

Introduction

During on-campus conversations on same-sex relationships during 2013-14, an often-referenced book was *What Christians Think About Homosexuality – Six Representative Viewpoints* by L. R. Holben, published in 1999.

Though the language is somewhat dated, Holben's summary of the range of viewpoints on this topic seems to have stood the test of time. Holben was then a freelance writer, but is now an ordained Episcopal priest.

This material supplements information that appeared in the summer issue of EMU's Crossroads Alumni magazine.

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VIEW #1, CONDEMNATION

The “condemnation” camp notes that the Bible contains zero positive references to homosexuality. Its leaders deny that a unique homosexual orientation exists and insist that homosexuals, at some point, make conscious decisions to sin, which leads to addiction and then to self-fulfilling homosexual identities. Same-sex desires are as sinful as sex acts. Holben says this camp “honestly believes that sexual sins are the worst sins, anyway. ... Then, homosexual sins are the worst of the worst.”

– Reported by Terry Mattingly, director of the Washington Journalism Center at the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.

This longer summary prepared by EMU Marketing/Communications:

This viewpoint is characterized by a belief that the Bible clearly pronounces damnation for anyone who has same-sex desires or sexual behavior. Proponents of this view defend it as the only Christian view that has not been morally compromised by secular humanism. No Christian can identify as being other than heterosexual or act upon same-sex desires.

The Bible is the inerrant, inspired Word and revealed will of God, according to this viewpoint. It is the ultimate moral authority, an objective text that is above all scrutiny. The Bible's judgment of same-sex relationships and desires is made clear in Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18-19), 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, and Romans 1:18, 1:24-28. There are no positive references to such relationships. God's created intent is evident in the Bible: heterosexuality that propagates humanity and joins a husband and wife in a lifelong union. Same-sex relationships are unnatural and idolatrous in the face of that intended order; it is only within the order of heterosexual marriage that sexual expression is moral. Additionally, sex must be generative – thus, the most traditional “Condemnation” proponents hold that birth control, sex with a sterile spouse, sex during menstruation, masturbation, and a male orgasm outside of intercourse are all sinful, as they do not fulfill sexuality's

primary purpose – conception. In more recent decades, especially among Protestant proponents, sexuality's purpose has been expanded to include intimacy, psychological union, and some level of mutual gratification.

Because there is no mention of non-heterosexual orientations in the Bible, “Condemnation” proponents hold that they do not exist. There is no moral distinction between desiring and acting upon desires for homosexual sex. Contemporary psychology's findings on sexual orientation are not credible – they undermine Christianity. Same-sex relationships and desires are fostered in one of two ways. Broken homes and parents who break traditional gender roles are seen as a breeding ground for the gender confusion, which are thought to be the root of homosexuality. Further, someone who experiments sexually with someone of the same sex is punished by God with an addiction to that experience. Then, a false identity of orientation is built around that addiction. Homosexual persons are thought to be predatory, incapable of loving relationships, and self-destructive in personality.

Proponents of “Condemnation” do not generally discuss trying to turn a homosexual into a heterosexual. However, it is often assumed that, were a homosexual person to convert to Christianity, he or she would cease to experience same-sex desires. Some proponents see homosexuality as a form of demon possession that requires exorcism. Some forms of Christian counseling may be seen as appropriate for a converting homosexual person. To heed the call of Christ, homosexual people must repent of their actions, admit that their desires are the result of conscious, sinful choice, renounce those desires, and ask for salvation. The final goal for the convert is a heterosexual marriage. If converts continue to experience same-sex desires, then they must lead a life of celibacy, and are barred from church leadership.

CRITIQUE FROM OTHER VIEWPOINTS

The primary critique of this viewpoint is that it carries an attitude of contempt and hatred that is the opposite of the spirit of Christ. Jesus ministered love to social outcasts, and left judgment to the hypocritical pious. Also, the portrayal of homosexual people as pedophiles with destructive lifestyles is declared to be nothing more than misinformation and scare tactics.

Another critique from many of the other five viewpoints is what they see as misuse or inconsistent use of the Bible. The story of Sodom is seen as an attempted gang rape, not a consensual same-sex relationship; thus one cannot equivocate the two. Also, this viewpoint proclaims damnation to homosexual people because of Leviticus, but themselves transgress or remain silent on other aspects of the Holiness Code, such as the death penalty for cursing one's parents, remarrying after divorce, or committing adultery. The Bible urges Christians to spurn worldly goods, but some adherents to this viewpoint subscribe to a “prosperity theology.”

Moreover, critics continue, homosexual orientations are a scientific fact, and homosexual people are on average as mentally healthy as straight people. They usually become aware of their sexuality long before engaging in any sexual activity, which belies the explanations offered by the “Condemnation: proponents.

RESPONSE TO CRITIQUE

It is not compassionate to let homosexual people go to hell, just to spare their current feelings, “Condemnation” proponents respond. Impressionable children need to be protected from ungodly behavior. God is love, but is also wrathful, and takes rebellion against Him seriously. He has made clear in the Bible that same-sex desires and sexual behavior are sinful, and the church (and, in some cases, the state) should act accordingly. To even suggest another interpretation on the issue is to succumb to falsehood and rebellion.

VIEW #2, PROMISE OF HEALING

The “healing” camp says homosexual orientation is real, even if its origins remain mysterious. It’s crucial that many who take this position can testify that they have changed their “orientation” or at least their “sexual behavior.” At the same time, some concede that they continue to experience same-sex temptations and that “healing” is a life-long process. While viewing all sex outside of marriage as sin, they stress that same-sex desires, alone, are not sinful and that homosexual sin is no worse than other sin.

– Reported by Terry Mattingly, director of the Washington Journalism Center at the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.

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The second category of opinion, “Promise of Healing,” takes a more pastoral tone. Same-sex desires are viewed as psychological impairment or immaturity, from which one can and should undergo mental and spiritual recovery. As with “Condemnation” proponents, the moral authority is the Bible, which negatively judges same-sex acts. Moreover, the Bible specifically endorses the positivity of male-female relationships. “Promise of Healing” proponents strongly advocate for sexuality-conversion programs.

Within those marital relationships, human sexuality has four purposes: procreating, intimately uniting the spouses, sharing a sacramental bond, and symbolizing an archetype of completeness that is manifest in God. Maleness and femaleness are meaningful because of their juxtaposition. Masculinity is marked by initiative, leadership, authority, protectiveness, and rationality. Femininity is marked by responsiveness, receptivity, nurturing, sacrificial love, and intuition; these two opposites are meant to complement one another in heterosexual relationships. Even outside of marriage, sexual relationships are spiritually binding, and thus sexuality must be taken seriously. (1 Corinthians 6:15-16) Sex does not need to be generative, but must take place in a heterosexual marriage to be morally legitimate.

The concept of a homosexual orientation is not natural; it may develop through an inappropriate or immature bond with the same-sex parent. Psychological injury needs to have occurred for same-sex desires to present in adulthood. “Promise of Healing” proponents maintain that, because of this injury, homosexual people are unable to access their full gender identity, and eroticize those repressed elements of themselves. This eroticization leads the homosexual person to seek same-sex love, a vital part of the human experience, in inappropriately sexual ways. Thus, same-sex relationships are unfulfilling and unstable, because they are broken mimics of failed parent-child relationships. Having these desires does not make one culpable as long as they are resisted and submitted to the healing power of the Holy Spirit. God does not intend for homosexual people to remain as they are psychologically and spiritually, they need an ongoing process to escape their bondage to same-sex thoughts and behaviors.

“Promise of Healing” proponents believe in the ability for a homosexual person to become straight through “ex-gay” programs. They see three barriers to this sexuality conversion: a failure to forgive others' sins, a failure to repent and be forgiven for one's refusal to forgive others, and a failure to love and accept the “true self.” With prayer, the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and learning to see one's self with the loving eyes of Christ, these three barriers can be overcome. Also, the homosexual person needs to develop platonic same-sex attachments to fulfill their unmet need and confused gender identity. Then, an identity can be reestablished in Christ.

CRITIQUE FROM OTHER VIEWPOINTS

From the liberal viewpoint, critics of the “Promise of Healing” stance holds that attempts to change sexual orientation not only do not work, but are mentally damaging. There is considerable evidence of

failure that critics bring against the ex-gay movement. While the ex-gay movement promises heterosexuality to its clients, in reality, they use a bait-and-switch tactic to leave the homosexual person struggling with their immutable orientation, forced singleness, and a sense of failure for not living up to the program's promises. Rather than results, critics claim, ex-gay programs are essentially discriminatory and belittling, sometimes driven by monetary gain.

There are also theoretical fallacies and theological objections with which critics find fault. First, the "Promise of Healing" uses outdated psychology models of orientation etiology that have long been discredited. Second, one can be clear on one's gender identity (e.g., be a physically strong, assertive male) and have same-sex desires (e.g., not be attracted to women) – these two matters are not correlated. Third, critics denounce what proponents term "gender identity" as merely sexist stereotypes. Fourth, the "Promise of Healing" refuses to recognize that same-sex love can have the same affection, mutuality, passion, commitment, and self-sacrifice as heterosexual love. Critics' theological objection has to do with the "Promise of Healing" proponents' promotion of the divinity of male-female complementarity, and its ties to the Trinity. This divinity, critics say, is not expressed in the Bible, and the Trinity is a post-Biblical concept. Honoring duality in nature is an ideal held in pagan religions, not Christianity.

RESPONSE TO CRITIQUE

Some ex-gays may have underestimated the cost and difficulty of the journey to follow Christ, but that does not make their ministry any less valid, answer "Promise of Healing" proponents. We have never claimed that there was a quick fix for same-sex desires. All Christians battle sin and woundedness, and sometimes only see small, gradual progress. Just the continuation of same-sex desires is not an indication of the program's failure; one can be in a healthy heterosexual relationship and still be tempted by old habits.

Besides, proponents counter, if homosexual peoples' testimonies are taken for their word, why are ex-gays only assumed to be in denial or brainwashed? That's an unfair double standard. God will not leave his children in their brokenness, but the path to righteousness is hard.

VIEW #3, CALL TO COSTLY DISCIPLESHIP

Many groups, including the Vatican, now believe that same-sex orientation is an imperfection or impairment, but rarely the result of a conscious choice. Since healing does not always occur, many homosexuals face what Holben describes as "A Call to Costly Discipleship." This camp urges homosexuals to live chaste lives and, thus, honor centuries of unbroken Christian tradition that all sex outside of marriage is sinful. This approach emphasizes that life in a sinful, fallen world is often painful and complex.

– Reported by Terry Mattingly, director of the Washington Journalism Center at the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.

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This third view tries to balance the Bible's position on same-sex relationships and a compassionate ministry. It strives to take into account the actual situation and life experience of homosexual people, and relevant science. The proponents of this view ask that homosexual Christians practice sexual abstinence and understand their sexual orientation to be a disability. The only moral authority is the revealed Word of God. Denominationally, there are slight nuances to that Word. To Protestant proponents, this means the Bible exclusively; to Catholic proponents, this means the Bible and church teachings. The application of this authority, however, must involve reason. Both scientific research

concerning sexual orientation and Biblical scholarship are welcome in the search for the universal truths in historically contextual Bible passages. These passages are clear, however, on same- gender sexual acts – they are sinful.

The purpose of human sexuality is the reproduction and binding of a husband and wife. Proponents differ from the “Promise of Healing” view in that they do not revere the male-female dichotomy as divine. They also differ from the “Condemnation” view in that sexuality need not always be associated with procreation. Both procreation and intimate union are gifts from God, and to always prioritize one over the other is not true to the complexity of human relationships. Yet sexual activity is only legitimate in heterosexual marriage. That marriage should be a lifelong, monogamous partnership that is ideally open to having children.

From scientific evidence and homosexual testimony, alternative sexualities are accepted as real. Proponents hold that an orientation exists prior to and outside of sexual activity, and is discovered in the same way that heterosexual people become aware of their sexual and emotional attractions. Just because there is no mention of this in the Bible does not preclude its existence; the Bible does not discuss the subconscious mind, but it is accepted as part of the human psyche. Generally, proponents accept the scientific community's understanding that sexual orientation results from psychodynamic forces, both biogenetic and environmental, and is usually fixed at a very early age. A person is not culpable because of their orientation. Moral culpability presumes the freedom to choose. A celibate homosexual person is morally equivalent to a celibate or married straight person. Homosexual people can be as whole, mature, and stable as heterosexual people. They can love deeply, lead productive lives, and achieve profound spiritual maturity.

However, proponents explain, God did not intend for alternative orientations to exist; they are a result of the Fall. Despite homosexual peoples' helplessness in the matter, their orientation is a moral inclination towards sin. It is a disability. God can take this disability and turn it into a greater good if the homosexual Christian gives it over to His will. Proponents hold that there is likely no chance that a homosexual person can become heterosexual. With that view, homosexual Christians must completely abstain from sexuality, undergo psychological and/or spiritual counseling for their disability, and remember that no Christian is promised happiness or emotional fulfillment in this lifetime.

CRITIQUE FROM OTHER VIEWPOINTS

From a conservative stance, this viewpoint is criticized as either naive or dishonest because it does not recognize the depravity of same-sex lust. There is no such thing as same-sex romantic love, these critics say. Thus, leaving homosexual people in their sinful desires is to be an accomplice in their damnation. Homosexual people could become heterosexual, if only they would accept God's healing power.

From a more liberal stance, critics point out that a life of emotional and erotic denial is much harsher than any burden that heterosexual Christians are expected to bear. For heterosexual people, the struggle of celibacy is typically from puberty to marriage, but for homosexual people, that struggle becomes a bleak, depressed life without the hope of partnership. Gays and lesbians are being asked to give up more than sexual gratification – they must also forsake the self-revelation, mutual help, familial connections, and emotional union that a partnership ideally provides. Critics continue that the traditional Christian promotion of virginity and celibacy is rooted in anti-sex preconceptions, not in Biblical teachings or mental health. The issue of inconsistent Scriptural application is brought up. What of the selective enforcement of remarriage after divorce, the accumulation of wealth, and participation in violence? Why police sexuality, but not those Biblical mandates?

RESPONSE TO CRITIQUE

Proponents counter that conservative critics are confusing their obsessive attachment to ignorance, prejudice, and misinformation with fidelity to Biblical morality. Arguing that it is possible for homosexuals to change their orientation change is fanciful thinking.

To those who are more liberal, proponents answer that critics are lacking understanding of the purpose of a Christian lifestyle, which calls all believers to rigorous discipleship. People do not have a right to sexual or emotional fulfillment, and can live without them. Homosexual Christians may have a harder path to walk than heterosexual Christians, but where does one draw the line to say that Christ has asked too much of his followers?

VIEW #4, PASTORAL ACCOMMODATION

“Pastoral accommodation” views homosexual acts “not so much as intrinsically evil as essential imperfect,” writes Holben. But in a fallen world, homosexuals may justify some sexual activity, just as other Christians now justify divorce and remarriage. This stance emphasizes monogamy.

– Reported by Terry Mattingly, director of the Washington Journalism Center at the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.

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This viewpoint, while still holding to a level of Scriptural literalism, deemphasizes the legalistic tone taken by more conservative positions. Proponents would characterize same-sex sexual activity as inherently imperfect, rather than entirely sinful. While same-sex relationships are never to be idealized, proponents can accept them as morally acceptable in some cases. The only explicit Old Testament condemnation of same-sex relationship is in the Leviticus Holiness Code, most of which has been completely disregarded in modern Christianity. For example, the mandate against sex while a wife is menstruating is no longer considered relevant in most churches.

Given this selective acceptance of Biblical mandates, how is the church to establish moral norms? “Pastoral Accommodation” proponents attempt to discern universal truths, taking into account the cultural and historical context of situations in the Bible. Although the writers of the Bible were divinely inspired, they could not have had scientific knowledge of things like genetics, atomic fission, or sexual orientations. Our modern understanding of the world requires us to nuance our ethics based on a contextual reading of the Bible.

Proponents of this view still maintain that heterosexual relationships are divinely ordained, based on Scripture and the biological facts of reproduction. However, they also see the variety of sexual orientations as a scientific fact. Homosexual people should try to change their sexuality if they can, but proponents do not generally expect that such a thing is possible.

God's intent for human sexuality is focused on the psychospiritual connection and mutuality in heterosexual marriage, and ideally blends both erotic and *agape* love. However, this is an ideal to which few heterosexual relationships consistently measure up. In a fallen world, moral choices are often ambiguous, and partnerships are imperfect. For instance, polygamy and acceptance of concubines in the Old Testament were not truly sinful, because the Israelites did the best they could constructing a sexual ethic within their social context. Thus, what is, objectively, sinful behavior, may be seen as subjectively permissible depending on the circumstances. If same-sex partners are striving for that same idealized erotic and *agape* love, then their relationship is not necessarily wrong.

Homosexuality is seen as a psychosexual disability, and a result of original sin, but homosexual people can nonetheless live very moral and religious lives. The specific struggle that homosexual Christians face is either self-denial of intimacy, or a moral imperfection in relationships. Celibacy is a highly respected option for the homosexual Christian, but proponents recognize that forced singleness leads to psychological malaise. Moral imperfection can be minimized if a same-sex relationship is subjected to moral parameters: fidelity to one partner with whom one shares mutual love, care, and respect. Even in such a context, though, proponents would not support church officiation of same-sex relationships; the partners are expected to remain discreet.

CRITIQUE FROM OTHER VIEWPOINTS

From a more conservative stance, critics denounce this tacit acceptance of same-sex relationships as sanctioning that which the Bible says is sinful, making proponents accomplices in the damnation of homosexual people. Christian faithfulness is not so demanding that it is impossible for those with same-sex desires to repent of their sinful lusts. Throughout history, at times being a Christian has meant the loss of family, property, social position, and even one's life. Thus, how can sexual fulfillment be seen as a necessity or right? All people are capable of celibacy with the grace of God. Besides, critics say, there is no such thing as non-heterosexual orientations; homosexual people could change if they truly were dedicated to God.

From a liberal stance, critics accuse "Pastoral Accommodation" proponents of relegating homosexual Christians to a sort of second-class citizenship. They hold on to homophobia and a thinly disguised contempt for same-sex relationships as lesser than their own. It is heterosexist, critics say, to view other sexualities as a disability. How can homosexual Christians be psychologically integrated and healthy when their intimate, loving relationships are labeled as defective and inferior?

RESPONSE TO CRITIQUE

To the conservatives, proponents answer that there is an inevitable level of ambiguity in almost every moral choice we make. We have no choice but to live in the context of a fallen world. For instance, now only a few radical denominations contest the Christian's obligation to the state to participate in war, ability to amass wealth, and acceptance of usury as a basis of the capitalist system. Simply by living, we are directly or indirectly all capable of objective sin. Once one accepts this inevitability, it is only reasonable to extend this realism to Christian ethics of sexuality. Christianity may be difficult or dangerous, but nowhere in the Bible is it described as being psychologically ruinous.

To the left, proponents say that they have no choice but to true to God's revealed purpose for creation, no matter what attitude that casts upon same-sex relationships.

VIEW #5, AFFIRMATION

The "affirmation" camp goes beyond tolerating gay and lesbian relationships, saying they hold the same "potential for a self-transcending exchange of love as heterosexual unions." These Christians believe that the morality of "homosexual acts are to be evaluated exactly as are heterosexual acts," writes Holben. Monogamous, committed, homosexual relationships are truly sacred unions. But what does "monogamy" mean?
– Reported by Terry Mattingly, director of the Washington Journalism Center at the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.

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Moving towards the liberal end of Holben's spectrum, this is the first viewpoint to unconditionally say same-sex relationships are good. Proponents see them as having the same capacity for self-transcendent love as heterosexual relationships, and one's sexual orientation as unchangeable. Thus, same-sex sexual activity must be evaluated on the same terms by which heterosexual acts are evaluated – the quality of relationship they express. Sexuality is not a degraded part of human nature, but a gift from God that allows us to grow in love. If the partners are both consenting, non-exploitative, mutually committed, faithful, and intend permanence, then the relationship is a moral one. Homosexual Christians then have the added call to be role models of sexual responsibility in a sexually casual world that also views same-sex relations with suspicion.

Proponents regard the Bible very seriously, but do not hew to a literalist interpretation. The Bible is seen as divine, but filtered through the medium of human writings. These writings reflect a series of human encounters with God, resulting composed, edited, and selected over a millennium; they were written in languages and cultures other than our own for a variety of genres and purposes. Taking all this into consideration, proponents claim that the spirit, rather than the letter of the text, is important. God reveals Himself through an interactive process with the Christian; the Holy Spirit mediates the Bible in such a way that revelation is a personal experience with God. Proponents read the Bible's overarching message as twofold: God is love, and God is just. Christians are called to enact that love and justice. What kind of justice and love would condemn one for his or her immutable sexual orientation, or deny this person the fullness of human experience because of it?

“Affirmation” scholars have explored the pre-translation manuscripts of passages that appear to refer to same-sex sexual activity. For instance, the Old Testament term traditionally translated as “sodomite,” proponents explain, was actually the word “qadesh,” or “holy ones,” who were the male cult prostitutes of certain Canaanite deities. Paul's supposed references to same-sex relationships use words that are by turns euphemisms and invented; he was likely referring to effeminate male prostitutes and those who committed pederasty, common practices at the time. The Hebrew word most often translated as “abomination” actually denotes acts and things associated with idolatry.

These scholars also consider issues of context in passages that may refer to same-sex activity. For instance, in the case of Sodom, any sexual intent the townspeople had would have been attempted gang rape, having nothing to do with loving, consensual homosexual relationships. Scripture supporting this distinction includes later Bible references to Sodom's sins, which were apostate worship, false prophecy, pride, and economic injustice. Sodom's purportedly sinful homosexual community is never mentioned. Additionally, “Affirmation” scholars claim, Old Testament homophobia was based more in the Hebrew peoples' fertility needs in the face of underpopulation and a culture of familial pride than it was in a moral conviction. Thus, semen was revered as the holy seed of procreation, and any non-generative expulsion of sperm was so wasteful it was offensive.

In light of these filters through which God's will has been mistaken as condemnation, homosexual people are instead fully accepted into “Affirmation” churches, which strive to model true inclusivity by opening ordination to homosexual Christians and the officiation of same-sex partnerships.

CRITIQUE BY OTHER VIEWPOINTS

From conservative stances, critics say that love alone is not the defining principle of morality. Paul emphasized love, but also urged lifestyle conformity to the new Christian communities. Mutuality, commitment, and other-focused love must still be expressed within the bounds of God's will – heterosexual marriage. Difficult and painful demands must sometimes be made of the devout Christian. The concept that there is no such thing as a “victimless crime” – thus sin must involve an injured party – is a secular notion, not Christian. Conservative scholars also address the matters of translation and context that “Affirmation” proponents argue. For example, they contend that there was in Paul's culture same-sex sexual activity other than prostitution and pederasty to which he referred.

And just because male prostitution was an idolatrous Canaanite practice does not mean that one specific homosexual sexual activity was the only kind being denounced. Rather than presenting real Biblical scholarship, critics claim, “Affirmation” scholars are reading their preconceived biases into the text.

From the far more liberal stance, the critique centers around “Affirmation” proponents’ reliance on “heterosexist models” for sexual relationships. “Liberation” proponents argue that erotic initiatives are a means of self-discovery and personal fulfillment, and do not require further moral justification.

RESPONSE TO CRITIQUE

The “high view of Scripture” conservatives so often cite as an insurmountable obstacle to their making any significant movement toward moral acceptance of homosexuality can no longer be intelligibly defended whether on scholarly, historical or theological grounds. The significance of the Bible should not be reduced to so-called infallible statements of propositional truth. We must recognize that the biblical writers’ theological “process” on moral issues was not that dissimilar from our own when we submit our minds and hearts to the work of the Spirit, and there is therefore no basis for assuming that their ethical discernment is uniformly and universally applicable while our own insights and judgments are inherently unreliable.

VIEW #6, LIBERATION

“Liberation”: As the Rev. Canon Elizabeth Kaeton of Newark once told the Episcopal Church’s homosexual caucus, the task for gays and lesbians, “our specific charism, is to help ourselves and the church reclaim the erotic as a central part of our lives.” A one-night stand may be a holy act, if the sex is honest, loving and not abusive. This camp argues that monogamy may, in fact, be a mask for jealousy and spiritually destructive forms of idolatry.

– Reported by Terry Mattingly, director of the Washington Journalism Center at the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.

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The most liberal view Holben outlines, “Liberation” declares that it is not for the heterosexual majority in the church to decide how homosexual people should live. The Bible’s comprehensive call is to struggle against all oppression and domination. In that light, homosexual Christians are at the forefront of a new Christian faithfulness, proclaiming Jesus’ radical message: that nobody is outside of God’s love. In fact, those whom modern society condemns and marginalizes are exactly those whom Jesus invites to the head of the feast in the kingdom to come. Christ the Liberator calls his people to throw off sexism, misogyny, patriarchy, heterosexism, racism, and political and economic injustice. Then, his followers can experience and share the “more abundant life” which he promises.

Jesus himself is the ultimate authority of the “Liberation” viewpoint. Proponents claim that he was not the champion or defender of sex-phobic, self-righteous, individualistic ethics that has marked the church for centuries. Rather, he spent time with the most disreputable people of his society, whom he drew in with unconditional love. Jesus’ great news was that they, too, had a place in God’s kingdom. Jesus put himself firmly on the side of the marginalized, which in modern times, includes the sexually oppressed homosexual community.

The Bible is best read with the lenses of feminist, African American, and Central American liberation theologians, who understand from Scripture that God is always on the side of the oppressed. Because homophobia, transphobia, and similar prejudices are the last acceptable forms of discrimination inside

the church, God is that much more in solidarity with LGBTQ (lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer/questioning) people. In fact, to truly understand the Bible, one must read it through the eyes of the oppressed. With this enlightened perspective, proponents say, one understands the radical good news that we are images of God, God's kingdom includes all sexual orientations, and He delights in all of our uniqueness. He gives humans a sexual capacity beyond all other animals, and this should be celebrated. Thus, sexual morality is about finding genuine, nonabusive ways to relate to one another with an equal balance of power, not about genital activity. With this framework, sex in a heterosexual marriage could be wrong if, for instance, a husband exerts "conjugal rights" over a wife regardless of her consent. A same-sex one night stand could be moral if, for instance, both people fully acknowledge each other's humanity, and satisfaction, consent, and desire are mutual. Quality over enduringness is emphasized.

If we are to, instead, read Scripture with the conservative literalism of the Old Testament, then in addition to oppressive sexual regulations we must accept a God of genocide and justification of rape. Paul's writings indicate his own patriarchy, satisfaction with the political status quo, and neurotic negativism towards sex rather than divinely inspired morality. Feminist theologians posit that Biblical writers who dealt with issues of sexuality and gender were flawed in their fundamental motives, because they wrote with the intention of serving patriarchal functions in a primitive agrarian society. Paul, like the other authors, was merely conveying his own convictions about how to face everyday problems with his individual interpretation of Judeo-Christian ethics. In order to overcome the oppressive limits of this worldview, proponents say that homosexuals can and should play a valuable role in churches as prophetic voices.

CRITIQUE FROM OTHER VIEWPOINTS

From the most conservative stance, critics contend that there is no such thing as homosexual sexual orientations, and no such thing as real love in same-sex relationships. Scripture totally condemns all same-sex sexual activity. These critics see the "Liberation" proponents as taking God's place as moral authorities and rebelling against His will in order to justify their rejection of His sexual regulations. "Liberation," they contend, is in reality deadly bondage to sin.

From the moderate critique, it is maintained that humans cannot decide right and wrong for ourselves. The entire notion of theological revelation from one's own experience is contrary to the Judeo-Christian understanding of reality. Proponents mistakenly see salvation as collective or sociopolitical, when in reality it is an individual relationship between one soul and God. Sexuality is powerful and significant, but "Liberation" runs the risk of idolizing it. Besides, there is no innate connection between the homosexual experience and radical politics.

RESPONSE TO CRITIQUE

LGBTQ liberation theology is truer to the call of Jesus than individualistic, pietistic, homophobic, bourgeois Christianity, respond "Liberation" proponents. There is no such thing as objective theology; everyone interprets Scripture and religion through their own life experiences. The Bible's message all the way from Exodus to Calvary is that legitimate theology is birthed in the subjective pain and trials of God's oppressed people.