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Please cite this publication as follows:

Scherer, B. (2017) Queerthinking religion: queering religious paradigms. *The Scholar and Feminist Online*, 14 (2).

Link to official URL (if available):

<http://sfonline.barnard.edu/queer-religion/queerthinking-religion-queering-religious-paradigms/0/>

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## **Queer thinking Religion: Queering Religious Paradigms**<sup>1</sup>

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“Queer” and “religion” are arguably uneasy bedfellows. Both can be - and are being - used as categories for the projection of identitarian yearning and belonging, often constructed as mutually exclusive types of belonging. Both categories are problematic; both are contested. In this paper I investigate queer (and) religion using different discursive threads such as Human Rights; ethics; bodily integrity; spirituality; and resistance. I build herein on my theory of *aphalophobia* as underlying heteropatriarchal oppression and challenge the myth of “religion” as an essentialized positive category. Instead, “religion” is shown to be value-neutral and morally protean; while on the other hand “victimhood” does not equal sainthood. I introduce the term *homosecularism* to describe the homonormative expectation of belligerent secularism. Finally, I propose a way forward for a mature, constructive and *jouissant* relationship of “queer” and “religion”: however messy, uneasy, hybrid and/or idiosyncratic embodied queer religious identities, I propose *queer* thought religion as embodied *compassion-in-action*.

### **1 The Problem with Queer Theory**

It has long been acknowledged that the term “queer” implies “dissent and defiance of dominant meanings of sex and gender.”<sup>2</sup> Among the *loci classici* for approaching the term<sup>3</sup> one of the most famous, by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, speaks of “the

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the unknown peer-reviewers for their helpful remarks and Aleardo Zanghellini (Reading) for adding 'morally protean' to my thinking about 'neutral' religion. My particular gratitude goes out to Naomi Goldenberg (Ottawa): our genial and intense discussions and (dis)agreements have wonderfully sharpened my point of view and, hence, added much to this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Claudia Schippert, “Queer Theory and the Study of Religion,” *REVER* 5.4 (2005): 90-99.

<sup>3</sup> Such as Eve K Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 230; David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Toward a Gay Hagiography*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62.

open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically.”<sup>4</sup>

Fifteen years on, Jonathan Kemp succinctly observes that “[q]ueer, if it names anything, names a critical impulse that can never, must never, settle.”<sup>5</sup> Drawing on etymological affinities to German terms, I have spoken of the queer impulses as *Querschläger* and of queer subjects as *Queerköpfe*, “ricochets to the hegemonic binary discourses on gender and sexuality.”<sup>6</sup> Queer subjects embody the “identitarian openness which resists the seduction of identity by exclusion and celebrates the whole potential of gender and sexuality fluidity and diversity.”<sup>7</sup> Consequently, Queer Theory, can never entail “a single, stable intellectual stance,” but needs to utilize “a diverse and often conflicting set of interdisciplinary approaches to desire, subjectivity, identity, relationality, ethnicity and norms.”<sup>8</sup> This intellectual “instability” might be Queer Theory's most significant problem: defying sexuality and gender normativities necessarily connects with other indissolubly interlaced marginalized normativities such as ethnicity, (post)colonial and subaltern status, and abled-bodiness. The subversion of normativities, *résistance*, becomes a much broader social justice issue. Acknowledging the identitarian messiness and biographical idiosyncrasies of human existences (including ethnic-cultural, socio-economic and physic-mental variability etc.), intersectional approaches becomes necessary and what I would term “Intersectional Theory” is born (if not by name

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<sup>4</sup> Eve K. Sedgwick, “Queer and Now,” in *Tendencies*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Kemp, “Queer Past, Queer Present, Queer Future,” *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 6.1 (2009): 3-21,

<sup>6</sup> Burkhard Scherer, “Introduction,” in *Queering Paradigms*, Burkhard Scherer ed., (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Burkhard Scherer, “Introduction,” in *Queering Paradigms*, Burkhard Scherer ed., (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Noreen Giffney, “Introduction: The ‘Q’ Word,” in *Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*, Noreen Giffney and Michael O'Rourke, eds., (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 2.

then by practice). Has, then, Intersectional Theory emptied “queer” of any remaining common focus? Has it superseded Queer Theory? Some Queer Theorists caution openly against the loss of “queer's ... radical force if its semantic range is extended to encompass concepts and experiences which are not shared by the sexually non-normative, regardless of location” and plead “to keep queer ‘queer’.”<sup>9</sup> Yet, if queer is a radical impulse of subversion, isn't it necessary that it would expand, transform itself and, at least in part, also be aimed at self-subversion? Is the clinging to gender and sexuality normativities as Queer Theory's focus already implying yet another form of identitarian essentialism? Or are we simply acknowledging Queer Theory as one angle of the critical inquiry or Intersectional Theory, if you will a gender/sexuality perspective on the aforementioned indissolubly interlaced production of normativities, power imbalances, marginalization and social injustice? And what happens after any given, intersecting societal paradigm has successfully been queered, challenged and dismantled but (post)queer yearning, meaning and belonging struggles to emerge in the allegedly unavoidable ethical vacuum, which the dominant religious discourses gloomily foreshadow for the case that their hegemonic or self-declared morally superior essentializing codes of social interactions are troubled, subverted and voided? The prophesized post-religious crisis of queer mirrors the equally prophesized post-modern crisis of religion and its academic study.

## **2. A Crisis of Religious Studies, a Crisis of Organized Religion?**

After the poststructuralist and post-essentialist turn, Religious studies itself has been subjected to increased meta-reflection and contestation. As the subtitle of Joseph Cahill's 1982 examination of the position of Theology in the academia suggests, Religious Studies

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<sup>9</sup> Liz Morrish and Kathleen O'Mara, “Introduction: Queer Impact and Practices,” in *Queering Paradigms, Vol. 3: Bio-Politics, Place, and Representations*, Kathleen O'Mara and Liz Morrish, eds, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), 11-12.

has been in crisis.<sup>10</sup> Acknowledging its very subject, “religion,” as both non-definable and as a Eurocentric colonialist imposition, Religious Studies is struggling with both methodological *aporia* and the “loss of its subject.”<sup>11</sup> At the same time, in the Global North, a crisis of religious institutions due to secularization and the loss of credibility of organized religions has been noted<sup>12</sup> prompting, among others, the study of “invisible religion”<sup>13</sup> and “implicit religion.”<sup>14</sup> Closer attention has been paid to individualized forms of religious experience and to the rise of subjective, “alternative spirituality.”<sup>15</sup> Religionists have been exploring spiritual “hybridity,” adopting a central critical parameter shaped by Mikhail Bakhtin and Homi K. Bhabha<sup>16</sup>; individually packaged, spirituality has become a commodified item in the cultural supermarket.<sup>17</sup> A recent study by the Christian think tank “Theos” (UK) points to the striking prevalence of amorphous 'spiritual' beliefs within the secularized population of the UK.<sup>18</sup> Yet, in the last decades, the increasing challenges to modernism as the dominant “western”/colonial mind-set and the comeback of

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph Cahill, *Mended Speech: The Crisis of Religious Studies and Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> Fritz Stolz, “Religionswissenschaft nach dem Verlust ihres Gegenstandes,” in *Streitfall "Religion,"* Ernst Feil, ed., (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2000), 137-140; Carl Raschke, “The Deposition of the Sign: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Religious Studies,” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 3.1 (2002); Carl Raschke, “Derrida and the Return of Religion: Religious Theory after Postmodernism,” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 6.2 (2005): 1-16; Günther Stephenson “Beteiligt, skeptisch oder distanziert: Zur Krise der Religionswissenschaft,” in *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 93.1-2 (2009): 16-24.

<sup>12</sup> Wouter Hanegraaf, “New Age Religion and Secularization,” *Numen* 47 (2000): 288-312.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: the Problem of Religion in Modern Society*, (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

<sup>14</sup> Edward Bailey, *Implicit Religion: An Introduction*, (London: Middlesex University Press, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Paul Heelas, “Expressive Spirituality and Humanistic Expressivism: Sources and Significance beyond Church and Chapel,” in *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman, eds., (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 237-254.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> Gordon Matthews, *Global Culture/Individual Identity: Searching for Home in the Cultural Supermarket*, (London: Routledge, 2000); Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*, (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Theos, [http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/files/files/Reports/Spirit%20of%20Things%20-%20Digital%20\(update\).pdf](http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/files/files/Reports/Spirit%20of%20Things%20-%20Digital%20(update).pdf) *The Spirit of Things Unseen: Belief in Post-religious Britain*. (London: Theos, 2013).

organized religion have been noted as a postsecular turn in culture(s) and society/-ies,<sup>19</sup> although the very notion of 'the postsecular' is increasingly being contested.<sup>20</sup> Is the observed reassertion of religion the failure of secularism to provide strong alternative narratives for the projection of identitarian yearning and belonging? Or are organized religions as form of “vestigial governmentality”<sup>21</sup> proving resilient due to their offer of binary structures of thinking and belonging, allied to – and mirrored by – an hierarchical binarism which underlies (heteropatriarchal) power and authority?

### **3 The phallus and the cultural myths of the good religion and the good victim**

For LGBTIQ subjectivities, a societal renaissance of religion can constitute a challenge. In Lacanian terms, heteropatriarchal power is symbolized by “having the phallus”: hegemonic and oppressive (cis-/hetero-)male privilege; this privilege is based on an essentialist gender binary and produces sexism as the expression of its hegemonic power; homo- & bi-phobia as the expression of phallic insecurity; and, in its most violent form, transphobia: the very existence of trans\* people is perceived as an attack on the foundations of the phallus, which is the alleged inalterability of essentialized; hierarchical; and strictly binarist gender. Recently I have started to theorize all these various expressions and modes of heterosexist oppression under the term *aphalophobia*: the fear of losing the “phallus” or the privileged binarist power.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Gregor McLennan, “The Postsecular Turn,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 27.4 (2010): 3-20.

<sup>20</sup> Khaled Furani, “Is There a Postsecular?” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83.1 (2015): 1-26.

<sup>21</sup> Naomi R. Goldenberg, “The Category of Religion in the Technology of Governance: An Argument for Understanding Religions as Vestigial States,” in *Religion as a Category of Governance and Sovereignty*, Trevor Stack, Naomi Goldenberg, and Timothy Fitzgerald, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 280-292.

<sup>22</sup> Bee [Burkhard] Scherer, <https://queeringparadigms.com/2014/08/11/crossings-and-dwellings-being-behind-transphobia/> “Crossings and Dwellings: Being behind Transphobia,” Conference paper delivered at *Fear and Loathing: Phobia in Literature and Culture*, University of Kent, 9-10 May 2014.

Analogously, most religious organizations and institutions claim; hold; and - in the post- and counter-secular contexts – reclaim the spiritual phallus along the Aristotelian (or more precisely: Parmenidean) “true-false” dichotomy of European classical logics. Challenging the spiritual phallus, LGBTIQ perceived, identifying and/or expressing individuals are often becoming the prime targets of religious hatred. When exhibiting the spiritual phallus, religious organizations and institutions are availing themselves of the aid of a romantic myth expressed in the common place truisms, which automatically render anything labeled as “religion” as worthy of special respect and protection: “All religions are good” or “All religions want peace and happiness for all.” These post- and counter-secularly popular assertions - that all religions share as an identitarian core the aim for peace; uphold ethical standards in society; and are essentially “good” - have two interconnected and major consequences: firstly, if all religions are essentially good, it follows that any expression of a religion not justifiable as “good” has to be an “abuse” or misuse of religion; secondly, if all those good religions have proper ethicality (morality); peace; and happiness for all on their mind, then any religious conviction should have equal (or even higher) value and legal protection to (or than) other characteristics of legal identity politics (such as sex/gender; race/ethnicity; (dis)ability; age; and of course sexual orientation and gender identity/expression).

Obviously, casting off religious-ideological blinkers, it is not difficult to critically argue that religions *per se* cannot essentially be classified as good (nor bad): evidently, religions simply *are* (or *are there*) and reflect and express the whole spectrum of human ethical potential.<sup>23</sup> If that is so, then there simply is no misuse and no abuse of religion; violence and oppression in the name of any religion are simply that: expressions of (a) religion. Again this leads to the possibility that some religions,

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<sup>23</sup> Burkhard Scherer, “Faith and Experience: Paradigms of Spirituality,” in *Integrating Spirituality in Health and Social Care: Perspectives and Practical Approaches*, Wendy Greenstreet, ed., (Oxford: Radcliffe, 2006), 89-101.

i.e. their followers, express themselves more frequently in harmful ways through their spatial and temporal journeys. Value-neutral in their potential state, they are morally protean in actualization. Hence, certainly, accepting “religion” as a value-neutral and morally protean aspect of culture needs to result into a rethinking of the protective privileges claimed by “faith/religion” as an identitarian characteristic. If “religion” is itself an intrinsically value-neutral category, having a harmful or discriminatory religious conviction and practice cannot be seen as equally worthy of protection as identifying with and/or expressing a sexual orientation and/or gender identity. And while spiritual and/or religious needs and rights can be positively acknowledged and affirmed, their expression can be subject to non-privileging scrutiny. In legal terms, constitutional rights warranting the free practice of any religion (*Religionsausübungsfreiheit*) cannot be conflated with; or treated as an unlimited Human Right of equal or higher hierarchy to/than individual Human Rights to, e.g., the right to physical integrity (*körperliche Unversehrtheit*). I argue, indeed, that individual bodily integrity should be used as a primary principle in the hierarchy of rights with the caveat that 'the body' is not necessarily a merely secular location: to construct the body as secular *per se* is clearly underestimating the complexity of the embodied, religious self.<sup>24</sup> While fully acknowledging the identitarian messiness of human existence, employing “bodily integrity” as a critical parameter enables us, however, to successfully challenge harmful embodied religious discourses. When evaluating ethical practices and privileges an “embodied wellbeing”-focused approach would weigh heavily in discussions about circumcision; FGM (or FGC); abortion; contraceptives; gender confirmation surgery, etc. Utilizing “empowered consent” in conjunction with “freedom from suffering and its causes” (to use religious – namely Buddhist – language) as evaluative tools of religious practices is one possible way out of the intellectual dilemma of being rendered voiceless as

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Amesbury, “Is the Body Secular? Circumcision, Religious Freedom, and Bodily Integrity.” Paper presented at the *British Association for the Study of Religion Annual Conference*, September 7-9, 2015.

an activist from the Global North in the face of any suffering which is culturally and postcolonially framed: some Queer Theorists and postcolonial feminists alike have maneuvered themselves into this very dilemma of ethical-relativizing silence with regard to harmful cultural (and religious) practices, e.g. to avoid the charge of homonationalism.<sup>25</sup> This silent complicity with evident heteropatriarchal oppression appears to mistake postcolonial agency (which can for many reasons be complicit with that very oppression) with informed, individual empowerment to claim freedom of suffering. At the other hand, seeing (culture and) religion as value-neutral *per se* and morally protean in expression, does not preclude us *a priori* from taking serious religious discourses as inscribed on religious bodies. The complex, embodied religious Self is clearly worth of societal acknowledgement and individual protection. The ethical discourse around the vulnerable or wounded body however shifts from essentialized arguments based on “religion” as a protective good in itself to the question where individual bodily self-expression (including self-harming and self-oppressive practices) becomes a question of societal concern; hence, for example, the question of religious circumcision becomes part of the same discourse negotiating the (non-)governance of, for example, suicide; extreme BDSM; and euthanasia.

Value-neutral evaluation of “religion/faith” manifesting in cultural/religious, morally protean embodied practices also allows us to challenge another binary in form of the dualistic construction of “queer” and/vs. “religion”: the idea that “bad religion” is persecuting the “good queers.” Challenging the myth of the good religion should be balanced by challenging the myth of the *per se* ethical superiority of any (member of any) marginalized

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the powerful critique offered by Aleardo Zanghellini in “Are Gay Rights Islamophobic? A Critique of Some Uses of the Concept of Homonationalism in Activism and Academia,” *Social & Legal Studies* 21.3 (2012): 357-374.

group. Being the victim of *aphallophobia* (sexism, homo-/bi-phobia, transphobia) does not render anyone into a saint.

Hence, with all the queering, troubling and subverting it might be worth to ask the question of the possibility of (post-)queer ethics or ethics after queering.

#### **4 *Queer* thinking Religion: Queering Religious Paradigms**

Notwithstanding the queer impulse to subvert phallic religions' institutional, oppressive power, the recent decades and years have seen an increasing academic interest in the spiritual needs, expressions and practices of queer subjects themselves.<sup>26</sup> And, while queer spiritual yearnings and needs spawned some queer-inclusive/-embracing religious practices,<sup>27</sup> in the contemporary societal discourses on Human Rights, in particular in the Global North, Religious rights and LGBTIQ rights are still topical dichotomies,<sup>28</sup> exhibiting productive and genealogical dynamics.<sup>29</sup> This inimical discursive current is aided by the above-mentioned idiosyncrasy of the very type of identity politics, which attributes an implicit value to different characteristics and affords religious convictions *a priori* protection, even when they are harmfully discriminatory. For example, in North-America, institutionalized religion in the form of conservative Christianities is almost invariably seen as incompatible with queer liberation and LGBTIQ subjectivities: religious (here: Christian) cultural codes form vestigial governmental structures by (re-)erecting the spiritual phallus; in

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<sup>26</sup> Gary Comstock and Susan Henking, eds., *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Continuum, 1997).; Scott Thumma and Edward R. Gray, eds., *Gay Religion*, (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005); Melissa Wilcox, *Queer Women and Religious Individualism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

; Donald Boisvert, and Jay Johnson, eds, *Queer Religion. Vol. 1: Homosexuality in Modern Religious History. Vol. 2: LGBT Movements and Queering Religion*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Melissa Wilcox, "Same-Sex Eroticism and Gender Fluidity in New and Alternative Religions," in *New and Alternative Religions in the United States*, Eugene V. Gallagher and William M. Ashcraft, eds., (Westport, CT: Praeger/Greenwood, 2006), 243-265.

<sup>28</sup> Austin Cline, <http://atheism.about.com/od/gaymarriage/a/GaysReligion.htm> "Gay Rights & Marriage vs. Religious Liberty: Does Equality for Gays Threaten Religious Liberty in America?" Accessed August 7, 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Tina Fetner, *How the Religious Right Shaped Lesbian and Gay Activism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

this way they play an important part of queerophobic oppression and soul murder. LGBTIQ Christians are hence viewed as suffering from 'Stockholm syndrome.' As Johansson puts it:

<blockquote>If they deny the responsibility of the Church for the soul murder that it has committed upon homosexuals, individually and collectively, through aeons of intimidation and oppression, then they are acting as the accomplices of a criminal psychopath, and when the magnitude of the crime that institutional Christianity has perpetrated is revealed to the world, they — and the Church — will suffer unparalleled dishonor.<sup>30</sup></blockquote>

I propose calling the particular form of homonormativity which antithetically constructs itself to religion and faith and vocally demands belligerent secularism from its LGBTIQ subjects <em>“homosecularism”</em>. In the consequence of counter-Christian homosecularism, Queer Christians, Theologians and Religionists are left in an uncomfortable position to justify their allegiance to or interest in – <em>per se</em> – 'anti-LGBTIQ' religion. For scholars of religion, the possible coping strategies include the recluse to the academic Ivory Tower or the biographically more challenging option of becoming queer academics-cum-activists. Most Christian Queer Theologians appear to have invented themselves as the latter.

Once the freedom to practice a religion cannot be construed to imply the freedom to oppress the religiously abject or 'other', the allegedly essential oppositionality of LGBTIQ identities and religions (as their oppressors) might be bridged by thinking about and asserting spiritual needs and rights as part of a (secondary) Human Rights discourse for queer subjects, lest to <em>a priori</em> cut off the religious/spiritual from the array of possible identitarian expressions for LGBTIQs. In its possibly most explicit form, Harry Hay's inception of the

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<sup>30</sup> Warren Johansson, “Ex Parte Themis: The Historical Guilt of the Christian Church,” in <em>Homosexuality, Intolerance, and Christianity: A Critical Examination of John Boswell's Work</em>, Warren Johansson, et al., eds. (The Pink Triangle Trust, 2003).

*Radical Faeries* caters for this.<sup>31</sup><sup>31</sup> The ensuing dynamic can lead to the creation of inclusive spiritual places; it expresses itself in multiple ways: as creating new queer spiritual spaces (e.g. LoveSpirit Festival<sup>32</sup><sup>32</sup>) or claiming a queer space even in queerophobic religious contexts and, by doing so, subverting queerophobic institutions; as heightening queer spiritual visibility; as queer appropriation of religious modernisms (science, rationalism discourse) and postmodern spiritualities. Queer religious scholar-cum-activist pragmatism can mean supporting those theologies, which open up institutional religious discourses while avoiding queer retrospect utopias – *à la* Boswell.<sup>33</sup><sup>33</sup> Queer spiritual re-empowerment consists of the *jouissant* reclaiming of religious agency for informed, individual empowerment. Empowered spiritual choices can form an agentive foundation for a queer-religious dialogue with the religious phallus - those forms of religion, which are most invested in the wielding of societal power and exclusion. The onus falls on any organized religion in the focus of a (Foucauldian and post-Foucauldian) discourse analysis critique to do some honest soul- (and phallus!-) searching in regards to the past and the present religious oppression and violence - without trying to deflect blame or obscure the past; the trust of LGBTIQ subjects embroidered into the dichotomist discourse of LGBTIQ rights vs. religion can only be advanced by sincere steps towards repent (in Christian terms) and reform on the side of the religious institutions and organizations; for example, exactly such an act of repent was demanded on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016 by 105 senior Anglicans from the Anglican communion<sup>34</sup><sup>34</sup> yet to no avail: on the contrary, the Anglican communion appears

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<sup>31</sup> Mark Thompson, “This Gay tribe: A Brief History of Faeries,” in *Gay Spirit: Myth and Meaning*, ed. Mark Thompson, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 260-278; Jay Hasbrouck, “Utopian Imaginaries and Faerie Practice: Mapping Routes of Relational Agency,” in *Gay Religion*, ed. Scott Thumma and Edward Gray, (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005), 239-258.

<sup>32</sup> <http://lovespirit.org/> LoveSpirit

<sup>33</sup> John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>34</sup> Jayne Ozanne et. al., <https://lettertoarchbishops.wordpress.com/> “Open Letter To Archbishops” January 2016.

to have reverted to a firm anti-LGBT stance by punishing the US Episcopal Church “over its stance on same-sex marriage and homosexuality.”<sup>35</sup>

Queer-religious relations can be approved above all by firmly basing religious practice on the “human principle” – the principle, which puts the embodied person above any abstract doctrine and establishes concrete compassion and love-in-action above abstract ideas. Any such dialogue also asks from queer subjects to dare compassion and forgiveness – after succeeding in self-compassion and self-forgiveness! – despite any potential residual spiritual wounds LGBTIQ people might individually or collectively bear. In that way, an *empowered* spiritual choice can become the instrument to healing. Within this process, the re-spiritualization of queerness becomes part of the queer resistance to neo-liberal homonormativity, which expresses itself in late-capitalist; consumerist; and, also, hedonistic homosecularism. Moving beyond these alignments, it appears to me that a successful queer re-spiritualization will need to be preceded by individual value shifts from materialist egotism to living a (post/)queer ethics of embodied *compassion-in-action* (and -activism). A *queer* thought spiritual and/or religious identity can naturally draw meaning and *jouissance* from a “spiritual awakening” (to use, again, religious – namely Theo-Christian – language), which aims at (and performs) an empowered LGBTIQ spiritual embodiment. For me, claiming the responsibility for this empowerment naturally results in an urgent social activist impulse: the queering of religious paradigms.

The new approach to the messy relationship of queerness and religion suggested in this paper departs from the necessary problematizing of the key concepts involved. While questioning the endless extendibility of the term, I propose taking “queer” as a form of

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<sup>35</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-35318392> “Anglican communion to restrict US Church over gay marriage”, BBC News. Accessed 15 January 2016.

intersectional resistance. I further make the argument to rethink religion as value-neutral and morally protean and, in consequence, to challenge religion's position in the hierarchy of rights. Instead I propose “bodily integrity” as strong principle of societal - legal and ethical - evaluation, while leaving intact the complexity of the embodied *religious* Self. Finally I argue to move beyond troubling towards the nurturing the embodied subject: queer embodied spirituality and ethics as fruitful and joyful compassion-in-action/activism can successfully move beyond homosecularism translating spiritual yearning into forms of belonging, which resist neoliberal homonormativity.