the rising rhetoric of persecution is especially relevant
here. Alongside public scrutiny of ex-gay ministries and their effectiveness, or lack
thereof, a number of reactionary ‘watch’ groups and blogs have emerged. For instance,
Gay Christian Watch is ‘a blog upholding biblical standards of sexuality’. It chronicles
the stories of ‘exhomosexual abolitionists’ who help others ‘escape homosexuality
through the power of Christ’. Voice of the Voiceless is a similar site that offers
‘traditional biblical views on marriage and family’ and promotes ‘Ex-Gay Pride’.
What’s different about these sites is that they are not interested in promoting ex-gay
conversions, per se; rather they take the position of vigilantes who are keeping an eye
on and denouncing the efforts of ‘ex-ex-gays’ who are thwarting the ex-gay conversion
efforts. They characterize the anti-ex-gays as ‘gay Christian movement adherents’ who
are a ‘loose association of ex-ex-gays whose main unifier seems to be the proliferation
of homosexual rights within the Christian church’. Blog items include stories on ‘gay
activists who react Klan-style to an exhomosexual awareness event’ and other forms of
‘anti-ex-gay extremism’. In short, in just over a couple of decades, from the
perspective of the ex-gay movement, queers themselves have become the oppressors.
In particular, these watch groups are on the lookout for gay Christians whose crime it
seems is the attempt to seek inclusion in Christian religions as openly queer. None of
these sites mentions current legislation in California and New Jersey that would ban
reparative therapy for youth. These extra-religious actions are not the enemy; rather
these bans reflect predictable secular responses against which the good Christian must
always fight. The real enemy here is the one from within, the homosexual who takes
pride in and seeks belonging for what has traditionally been considered an
abomination.
Religious Support for Marriage Equality

Ex-gay Christians may be right to fear the increasing inclusion of queer Christians in religious communities; they are, in fact, a locus of change. Current research indicates a steady uptick in people who were originally against marriage equality changing their minds in support of it (there is no comparable changing of minds in the opposite direction). Respondents state that the primary reason for this change of attitude is getting to know someone who is gay or lesbian, especially in their church. In Canada, the UK, and the US, religious associations have been in the foreground of the fight for LGBT rights and recognition. These associations include both queer-oriented religions and congregations representing mainline denominations. One of the most active groups lobbying for the overturn of DOMA in the US is a multifaith group that includes Christian, Jews, and Muslims, a majority of whom identify as heterosexual.

A thorough examination of the rationale for this supportive engagement among religious groups is beyond the scope of these brief remarks. The seed I want to plant here is that this is another area that can be fruitfully studied by focusing on scripts, in this case, scripts of inclusion and exclusion. The implications for both theology and a more general politics of belonging are considerable. As I discussed earlier, the nuclear family as predicated on ‘procreative’ interpretations of natural law is a foundational pillar of most major religions. Congregations and religious communities that have opened their doors to LGBT members have wrestled with this belief structure in a variety of ways. The most conservative approach has been to rewrite the script with an emphasis on the homosexual as god’s creation and therefore equally worthy of love and respect. Whether this love and respect extends to participation in specific sacraments such as marriage and participation at the level of ordination is another matter altogether and one that requires additional transformation of the script.

Both Mormon leaders and the new Catholic pope, sensing the mood of the times, have recently issued statements reminding followers that prejudice and discrimination against gays and lesbians is not acceptable. From the leaders of the most theocratic of Christian religions, these statements have left regional level bishops and priests scrambling to interpret what this means in practice. The general consensus is a reaffirmation of the Vatican II edict that the homosexual should be treated with love and compassion and should strive to practice celibacy in order to be worthy of full inclusion. Although it’s too early to tell at this writing, the contemporary variation on this theme appears to be an indirect call on leaders to cease persecution of homosexual individuals, but the definition of homosexuality as ‘inherently disordered’ remains intact.

Many of the relatively democratic mainline Protestant organizations as well as reformed Jews and some Muslim groups have been wrestling for many years with the question of how to characterize homosexuality. To the extent that gay, lesbian, or trans identified members adhere to the general tenets of the nuclear family model, the more progressive of these congregations have been inclined to set aside the ‘mysteries of