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**Book Section:**
Henderson-Merrygold, J. (2018) Queer(y)ing the epistemic violence of Christian gender discourses. In: Blyth, C., Colgan, E. and Edwards, K., (eds.) Rape Culture, Gender Violence, and Religion: Christian Perspectives. Palgrave MacMillan , London , pp. 97-117. ISBN 978-3-319-72685-4

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**Queer(y)ing the Epistemic Violence of Christian Gender Discourses**

Jo Henderson-Merrygold

Christian teachings about gender, sex, and sexuality have a wide-reaching impact upon contemporary society. The historic significance of the church as arbiter of morality and decency endures in many countries where Christianity has influenced what Michel Foucault calls "systems of knowledge" (1979). These systems of knowledge (also known as "epistemes") refer to the network of beliefs, perceptions, and ideologies that shape people's understanding of and engagement with their world and their selves; when they become widely accepted or deemed authoritative within a society, they take on the status of "discourses"—frameworks within which knowledge, social practices, subjectivities, and power relations are constituted and sustained (Weedon 1987, p. 108). These discourses can be incredibly difficult to contest or change, as they become regarded as foundational, or "natural," rather than socially constructed.

In this chapter, I consider the implications of this apparent immutability of social discourses, focusing particularly on Christian discourses of gender and sexuality, which prescribe the recognition of others' humanity in light of their gender identities and sexual preferences. When a person does not conform to the expectations of these discourses (that is, when their gender identity or sexual preferences are considered to contradict those stipulated within the discourses), recognition of their humanity may be withheld. This is the issue facing many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans(gender) (LGBT) people, and can result in what is known as epistemic violence. This form of violence can be hard to quantify but is no less harmful than more immediately identifiable forms of physical and sexual violence. It occurs when the episteme—the system of knowledge—stipulates a limited number of ways of being human, and refuses to acknowledge that humanity is possible beyond these parameters

(Spivak 2010). The primary result of epistemic violence is that specific groups of people are considered not sufficiently human to be granted full recognition and therefore to be deserving of human rights. When a person's humanity is questioned or denied, they become so much more vulnerable to violence. Systems are developed to police and contain them *beyond* the realm of the human, thereby maintaining their isolation and vulnerability. Building on Spivak's work on such epistemic violence (2010) and Butler's notion of "undoing" humanity (1999, 2004), I therefore explore how Christian heteronormative discourse renders queer[1] lives and experiences unintelligible and *not* human, and the implications of this for the lived experiences of LGBT people.

This failure to recognize a person's humanity becomes especially problematic when held in tension with the Christian doctrine of *imago Dei*: humanity created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). The relationship established in Gen. 1:27 between humanity and the divine provides the basis for the incarnational conception of the human person in Christianity. Each person is made in this image, so to reject someone's humanity is to declare that they are not *of* God, and therefore cannot be fully recognized or accepted as such *by* God. This, I suggest, is the quandary encountered by many LGBT people, whose humanity is denied or questioned within the dominant epistemes embraced by the Christian church. These epistemes privilege both cisgendered and heterosexual identities, recognizing them as the only natural and valid options. When the church becomes complicit in the production and maintenance of such heteronormative discourses,[2] validating them in light of church theologies and teachings, the effect is one of "divinising normativities" (Vorster 2012, p. 607), where only certain gender and sexual identities (typically heteronormative) are granted divine approval.

Moreover, within these Christian discourses, epistemic violence can flourish through the othering and dehumanization of LGBT people. For Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, othering is both a cause *and* effect of epistemic violence (2010); it makes a person or group

unrecognizable within an episteme, especially through silencing them and erasing their lived experiences (ibid.). This results in their lives being made unintelligible and therefore invalid; they are moved to the margins until they cease to have a visible social presence. The cumulative effect of such invisibility is the loss of validity as being truly human; as Judith Butler explains, those who are othered effectively lose their viability and are "undone" (2004).

Following Butler and Spivak, I spend time in this chapter distinguishing between systemic and epistemic violence; the difference is found in the methods used within Christianity's institutions to "undo" queer humanity. Epistemic violence covers the overarching effects of silence and erasure through systems of knowledge, while systemic violence utilizes systems of governance, such as internal denominational mandates, to control or demarcate those close to the margins. Systemic violence is both a contributory factor and a result of epistemic violence, as it makes visible and explicit the discrimination faced by those who are marginalized. As such, it is important to identify how the heteronormative episteme translates into systemic violence. To do so, I draw on three examples: the first considers the rhetoric of a Russian Orthodox Metropolitan, whose overt othering and dehumanizing of gay and bisexual men effectively reduces their identities to a set of predatory and animalistic urges. This in turn reflects the ideologies of Chechen political leaders, who concurrently torture queer men while denying the possibility of the existence of these men within their country. The second example addresses Church of England guidelines for LGBT clergy, which offer the promise of full recognition through the illusion of a choice. The language used within the Bishops' Guidelines on Human Sexuality demonstrates that both humanity and sexuality are deemed contingent, and recognition of each can ultimately be withheld if one does not conform to heteronormativity. The result is the demarcation of a group of people who are, at best, acknowledged to be *nearly* human, and who rely on the continual acceptance

and validation of those whose humanity is not subject to such scrutiny. Third, I discuss the response of the evangelical Christian community to two public figures who chose to challenge, in their own way, the dominant episteme of divinized heteronormativity. While the first two examples show the ways that LGBT people are fully or partially dehumanized in order to distance them from heteronormative humanity, the third demonstrates the forcible silencing and rejection of dissenting voices, ensuring the systemic erasure of queerness from certain Christian contexts.

Such acts of systemic violence are inseparable from their epistemic contexts, and need to be addressed by those who have the power and influence to change discourses. Despite the best efforts of affirmative or progressive churches, these discourses cannot be changed until the episteme is reconfigured to welcome and include a greater diversity of humanity. The first step requires acknowledging that Christianity enculturates systemic and epistemic violence through its deification of heteronormative discourses of sex, gender, and sexuality.

### *Pope Francis, Heteronormativity, and Epistemes of Violence*

Since his inauguration in 2013, Pope Francis has repeatedly demonstrated his commitment to the perpetuation of heteronormative discourses (Westen 2015). He has argued that he supports the family and the "natural order" from the threats of "ideological colonisation" and "indoctrination" of "gender theory" (Tornielli and Galeazzi 2015; Wooden, 2016). While Francis does not provide a specific definition of gender theory, going by his discussions on this subject, he appears to be alluding in general to those academic and cultural analyses which scrutinize or challenge heteronormativity and affirm LGBT lives. In particular, he expresses his disquiet at one of the central assertions of queer theory: that heteronormativity is culturally constructed and contingent, rather than natural and transhistorical. Implicit to his argument is the assertion that, if heteronormativity is the only divinely mandated model of

gender, sex, and sexuality, it *is* both natural and immutable. Within this paradigm, anything which emerges from "gender theory" cannot be considered an acceptable alternative as it is neither natural nor validated by God. Heteronormativity is so ingrained within the systems of knowledge in which Pope Francis lives and works that it becomes the only means of understanding gender and sexuality.

Interestingly, however, by expressing his concerns about gender theory using the language of "indoctrination" and "colonization," Francis indirectly hints at the potential for theories of sex, gender, and sexuality to lead to violence. While he is unable to reconcile diverse theories of gender, sex, and sexuality, he seems to acknowledge the patterns of othering and epistemic violence which result from colonial power systems. Indeed, references to colonization are particularly evocative when uttered by Pope Francis, an Argentinean Jesuit. The relationship between religion and colonialism is complex, and the colonial history of Argentina is inseparable from Roman Catholic Christianity. Following a Papal decree to the Spanish crown in 1497, South America was a target for conversion to Christianity (Lewis 2015, p. 21). From the arrival of the first Spanish explorers in 1516, spreading religion was a key outcome of the colonial plans (p. 17), and church officials were among the earliest explorers to the region in the 1500s, with Jesuit missionaries first arriving in the 1580s (p. 21). With the introduction of Christianity came Christian teachings of gender, sex, and sexuality which were deeply rooted in heteronormativity.

According to theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid, a fellow Argentinean, these new Christian teachings brought by the missionaries were at odds with pre-colonial models of gender, sex, and sexuality in Argentina, and may therefore be deemed as neither innately "natural" nor authoritative by indigenous Argentinians (2000; 2004). Indigenous women, she suggests, many of whom also experience extreme poverty, may not recognize themselves in the teachings of the Church nor the role models they are offered. Encouraged to treat the

Virgin Mary as a representative example on which to model their own womanhood, they find Mary's symbolic cleanliness and virginity alienating, and so return instead to the pre-colonial imagery of sexualized female deities (2000, pp. 11–83). The return to precolonial imagery, especially where it is tied to discourses of gender, sex, and sexuality, highlights the contingent and imperialist effects of Christianity as a colonizing force. Whether colonization is primarily associated with Spanish political forces, or Christian missionaries, Althaus-Reid's discussion here demonstrates evocatively the way theology and politics are inextricably linked, as are their sexual and economic underpinnings. She argues that we therefore need to "deconstruct a moral order which is based on a heterosexual construction of reality, which organises not only categories of approved social and divine interactions but of economic ones too" (p. 2).

Althaus-Reid's identification of the link between religious teaching, economic systems, and broader social discourses is key to understanding the role of Christianity in enculturating epistemic violence against queer people. As she indicates, Christian epistemes interweave religious and non-religious discourses, contributing to the organization and normalization of dominant economic and social categories (2000, pp. 11–19). Similarly, in his work on the history of sexuality, Michel Foucault identified Christianity as exerting considerable influence on the creation and control of sexual behaviour and morality across Eurocentric, Christianized countries (1979, pp. 20–3). According to Foucault, churches established conventions of desire and provided language through which to understand sexuality. They provided social and economic validation of some expressions of gender, sex, and sexuality, especially in the sacraments of marriage and (infant) baptism (pp. 20–1). Marriage and procreation rewarded appropriate sexual desire and practice, while the sacraments conferred recognition and legitimacy, ensuring a secure foundation for subsequent social and economic relations beyond the Church. For those who did not readily

conform, there was limited language for and no recognition of alternative desires or practices. Confession served as space for education, formation, and correction, as well as an environment for monitoring morality, and with it, decency (ibid.). The concept of decency was thus tied to religious propriety, and to God, but had broader social recognition too. For hundreds of years, churches therefore had supreme authority over social discourses of gender, sex, and sexuality.

Foucault, however, argues that this process "might have remained tied to the destiny of Christian spirituality had it not been supported and relayed by other mechanisms" (1979, p. 23). With the introduction of new discursive power systems in the eighteenth century, especially those associated with science, economics, politics, and technology, Christianity found new partners to reinforce its teaching (pp. 23–5). Foucault identifies certain behaviours that came to be regarded as heinous crimes and "perversions" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including "'nervous disorders' … 'excess' … onanism … [and] 'frauds against procreation'" (p. 30). By the end of the nineteenth century, these new medical discourses had transformed Christian prudishness into a scientific obsession with sexuality. "Claiming to speak the truth," writes Foucault, they "stirred up people's fears" and "ascribed an imaginary dynasty of evils destined to be passed on for generations" (p. 53).

Moreover, with the emergence of psychoanalysis, religious and scientific models of sexuality became further allied. The therapist transformed the religious institution of confession into a diagnostic tool, and started to identify the possibility of latent desires, especially those related to sexuality (p. 66). The construction of the "Other" no longer relied merely on what a person *did*; instead, desires became key in determining their intrinsic nature, or identity. As a result, it became possible to treat people as "Other" based on their sexuality or gender. What had previously been considered errant behaviour, and therefore

temporary, became identified as aberrant but intrinsic to that person's health and identity (pp. 51–65).

As homosexuality and diverse gender expressions emerged as medicalizable identities, science was used to corroborate the Christian assertion that only heteronormativity was "natural" and "normal." Consequently, *non*-heteronormative expressions of gender, sex, or sexuality rendered the person *un*natural and therefore *not* fully human. Heteronormativity thus became *the* divinizing normativity (cf. Vorster 2012, p. 607) of gender, sex, and sexuality, essential for a full and valid human life.

Once heteronormative discourses become established, the humanity of those outside the heteronormative paradigm may be called into question. Butler argues that humanity can be undermined, and individual lives can be "undone" or rendered nonviable, when norms of gender, sex, and sexuality are forcibly applied. She highlights the contingency of humanity and its relationship to what is considered normal and desirable:

> The human is understood differently depending on its race, the legibility of that race, its morphology, the recognizability of that morphology, its sex, the perceptual verifiability of that sex, its ethnicity, the categorical understanding of that ethnicity. Certain humans are recognized as less than human, and that form of qualified recognition does not lead to a viable life. Certain humans are not recognized as human at all, and that leads to yet another order of unliveable life … [I]f the schemes of recognition that are available to us are those that "undo" the person by conferring recognition, or "undo" the person by withholding recognition, the recognition becomes a site of power by which the human is differently produced. (2004, p. 2)

Within Christian contexts, these "schemes of recognition" around gender, sex, and sexuality take the form of divinized normativities, which "undo" those queer groups and individuals who fail to conform. This "undoing" results in the epistemic violence of silencing queer

humanity and queer identities; moreover, it is rendered visible through distinct systems of religious authority and power, sustaining acts of systemic violence within religious institutions and beyond.

*Demarcating the Bodies of the Christian Human and the Queer Other*

"Undoing" can occur in various ways, but essential to each act of dehumanization is that it actively undermines a core element of humanity. In this first example, the violence of "undoing" is perpetrated by withholding recognition of LGBT bodies as human. As Butler has argued, bodies matter, and it is on bodies that we read and recognize what it means to be human, or otherwise (1993, 2004). Yannik [Annika] Thiem highlights the importance of bodies when he describes them as "possible or impossible, [we] render them with power or marginalize them, and make them vulnerable to violence and exploitation" (2007, p. 459). A statement issued in 2017 by Metropolitan Kornily, Primate of the Russian Orthodox Old Believer Church, highlights the way bodily "undoing" and marginalization can make LGBT lives vulnerable to physical as well as systemic violence. It further demonstrates the influence of the church in rendering lives viable or otherwise through the paradigm of gender, sex, and sexuality (Thiem 2014).

In July 2017, Metropolitan Kornily publicly argued that men should grow beards to "protect themselves from homosexuality" and to differentiate themselves from gay men (Williams 2017). He reasoned that men need to remain hirsute because it is natural and desirable within Christianity (ibid.). Queer media outlet *Pink News* highlighted the ludicrous nature of Kornily's claim by emphasizing the desirability of beardy, hirsute men (colloquially known as "bears") in queer subculture (Jackman 2017). Yet questions about the validity of the Metropolitan's statement are secondary to the effects of his egregious reductionism. His language reveals a reliance, once again, on ideations of what is "natural" in order to justify

the differentiation between heteronormatively recognizable humans and queer Others. LGBT humanity is thus rendered unnatural, but in this example, it is a bodily expression of queerness that is the subject of Metropolitan Kornily's claims.

Kornily relies on recycling a familiar but highly damaging trope that claims gay men are predatory and unable to restrain their desires. His assertion that (straight) men need to protect themselves from the threat of queer men creates an image of innate, animalistic, and uncontrollable sexual expression. Let us consider the implications of this claim in relation to the construction of violence.

As Kornily's recommendation for men to be hirsuite can only be adopted at an individual level, as decisions to shave or not are a personal choice; he thus appears to perceive the threat of homosexuality as one directed at individual men. His encouragement for men to deter the threat, and to distance themselves from queer desire, must equally be a personal endeavour. The implication at the core of Kornily's claim is, therefore, that queer attraction is so insatiable and animalistic that once identified, it cannot be stopped. Any clean-shaven or moustached man is beholden to the homogenous, unified desire of *all* male-attracted queer men (commonly described as gay or bisexual). Moreover, once Kornily's claim has been heard, the choice to continue to shave one's the face can be considered as an intentional embodiment of queerness or queer desirability. As such, Kornily creates a distinct and othered group comprising queer men, for whom there is no gradation, nuance, or diversity in the perception of their desire. In Kornily's presentation of the risk facing straight men, there is more in common between queer men and animals who cannot control their sexual desires, than with human men.

At no point in Kornily's argument does he suggest that there is any capacity for control or consent. Either he asserts that queer men are too far from being human to understand and require consent, or alternatively, that queer men are rapists. These are

horrifying conclusions, but whichever is the case there is a clear, persistent differentiation between heteronormative and therefore human man and the queer, not-sufficiently-human, man. This is an example of comprehensively othering in order to "undo" the personhood of an entire group of people, and of enacting systemic violence through withholding any recognition of the parity between queer and heteronormative humanity. It epitomizes Butler's conception of an unliveable life at the epistemic level.

While his argument has been subject to mockery on social media, Kornily's voice is an important one. As the *Pink News* article highlights, he is a religious leader supported by Vladimir Putin, the Russian president. The mutual familiarity and support between Kornily and Putin demonstrates the narrowness of the divide between Christian religious leaders and their secular political counterparts. So, when Kornily is makes his argument at a time where queer lives are subject to specific threats of violence (and at times actual violence) in Russia and Chechnya, the correlation between physical violence and its systemic and epistemic counterparts *has* to be recognized. Throughout 2017, torture and other human rights violations against gay, bisexual and trans men took place in Chechnya (Walker 2017). The Metropolitan's statement may initially seem distant from queer Chechnyan men's visceral experiences of violence, yet the rhetoric is consistent. It highlights the continuity between words which call into question the true humanity of queer lives and the real-world effects of those words. In an interview during the summer of 2017, Ramzan Kadyrov, the Chechen leader, categorically declared, "We don't have any of *those kind of people* here. We don't have any gays" (Keating 2017, emphasis added). He specifically describes "gays" as a distinct kind of people: a *sub*set of humanity. In doing so, Kadyrov cannot recognize the possibility that a Chechen *person* could be gay. Where imprisonment and torture is perpetrated, it is done so against someone who is *not* human. It can, therefore, be justified. For Kadyrov, as with Kornily, gay people are othered to the point of being "undone." LGBT

bodies are inscribed with queerness, and that queerness can be used to withhold recognition of their humanity and demarcate them as the Other.

### *"Undoing" in Christian Language and Legislation*

As Kornily's and Kadyrov's words highlight, recognition of humanity is not only given or withheld at the bodily level. Language itself has the power to render people intelligible and recognizable, which in turn creates an environment where there is the possibility of being "undone." The capacity of language to initiate systemic violence by differentiating between the fully, nearly, and not human is particularly evident in the treatment of Nicholas Chamberlain, the Anglican Bishop of Grantham. Following his appointment in 2015, Chamberlain was forced to out himself by an unnamed Sunday newspaper because of his sexuality. By withholding any choice over the disclosure, Chamberlain described feeling no option but to divulge his sexuality and relationship status publicly (Sherwood 2016). He is the first Church of England bishop to disclose that he is both gay and in a relationship. This resulted in significant scrutiny of Chamberlain and the Anglican Church's systems and processes by both the church and the media. It is in this legislative framework governing Chamberlain and other queer clergy that we can identify "undoing" language and its resultant systemic violence.

Following Chamberlain's disclosure, church leaders were under pressure to offer affirmation to both the Bishop of Grantham and to members of the church concerned about the appointment of a gay bishop. Questions were posed as to who knew what, and when, and whether Chamberlain—and his silent and silenced partner—were upholding the church's edicts. Early responses drew on the formal church statements confirming Chamberlain's compliance with the "Bishops' Guidelines,"[3] which forbid same-sex sexual relationships for clergy, while permitting them to enter civil partnerships. There is no single, unambiguous

document that lists these guidelines, as they build on a combination of Synod motions and bishops' statements. Consistent throughout the guidelines is the ban imposed on ordained people in same-sex relationships from marrying (Sherwood 2016). The response from Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, reiterated this message and declared that Chamberlain's "sexuality is completely irrelevant to his office" (ibid). Yet both Welby and Chamberlain's superior, Christopher Lowson, specifically referred to the guidelines, which refer to "Issues of Human Sexuality" and build on the Synod resolution that precludes "homosexual genital acts" (ibid). Welby may consider Chamberlain's sexuality irrelevant to his office, but it was nevertheless subject to careful scrutiny and evaluation.

The guidelines are particularly fascinating examples of the ways language, power, and recognition are combined to construct humanity. Applying only to LGBT clergy, the title itself, "Issues of Human Sexuality," requires detailed attention. The use of the term "human" in guidelines around queer sexualities and identities is a noteworthy inclusion in itself. There is no linguistic or legislative framework in which the guidelines could apply beyond the human paradigm, so the specific inclusion is, at best, extraneous. At worst, it would appear to imply that recognition of another's humanity becomes contingent on their sexuality. Those who conform to "divinized" heteronormative discourses are unproblematically granted fully human status; those who fail to conform are "undone," rendered something less than human. In other words, the language used in these guidelines grants or withholds recognition of humanity based on gender, sex, and sexuality. Furthermore, by explicitly including the terminology of "human sexuality" in this way, a power differential is created between those who make the rules and those subject to them. Those making the rules have the power to "undo" the humanity of those whose lives are governed by the rules. It is not a context of equals, but one that stratifies human incarnation, leaving LGBT people once again as lesser beings and subject to systemic violence. Legislation, and precise language usage, enables the

church to carefully but effectively "undo" queer lives, all the while promising recognition and acceptance.

This act of dehumanization is even more evident when we subject the language of the Bishops' Guidelines on Human Sexuality to further scrutiny. These Guidelines are constituted in part by the House of Bishops 1991 report, *Issues of Human Sexuality*, which use the term "homophilia," rather than homosexuality, throughout their discussion, thus distinguishing between religious and more popular definitions of sexuality. The Guidelines also use the term "homosexual genital acts," which are the focus of concern of the Synod motion agreed in 1987, on which the Bishops' Guidelines were built (House of Bishops 2013, pp. 130-1). This phraseology remains core to the Church of England's guidance on sexuality, having been explicitly cited in the statements following Chamberlain's disclosure (Sherwood 2016). The acts described in the phrase "homosexual genital acts" are disembodied and depersonalized. Acts are undertaken by genitals, and those genitals are problematized as homosexual. Moreover, describing queer clergy as "homophile" rather than gay, queer, or homosexual, creates further linguistic and conceptual distance between the person subject to the guidelines and their genitals. "Homophilia" promises the potential of queer love, but it must remain completely distinct from the homosexuality of genitals: it is linguistic castration, creating the homophilic body as distinct from the homosexual one. It is reductive, failing to acknowledge the presence of an incarnate, corporeal, embodied person within a same-sex sexual act. As Thiem argues, sex, gender, and sexuality are complex, intertwined and indistinguishable, and most importantly, they involve *bodily* experiences (Thiem 2014). They are far from reducible to acts perpetrated with or by genitals, especially as disembodied entities devoid of their wider context. Yet again, queer sexuality and sensuality are framed in heteronormative terms, through a framework which considers genital acts to be the only expression of sexuality and sexual desire. As with Kornily, LGBT bodies are fetishized,

reduced to constituent parts, and once again become the battleground upon which queer people fight to be recognized as fully human.

While Chamberlain's story drew attention to the Bishops' Guidelines, he and his partner are far from the only people "undone" by this language and subject to what Butler describes as social death (2004). When the Church of England models the treatment of LGBT people in this way, it loses any credibility to condemn dehumanizing treatment of queer people anywhere, whether within the Church, or outside in wider society. The legislative tool of the Bishops' Guidelines is no different in effect to the rhetoric of Metropolitan Kornily. Each denies even the possibility of recognizing the humanity of LGBT people, thereby leaving them vulnerable to subsequent enactments of epistemic and systemic violence.

### *LGBT Humanity as a Threat to Christianity*

While the effects of the Anglian edicts and Kornily's pronouncements effectively withhold recognition of LGBT humanity while tacitly acknowledging the existence of LGBT people—albeit it while relegating them to sub-human status—the final example I wish to share is the most complex. Significant numbers of evangelical protestants, predominantly in America, treat the possibility of queer humanity as a substantive threat to Christianity. Queerness is presented as posing such a threat to Christianity that heteronormativity becomes entirely inseparable from religion within the evangelical episteme. This is evident in the publication of the Nashville Statement[4] by the Coalition for Biblical Sexuality, otherwise known as the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, in late August 2017. While the statement remains controversial, having been condemned by key figures from across the theological spectrum including conservatives (Beaty 2017), it is an evocative and valuable insight into the core beliefs of many within powerful sections of conservative (predominantly white)

evangelicalism. Moreover, the statement attempts to create beliefs about non-heteronormative gender, sex, and sexuality as *the* "litmus test" for evangelical beliefs (ibid.).

The fourteen-clause statement articulates key beliefs on gender and sexuality and is endorsed by significant supporters of current US president Donald Trump. It refutes any religious validity to "homosexual, polygamous, or polyamorous" marriages (Article I), or to the claim that sexuality can be expressed outside marriage (II). It expressly withholds recognition of "homosexual and transgender self-conception as consistent with God's holy purpose in creation and redemption" (VII), and reiterates the idea that heterosexuality is exclusively natural and therefore to be privileged (especially VIII).

Article X, however, is the most problematic: "We deny that the approval of homosexual immorality or transgenderism is a matter of moral indifference about which other faithful Christians should agree to disagree." In other words, recognition of queer humanity is a threat to heteronormativity, and thus to Christianity. It is not a matter of moral inconsequence, and any indication that people should "agree to disagree" is met with comprehensive and strenuous rejection. The language makes clear that, within the system of knowledge upheld by adherents to the Nashville statement, there is no capacity for recognition of any humanity beyond the heteronormative model they promote. Where they depart from Kornily's model of sexuality and that of the Anglican church, however, is to withhold the recognition of Christian humanity from those who *challenge* these beliefs as well as from LGBT people. In this case, queerness is treated as a contagion, and the only way to protect the sanctity of the episteme is to "undo" the humanity of *all* those recognized as tainted by alternative discourses of gender, sex, and sexuality. Systems which make visible the epistemic violence, such as the Nashville Statement, are therefore put in place to invalidate, silence, and expel dissonant voices.

Yet hidden behind this uncompromising language and epistemic violence, we can detect a glimmer of queer and human recognition—a possibility that will not lead to humanity being "undone." In its expression of fear-driven epistemic violence, the Nashville Statement appears to acknowledge (inadvertently perhaps) that "homosexual and transgender" people *may* be human. In contrast to the Bishops' Guidelines, or the statements of Metropolitain Kornily, Article X presents queerness as something that may potentially be considered acceptable to supportive allies, whose own lives conform to heteronormative discourses. By remaining morally "indifferent" (rather than morally opposed) to LGBT identities, these allies allow the humanity of queer people and queer lives to be recognized, or at least rendered possible; they are thus able to resist the "undoing" of queer humanity within the church's own heteronormative episteme. Article X's response (a form of systemic violence) betrays a perceived need within the church to create doctrines that push queer people *and* those who acknowledged their humanity to the margins, lest this humanity be recognized and their potential to disrupt heteronormative discourses is unleashed. The statement may therefore be a fear-driven, but nevertheless deliberate, attempt by those currently in positions of religious and social power to retain their power, by asserting the *in*-humanity of *anyone* they suspect may pose a threat to their authority. In other words, those who are definitely *not* human cannot seriously threaten the power, authority, or security of those whose humanity is acknowledged. Heteronormative humanity thus retains its illusory permanence, and its proclaimed seal of divine approval. As a result, divinized norms of sexuality and gender, such as those made explicit in the Nashville Statement, gain absolute power within the episteme.

This process of epistemic and systemic violence resonates with Althaus-Reid's conception of Christianity as the self-appointed and colonizing custodian of decency through reliance on canonical theology and the regulation of sexual and amatory practices (2000, p.

9). Within such theology, the pinnacle of decency is identified in heteronormative terms as the divinely mandated model of gender, sex, and sexuality, expressed through monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Queer humanity poses a threat to (evangelical) Christian epistemes of gender, sex, and sexuality by making possible the inclusion of the *in*decent. For Althaus-Reid, such inclusion invites "dissenters" of heteronormativity to consider both God and humanity in relation beyond "heterosexual ideology" (2003, pp. 2–4), and to create queer and postcolonial theologies of indecency (p. 4). Moreover, she argues that once the indecent is accepted as a realm for theological engagement, it becomes possible to identify God *in* indecency (ibid., see also 2000; 2004). Althaus-Reid reminds us that decency and, by extension, heteronormativity, are human constructions and not divinely mandated. Yet for some churches and Christian communities, heteronormativity and Christianity function synonymously or symbiotically. As the Nashville Statement demonstrates, any threat to Christian constructions of decency must be quashed at all costs, no matter the violence caused by systems and structures which threaten to "undo" the humanity of those deemed too indecent to be fully human before God. In other words, the Christian community must be decontaminated from the metaphorical contagion of queer identities and queer acceptability.

Recent examples of such decontamination can be found in the experiences of Vicky Beeching and Eugene Peterson. Both Beeching and Peterson have been lauded within American conservative evangelical communities, and each has also found themselves treated as a threat to decency in relation to heteronormative epistemes. Peterson and Beeching independently confronted the systems that counter the potential presence, and acceptance, of LGBT people within Christianity, yet the outcome for each of them was markedly different. Their stories highlight the contingent and removable recognition of humanity within Christianity's heteronormative paradigm. They also witness to the ways in which recognition

and affirmation of queer humanity is explicitly withheld under the guise of protecting decency and securing the heteronormative systems of knowledge.

Peterson, a retired American Presbyterian pastor and author, is a popular and well-respected figure across multiple strands of American Christianity. His most famous work, *The Message* (published between 1993 and 2002), is a paraphrased and idiomatic retelling of the Bible. It is popular with contemporary audiences for making the Bible accessible, and is used widely in churches across many countries and denominations. During an interview in June 2017, he was asked whether, hypothetically, he would officiate at a same-sex marriage ceremony for committed Christians. He answered in the affirmative, and in agreement with his denominational stance (Merritt 2017). This was the first time he had publicly discussed same-sex marriage, but the response he received was swift and unrelenting. America's largest Christian bookseller, LifeWay Christian Store, threatened a comprehensive boycott of all 135 of his works from their stock listings (Shellnut 2017). This was not a hollow gesture, as they have previously upheld such threats against other offending authors. It was no surprise, then, when Peterson publicly disavowed the statement within twenty-four hours of publication, given the threat to his livelihood, and to his acceptance by the self-appointed custodians of divinized heteronormativity. Lifeway's response highlights the systemic violence used to police the parameters of decency. Yet Peterson himself was never at substantial risk of being "undone," or dehumanized, as he could (re)gain full recognition as a member of the heteronormative Christian community. This is not the case for queer Christians, where systemic and epistemic violence threatens to comprehensively "undo" their humanity.

Beeching's experience at the hands of conservative evangelical power brokers is testament to that differentiation between queer and heteronormative lives, and resulted in a very different outcome than that faced by Peterson. For many years, she was a widely celebrated Christian rock star and song writer, popular within many American evangelical

communities. In 2014, this changed after she came out as a lesbian during an interview with journalist Patrick Strudwick (2014). In Strudwick's article, Beeching acknowledged that the disclosure would lead to her being comprehensively blacklisted by the very churches who had previously celebrated her. This has turned out to be true. Unlike Peterson, once Beeching came out, she was unable to retreat to a safe, heteronormative space. Instead, she has been unable to continue with her music career within evangelical Christian circles, and is still subject to daily online abuse, predominantly by Christians who dehumanize her because she dares to be visible in her evangelical, Christian, and lesbian identities (Farley 2017). Each of these identities is core to Beeching's humanity and highlights her visible rejection of heteronormativity. As a result, she remains subject to malicious attempts to "undo" her, and to render her both unintelligible and not-human. She is the quintessential example of someone forced to live with the direct effects of systemic and epistemic violence.

*Acknowledging the Violent effects of Christian Discourses of Gender and Sexuality*

The explicit abuse faced by Beeching, and others who will not acquiesce to the requirements of Christian decency, is intentional. If the systems of language and the intelligibility of the body cannot function to "undo" humanity through the episteme, it must be specifically and intentionally enacted through systemic methods. Differentiating between who is and who is not human matters. Violence is both the tool for differentiation and the result of having one's humanity "undone." LGBT lives are consistently "undone," whether fully or partially, through Christianity's divinized heteronormative discourses of gender, sex, and sexuality. Queer people are rendered indecent, and thus condemned to remain outside the realm of the human. The only question is how far away they are kept. The consistent outcome within the examples explored earlier is one of systemic violence, used to protect systems of knowledge that seek to make queer lives unintelligible. As such, when Pope Francis voices his concerns

about the ideology and threat of gender theory, he is choosing to validate only one of many possible epistemes, one which is inherently tied to heteronormativity and decency.

Yet to deny that Christianity produces its own theories and discourses of gender and sexuality is hugely damaging. When Althaus-Reid advocates for an intentional inclusion of queer, indecent theologies, she emphasizes the contingency of the systems of knowledge Pope Francis insists are natural and divinely-ordained. Queer lenses reveal that same contingency at the heart of Christian gender theory, but they also reveal something vital about God. Human queerness has been excluded by divinized heteronormativity and resultant systematic and epistemic violence, but the indecency and queerness of God has likewise been excluded from Christianity. As Althaus-Reid insists, "The God who has come out, tired perhaps of being pushed to the edge by hegemonic sexual systems in theology, has made God's sanctuary on the Other side" (2003, p. 4). God, too, has been "undone" through the same epistemic violence which renders queer lives unviable and unrecognizable.

Once the abuse perpetrated against LGBT people is acknowledged, it is incumbent upon those chastened by the description of Christianity's culture of violence to enact change. This is a matter of praxis and theology. No single congregation or group can change these deeply entrenched discourses alone. The work of those who commit to LGBT inclusion is invaluable, and offers signs of hope to those who struggle with constant experiences of being "undone." There is a need to publicly and visibly reject those divinizing heteronormative Christian discourses that "undo" queer humanity, thereby sustaining forms of epistemic violence. The humanity of queer people should not be up for debate. Moreover, there is a need within Christian theology to embrace the indecent; this is not simply a matter of broadening the category of decency to include queerness, but rather involves reconceptualizing the divine to make space for indecency. In so doing, we must admit that decency is a human rather than divine construction, and one used to enact and justify

violence. Only once humanity is fully recognized in the decent *and* the indecent can the incarnational really have meaning and value. Only then can life in all its fullness, and life made in the image of God, be fully achieved.

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[1] While “queer” has historically been used as a term of abuse and denigration, it has also been reclaimed by LGBT people as a term of self-description and self-articulation. As an academic discipline, queer theory emerged from lesbian and gay studies, and focuses predominantly on studies of sexuality. While trans(gender) studies emerged at a similar time to queer theory, it has taken longer to establish and has a complex relationship with its sibling discipline due to the different focus of each. While distinctions can rightly be made between the two disciplines, in this chapter, “queer” is used to cover analysis attentive to diversity of both sex, gender, and sexuality outside the heteronormative paradigm. Throughout this chapter, I use “queer” as a synonymous and inclusive term to describe LGBT people, lives, and experiences. “Queer” also functions as a descriptor of the unquantifiable aspect of LGBT bodies and identities which mark an individual as outside the dominant norms of sexuality and gender.

[2] See Hornsby (2016, p. 2) for further discussion of the social construction and ubiquity of heteronormativity.

[3] The Bishop’s’ Guidelines comprise a number of Church of England publications and statements. *Issues in Human Sexuality* (The House of Bishops 1991) was later referenced and updated in the 2003 publication, *Some Issues in Human Sexuality: A Guide to the Debate* (The House of Bishops 2003), and most recently in *Working Group on Human Sexuality* (The House of Bishops 2013, especially pp. 28–36), which also covers intervening debates held at the church Synod. Further clarifications were made in a 2005 pastoral statement by the Church of England to reiterate the need for sexual abstinence within civil partnerships (https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2005/07/pr5605.aspx, accessed on 21 October 2017). While there have been significant developments between each publication, the linguistic framework is consistent throughout, with the language of “homosexual genital acts” and “homophilia” remaining unchanged (see e.g. The House of Bishops 1991, p. 28; 2013, pp. 33, 36).

[4] Designed for self-proclaimed evangelical Christians, the statement is a response to the perceived rise of post-Christian discourses which have "embarked upon a massive revision of what it means to be a human being" (Coalition for Biblical Sexuality. n.d.). The statement reasserts a biblical-inspired, heteronormative and complementarian model of gender and sexuality, and at the time of its launch had been endorsed by over 150 evangelical Christian leaders. Complementarianism is described by Katelyn Beaty as "The belief that men and women have distinct, God-given roles in the church and home" (2017). The statement was released during the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, Tennessee on 29 August 2017.