

RECONCILING MINISTRIES BIBLE STUDY

2022

STUDY MANUAL

VOLUME TWO – THE DEBATE OVER LGBTQ+ INCLUSION

IN THE CHURCH AND THE SYNAGOGUE

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STUDY MANUAL

VOLUME TWO -- THE DEBATE OVER LGBTQ+ INCLUSION IN THE CHURCH AND THE SYNAGOGUE

PART ONE – UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCES IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

LESSON 1 The Two Conflicting Viewpoints Within the Church Universal Over How the Bible Should Be Interpreted

BIBLE PASSAGES: Deut. 23:1 (eunuchs excluded from the covenant community); Isa. 56:1-8 (Isaiah prophesies that foreigners and eunuchs will be included in the restored covenant community); Acts 8:26-39 (Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch); Acts ch. 10 (Peter & Cornelius); Acts 15:1-29 (the Jerusalem Council)

I. Biblical Scholarship or Biblical Literalism

At the heart of the dispute over how “the Church” (and “the Synagogue”) should deal with gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender people, and other sexual orientation or gender identification minorities (hereafter referred to collectively as “LGBTQ+ people”) is a larger dispute over how the Bible should be interpreted. The argument here is between biblical “literalists” and “legalists,” on the one hand, and those who can be described as “modern biblical scholars,” on the other.

The difference is clearly illustrated by comparing two Bibles, both of which can be purchased in local bookstores today. In the Life Application Study Bible, the introduction to the book of Leviticus gives its readers the following “vital statistics”:

“Author: Moses

Date Written: 1445-1444 B.C.

Where Written: In the desert during Israel’s wanderings, somewhere in the Sinai peninsula.

Setting: At the foot of Mount Sinai, God is teaching the Israelites how to live as holy people.”

In contrast, The New Oxford Annotated Bible, another study bible, gives its readers the following introduction to the book of Leviticus:

“Though traditionally attributed to Moses, the book of Leviticus is part of the larger Priestly source in the Pentateuch, which appears primarily in Genesis - Numbers and is so named because its content, theological ideas, and literary style reflect priestly perspectives. This Priestly source was penned by several different anonymous authors or groups of authors.... Leviticus, like other books of the Torah, was composed over a long period; it preserves some pre-exilic traditions, but its literary form likely originated in the exilic period [that is, sometime between 586 and 538 BCE].”

This example is deliberately chosen. Two of the passages most often cited by the opponents of LGBTQ+ inclusion, Lev. 18:22 and Lev. 20:13 (it is “an abomination” for a man to “lie with a male as with a woman”), both of which are quoted in full and analyzed in Lesson 3 below, come from the chapters of Leviticus that are known as the Holiness Code (chapters 17-26; see Lev. 19:2: “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy”). Obviously, a person who believes these words were spoken directly by God to Moses on Mount Sinai is going to give them much greater weight than will be given by someone who believes they were written by an unidentified group of priests almost a thousand years after Moses.

For the biblical literalists and legalists, the debate over the church and homosexuality begins and ends with these two passages from Leviticus. In their view, God gave Moses “the law” on top of Mt. Sinai and that law specifically condemns male homosexual acts. “God said it, I believe it, and that settles it.” Nothing else is relevant.

In contrast, for more moderate or progressive theologians, there is a great deal more that is relevant in determining the church’s position on homosexuality, including evidence of the movement of the Holy Spirit within and among LGBTQ+

Christians and Jews, advances in scientific knowledge and understanding of sexual orientation, and scholarly investigation into the sources of biblical passages and the context in which they were written (“scientific historical criticism”). Thus, the United Methodist Church offers a course called “Living the Questions,” which begins in chapter one with a discussion of biblical interpretation. The following observations are included in that discussion:

“Before leaving for seminary, a young theological student was taken aside by an evangelical pastor and was told in the hushed tone reserved for the imparting of great wisdom, ‘You’re going to read a lot of books ABOUT Jesus—don’t forget to read the book BY Jesus!’

“And therein lies what is perhaps the greatest divide among Christians: the authority one places in the text of the Bible. It’s important because how you understand the Christian life depends on how you read the Bible.

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“In the early part of the 20th Century, a pamphlet circulated about the ‘Fundamentals’ of Christianity. It spawned a whole movement committed to the inerrancy of scripture and other supposedly bedrock doctrines. Defenders of the infallibility of scripture pointed to one verse in 2nd Timothy (verse 3:16): ‘All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.’ Literalists then adopted a kind of circular argument, saying that, because the Bible is without error or inconsistency, it must be the work of God, and because it is the work of God, it must be without error or inconsistency. It doesn’t matter which proposition comes first, the other is argued to follow.

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“... [I]nconsistencies in scripture [such as the two conflicting accounts of the Creation in chapters 1 & 2 of Genesis, the two different accounts of the delivering of the Ten Commandments, in Ex. chapter 20 and Deut. chapter 5, and Moses purportedly describing his own death in Deut. chapter 34] ... have led careful readers of the Bible to be curious about what was going on. These people weren’t

folks who were looking for ways to discredit the Bible, either. Far from it! They were people who had dedicated their lives to understanding scripture through-and-through. What these modern biblical scholars do is called Historical and Literary Criticism—and it doesn't mean being critical of scripture. It means thinking critically about scripture.

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“An important thing to remember, as well, is that the divine is not limited to the Bible.... The Bible is just one way in which the divine is revealed to people as they grow and travel over the period of one's whole life” [Italicized emphasis added].

A clear example of “historical and literary criticism” can be found in the pioneering work of Robin Scroggs, a book titled The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate, which was published in 1983. In his preface to the book, the author stated the reasons he conducted his study and the basic principles that guided him in the process:

Scroggs, pp. v-vi: “As all authors know, but perhaps few readers, books are often generated out of situations which seem at the time to be purely accidental.... Four years ago I would never have imagined myself addressing this topic in book form. But, about that time, I attended a meeting of church leaders, ministers, and lay persons, solely as a guest. One of the items on the agenda was a report by an ad hoc committee which presented a resolution concerning the issue of civil rights for homosexual persons. The discussion this report caused was sharp and even bitter in tone. I sat amazed as I heard the Bible being invoked in ways that were wholly inappropriate to any canons of biblical scholarship. Perhaps something in me snapped during those minutes. For better or worse, I decided that somebody needed somehow to provide resources that would give both clarity and honesty: clarity about the real issues with which the Bible dealt, and honesty about how the Bible could or could not appropriately inform the current debate....

“Perhaps this ‘personal confession’ will signal my own interests and involvement with the topic. I am not a homosexual. Nor do I write this book as an

advocate either for or against the ecclesiastical rights of homosexuals....

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“Ultimately, ... my purpose in writing is to make it as clear as possible what are the issues in the use of the Bible in Christian debates about the acceptance of homosexuals. Just what is a proper use of the Bible, especially the New Testament, in these discussions? If this is the basic question of the book, the reader ... [may well wonder why] I deal so extensively with Greek, Roman, and early Jewish texts? Why do I not simply explore what the biblical texts themselves say?

“There have, in fact, been a number of recent studies of the biblical texts, ... [most of which] remain so close to exegesis of the texts themselves that they do not explore the wider societal context. That is, they do not raise the question: *What are the authors against?* What are they opposing when they oppose homosexuality? *Yet this is in fact the very first question that should be asked and answered.* If one wants to know the *meaning* of a prohibition, one must first determine just what it is the author of the prohibition is against. It seems to be assumed by most that homosexuality in the time of the New Testament must have been the same as it is now—surely this seems obvious. But it is the most serious violation of any scholarly canon to assume without inspection that what an ancient author is opposed to is the same phenomenon that exists in our own time” [Italicized emphasis added].

Having thus described the nature and purpose of his study, the author proceeded to review the biblical passages that purportedly establish the Bible’s opposition to homosexuality. But he didn’t stop there. Instead, he went on to examine in detail the following subjects: “homosexuality” and “pederastic practices” in the Greco-Roman world; the “great debate” within that world over “the comparative merits of pederasty [sex between men and adolescent boys] and heterosexuality”; Jewish attitudes, “in both its Palestinian and Hellenistic forms,” toward Greco-Roman “homosexuality”; and attitudes on this same

subject within the early Christian church, including in particular the views of Paul, the self-proclaimed “apostle to the Gentiles.” Based on his extensive research into all of these matters, the author set forth his conclusions as follows:

Scroggs, pp. 123, 126-27: “Quite clearly the previous chapters indicated that *I cannot in conscience accept the view that makes biblical injunctions into necessarily eternal ethical truths, independent of the historical and cultural context. The meaning of the statements for me is first the meaning they had for the writers in their own, concrete situation. The possibility that they may have meaning for today depends on whether two additional conditions are met: (1) The biblical statements must be consonant with the larger, major theological and ethical judgments which lie at the heart not only of Scripture but of the historical church throughout the ages. (2) The context today must bear a reasonable similarity to the context of the statements at the time of writing.*

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“The brunt of my exegesis in the previous chapters has been to show that in the Greco-Roman world there was one basic model of male homosexuality....

While I tried not to minimize exceptions or partial deviations from the model of pederasty, I thought it fair to conclude that the majority of such relationships were, both by definition and practice, characterized by lack of mutuality, both spiritually and physically. The more one shifts attention to the call-boy and outright prostitution, which 1 Cor. 6:9-10 and 1 Tim. 1:9 attack, the more the practices opposed are those abusive of human rights and dignity. *Thus what the New Testament was against was the image of homosexuality as pederasty and primarily here its more sordid and dehumanizing dimensions.* One would regret it if somebody in the New Testament had not opposed such dehumanization.

“If this is so, the necessary criterion of reasonable similarity between the New Testament period and today’s model of homosexual relationships does not obtain. The ideal, at least, of adult homosexuality today, certainly within Christian groups, is that of caring and mutual relationships between consenting adults....

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“[In sum, I conclude that] the basic model in today’s Christian homosexual community is so different from the model attacked by the New Testament that the criterion of reasonable similarity of context is not met. The conclusion I have to draw seems inevitable: Biblical judgments against homosexuality are not relevant to today’s debate. They should no longer be used in denominational discussions about homosexuality, should in no way be a weapon to justify refusal of ordination, not because the Bible is not authoritative, but simply because it does not address the issues involved” [Emphasis added; NOTE: Scroggs’ rationale in support of his conclusions is examined further, below at pp. 115-17 & 164-67].

In sharp contrast to this example of “modern” biblical interpretation, which is based on scholarly research and analysis, the shortcomings and deficiencies of biblical literalism are vividly illustrated by the following satirical “open letter” to the vehemently anti-LGBTQ+ radio talk show personality, Dr. Laura Schlesinger. This letter was written by an American college professor and posted on the internet in response to Dr. Laura’s statement on her radio show that homosexuality is an abomination according to Leviticus 18:22 and cannot be condoned under any circumstances:

“Dear Dr. Laura

“Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God’s Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind them that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination ... end of debate. I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some other elements of God’s Laws and how to follow them.

“1. Leviticus 25:44 states that I may possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are from neighboring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can’t I own Canadians?

“2. I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

“3. I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness – Lev.15:19-24. The problem is how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.

“4. When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord – Lev.1:9. The problem is my neighbors ... they claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

“5. I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states that he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself, or should I ask the police to do it?

“6. A friend of mine feels that even though eating shell fish is an abomination, Lev. 11:10, it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don’t agree. Can you settle this? Are there ‘degrees’ of abomination?

“7. Lev. 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle-room here?

“8. Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev. 19:27. How should they die?

“9. I know from Lev. 11:7-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

“10. My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev. 19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of threads (cotton/polyester blend).

“He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? Lev. 24:10-16. Couldn’t we just burn them to death at a private family affair, like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev. 20:14).

“I know that you have studied these things extensively and thus enjoy considerable expertise in such matters, so I’m confident you can help.

“Thank you again for reminding us that God’s word is eternal and unchanging.

"Your adoring fan,

"James M. Kauffman, Ed.D. Professor Emeritus, Dept. of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education, University of Virginia

"P.S. It would be a damn shame if we couldn't own a Canadian."

(forwarded by e-mail, from Rev. Dr. Pat Loughlin to Scott H. Strickler, April 15, 2015)

See also **Horner**, pp. 71-72: "Of all references to homosexuality in the Bible, two statements in the book of Leviticus (18:22 and 20:13) raise the most problems. *When read alone and out of context these verses sound unequivocally damning, especially for biblical literalists who do not subject their scriptural references to any kind of criticism, let alone scientific and historical literary analyses.* The person who desires to be such a literalist, if entirely consistent, would encounter a number of problems. He or she would eat no pork or shellfish (Old Testament dietary laws) and wear no fabrics of blended materials (Deuteronomy 22:11). If a woman, she would refrain from all sexual intercourse during her menstrual period (Leviticus 18:19 and 20:18), and if a man, he should go in to have intercourse with his widowed sister-in-law if her husband had died without first siring a son (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). These are only a few of the things that would be required.

"Christians are inclined to say that Christ has liberated them from having to observe all the Jewish laws, which is indeed true (although this has often been taken to mean they are liberated only from those laws that they dislike). This being the case, if they took Jesus' own statements as 'laws,' they would go and sell what they have and give it to the poor (Mark 10:21). They would not get a divorce for any reason except 'unchastity' (Matthew 5:32) or, perhaps, for no reason whatever, since 'What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder' (Matthew 19:6). Christian men, if they wanted to take literally all of their Master's suggestions, might go out and castrate themselves (Matthew 19:12). They are not, however, apt to do this, since *biblical literalists almost invariably end up deciding that they will take literally some of the laws and ignore*

the rest as not applicable to them.

“Biblical literalists, moreover, usually have not been trained to think through a particular verse or passage in relation to its context—whether that be a few verses or a few chapters. Nor do they customarily appraise it in the light of its particular place and time of origin, which is scientific historical criticism. No one ever said that a high degree of technical scholarship was required to enable ordinary men and women to understand the central themes of the Bible.... Nevertheless, it should be repeated that no intelligent reader should try to interpret a biblical verse out of context....” [Italicized emphasis added].

Bishop Gene Robinson, the openly-gay Episcopalian Bishop of New Hampshire, has urged anyone seeking to interpret Scriptural passages to comply with the following guidelines:

Robinson, pp. 62-67: “I would argue that in order to interpret any passage of Scripture, we must employ three lenses: the Scripture itself; the tradition of how the Church has interpreted that Scripture over the centuries; and reason, that is, the use of our own God-given intellect and learning, up to and including how modern knowledge, science, psychology, and reason inform our understanding of the issues being addressed by the Scripture. But first, and always first, is the Scripture itself.

“Be assured, I believe the Bible to be the Word of God—but not the ‘words’ of God. That is, I do not believe that the Bible was dictated by God and written down by scribes of one sort or another, unmediated by the scribes’ own life experiences, culture, religious belief, and context.

“I believe that the Bible is many accounts, by many writers, over a thousand years, of their experience of the Living God. Their accounts were heard (more often than read) as an experiential guide on how one accesses God (or how God accesses humankind) and discerns God’s will. The Bible is a collection of firsthand encounters with God, as experienced through the faithful (and sometimes unfaithful) people of God—from the Israelites in the Hebrew Scriptures ... and the Christians of the early Church in the New Testament.

“As such, it is the place we always begin. In reading these holy texts, we learn the ways that people of faith have historically come to know God and God’s will. They are enormously instructive, and over several millennia these texts have served as a guide for pilgrims of faith in their encounters with the Living God.

“Some of these texts are history; some are poetry. Some are fables and myths, meant to teach an important truth. Some are personal accounts of individuals, and some are communal accounts of a nation. *All are set in a particular historical and cultural context. And context is the central key in understanding these texts and the prism through which we accomplish the all-important task of determining whether the wisdom contained therein is applicable to all people for all time.*

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“... We may know the actual (and current) meaning of the words, but *without understanding the context and figurative meaning of the words and phrases at the time they were written, we may in fact misunderstand the author’s intent.*

“Indeed, *much of the biblical scholarship of the latter half of the twentieth century has been concerned with understanding the contexts in which the Scriptures were written.* Scholars have researched and discovered much about the culture, science, knowledge, biases, and pressing issues in the societies of the ancient world—both within the Hebrew and early Christian communities and in the hostile, threatening, and pagan cultures that surrounded them....

“So, *first and foremost, in reading texts from the Bible, we must ask, ‘What did these words mean to their author?’ and ‘What did these words mean to the community for which they were written?’ Once the context has been understood, we ask the question, ‘Is the message of this text eternally binding on all people of faith, or has something changed in the context between then and now that renders this text ‘culturally bound’ and not applicable in the same way to our current situation, given the knowledge and understandings of the present time?’*

“Not even the strictest fundamentalist or biblical literalist gives the same

authority and moral weight to every word of Scripture.... Few of us are willing to be bound by all the commands given to us in the biblical text; otherwise, we would give all we have to the poor to follow Christ, redistribute all the land every fifty years, refuse to charge any interest on our loans and investments, share our worldly possessions communally as did the early Church, and refuse to support our nation's defense budget in accord with Jesus's commandment not to resist evil. *We have come to understand certain things as acceptable in the biblical culture and time but not in our own*—among them, polygamy and slavery, which few Christians would promote despite their acceptability in biblical times. As we approach the biblical texts about homosexuality, ***we must not conveniently change our stance*** to one of asserting that every word of Scripture is inerrantly true and universally binding on all people for all time" [Italicized and bold emphasis added].

Miner & Connoley, pp. 71-72: "'But,' some may object, 'if the Bible is not a book of laws, then what is it?' It is the divinely inspired record of God's work. It tells us about Jesus Christ. It offers numerous examples of how God has interacted with our spiritual ancestors. As such, the Bible contains enormous wisdom for us today. We would be fools to ignore it. It's an incredible gift from God to help guide our lives.

"But Jesus taught that this inspired record must not be turned into a set of laws, frozen in time. When we do so, we completely close ourselves off from the other great source of guidance promised by God—the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself said he had many things he wanted to teach his disciples that they were not yet ready to hear. But he promised they (and we) would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, who would guide them (and us) into all truth. (John 16:12-15). Here, then, is Jesus' formula for finding truth: The ancient Scriptures must be balanced with the dynamic real-time work of the Holy Spirit....

"The ultimate irony is that we who have been set free from legalism are so very tempted to return to it. The New Testament has a lot to say about this. In fact, two whole books of the New Testament (Romans and Galatians) are devoted

largely to warning us not to retreat into legalism....

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“Some may object that if the Scriptures are not applied as laws, people will have license to do anything they want. Paul’s opponents feared the same thing. (Romans 6:1, 15). But this objection ignores the presence of the Holy Spirit. Paul was confident that the guidance of the Holy Spirit would be sufficient to prevent sincere believers from error. ‘If you are led by the Spirit,’ he said, ‘you are not subject to the law.’ (Galatians 5:18). *We who follow Jesus must be open to both the old and the new (both Scripture and Spirit) working in dynamic combination. This is how a follower of Jesus discerns truth.*” [Emphasis added]

[Compare Jer. 31:31-34: “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.... *I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord....” [Emphasis added]].

II. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Taking into Account the Advances in Scientific Knowledge About Homosexuality and the Experiences of and with LGBTQ Christians

At p. 11 of God vs. Gay?: The Religious Case for Equality, the biblical scholar Jay Michaelson states: “[A]s we turn to our religious traditions for information regarding homosexuality, we must do so with the understanding that ‘homosexuality’ and ‘heterosexuality’ do not even exist as categories until relatively recently. Even the term ‘sodomy’ wasn’t invented until the eleventh century. To say ‘the Bible forbids homosexuality’ is as ridiculous as saying ‘the Bible forbids the internet.’ Neither term would have made any sense to those for whom the Bible was originally written, as neither concept is part of the biblical worldview.”

Other commentators have similarly noted the advances in scientific knowledge about sexual orientation since the days when the Bible was written and have argued that this advance in scientific knowledge is one major reason

why the church should re-evaluate its current position concerning the inclusion or exclusion of LGBTQ people:

West, pp. 3-4: “When dealing with matters of biblical interpretation one always needs to keep in mind the role of the authority of the Bible in matters of faith and practice. While the Bible is an important witness to the relationship between God and humanity, it is not the ultimate revelation of God—Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, is. We must guard against what some scholars have called bibliolatry—making an idol out of scripture.

“One way to guard against bibliolatry is to realize that, *while the Bible may be the center of matters of faith, it must also be in ‘conversation’ with tradition, experience and reason. These four sources of faith have become known as the Wesleyan quadrilateral*, so named after their originator John Wesley, founder of the Methodist heritage.

“We must read and interpret scripture with the aid of the history and tradition of the Christian church. We must also bring reason—philosophical and rational thought—to bear on applications of scripture to real life situations. And last and most importantly, scripture must be weighed alongside human experience—especially the experience of God’s grace.

“It is time we stopped making an idol out of the Bible. It is time we bring philosophical and rational thought—especially what the sciences have told us about sexual orientation and identity development—into conversation with the Bible. It is time we listen to the experiences of God’s gay and lesbian children who know with all their hearts that God has created them just as they are [and to listen also to the experiences of Jews and Christians who have witnessed God’s presence in the lives of God’s LGBTQ+ children].” [Emphasis added].

Eastman, p. 1: “What influences lead us to new understanding of Scripture? New scientific information, social changes, and personal experience are perhaps the greatest forces for change in the way we interpret the Bible and develop our beliefs. *Scientific awareness of homosexual orientation did not exist until the nineteenth century*” [Emphasis added].

Specifically, the sources of both the concept of sexual orientation and the term “homosexuality” were identified in an article published in the New Yorker magazine on January 26, 2015, that was captioned “Berlin Story: How the Germans invented gay rights—more than a century ago”:

Ross, pp. 73, 75, & 76: “On August 29, 1867, a forty-two-year-old lawyer named Karl Heinrich Ulrichs went before the Sixth Congress of German Jurists, in Munich, to urge the repeal of laws forbidding sex between men. He faced an audience of more than five hundred legal figures, and as he walked to the lectern he felt a pang of fear. ‘There is still time to keep silent,’ he later remembered telling himself. ‘Then there will be an end to all your heart-pounding.’ But Ulrichs, who had earlier disclosed his same-sex desires in letters to relatives, did not stop. He told the assembly that people with a ‘sexual nature opposed to common custom’ were being persecuted for impulses that ‘nature, mysteriously governing and creating, had implanted in them.’ Pandemonium erupted, and Ulrichs was forced to cut short his remarks. Still, he had an effect: a few liberal-minded colleagues accepted his notion of an innate gay identity, and a Bavarian official privately confessed to similar yearnings. In a pamphlet titled ‘Gladius furens,’ or ‘Raging Sword,’ Ulrichs wrote, ‘I am proud that I found the strength to thrust the first lance into the flank of the hydra of public contempt.’

“The first chapter of Robert Beachy’s ‘Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity’ (Knopf) begins with an account of Ulrichs’s audacious act. *The title of the chapter, ‘The German Invention of Homosexuality,’ telegraphs a principal argument of the book: although same-sex love is as old as love itself, the public discourse around it, and the political movement to win rights for it, arose in Germany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.* This message may surprise those who believe that gay identity came of age in London and New York, sometime between the Oscar Wilde trials and the Stonewall riots. The brutal repression of gay people during the Nazi period largely erased German gay history from international consciousness, and even from German memory....

“Ulrichs, essentially the first gay activist, encountered censorship and ended

up going into exile, but his ideas very gradually took hold. In 1869, an Austrian litterateur named Karl Maria Kertbeny, who was also opposed to sodomy laws, coined the term 'homosexuality.' In 1896, Der Eigene ('The Self-Ownng'), the first gay magazine, began publication. The next year, the physician Magnus Hirschfeld founded the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, the first gay-rights organization. By the beginning of the twentieth century, a canon of gay literature had emerged ... and a schism opened between an inclusive, mainstream faction and a more riotous, anarchistic wing.... In 1929, the Reichstag moved toward the decriminalization of homosexuality, although the chaos caused by that fall's stock-market crash prevented a final vote....

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".... [Magnus] Hirschfeld, who was born in 1868, a year after Ulrich's speech in Munich, began his radical activities in 1896, publishing a pamphlet titled 'Sappho and Socrates,' which told of the suicide of a gay man who felt coerced into marriage. The next year, Hirschfeld launched the [Scientific-Humanitarian] Committee, and soon after reprinted Ulrich's writings. Building on Ulrich's insight that same-sex desire was a congenital trait, Hirschfeld developed a minutely variegated conception of human sexuality, with a spectrum of 'sexual intermediaries' appearing between the poles of the purely male and the purely female. He felt certain that if homosexuality were understood as a biological inevitability then the prejudice against it would disappear. 'Through Science to Justice' was his group's motto.

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"During the golden years of the Weimar Republic, which occupy the last chapter of 'Gay Berlin,' gays and lesbians achieved an almost dizzying degree of visibility in popular culture....

".... Hirschfeld was now at the helm of the Institute for Sexual Science: a museum, clinic and research center, housed in a handsome villa in the Tiergarten district. Widening his sphere of interests, Hirschfeld offered sex advice to straight

couples, advocated more liberal divorce laws and birth control, collaborated on the first primitive sex-change operations, and generally acquired a reputation as the 'Einstein of sex,' as he was called on an American lecture tour....

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"Nazism brought Berlin's gay idyll to a swift, savage end. Hirschfeld had left Germany in 1930, to undertake a worldwide lecture tour; wisely, he never returned. *In May, 1933, a little more than three months after Hitler became Reich Chancellor, the Institute for Sexual Science was ransacked, and much of its library went up in flames during Joseph Goebbels's infamous book-burning in the Opernplatz.* [Ernst] Rohm, [the openly-homosexual head of the Nazi Brown Shirts] became less indispensable once Hitler took power [and] was slaughtered in 1934, during the Night of the Long Knives, the first great orgy of Nazi bloodlust. Hirschfeld, who had watched the destruction of his life's work on a newsreel in Paris, died the next year...." [Emphasis added].

The impact of these events, and the concurrent growth in scientific knowledge concerning the subjects of sexual orientation and gender identity, have fueled much of the contemporary movement in recent years among biblical scholars and others to revisit the Church's traditional opposition to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons:

Loyal Opposition, "The Loyal Opposition and Scripture," Victor Paul Furnish, p. 34: "[T]o search the Scripture for judgments about homosexuality is to look for biblical answers to questions that were not and could not have been raised by the biblical writers themselves. Homosexuality, as we have come to understand it and to use the word, is not a biblical topic. There are a few passages that refer or allude to sex between males, and one that refers to sex between females. But these passages have nothing to say about 'homosexual orientation,' of which the ancient world had no notion and for which, therefore, it had no equivalent expression."

Boswell, p. 92: "[In some translations of 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 'homosexuals' are included among the categories of people who will not 'inherit the kingdom of

God'. [See Lesson 4 below, at pp. 154-57]]. *In spite of [such] misleading English translations which may imply the contrary, the word 'homosexual' does not occur in the Bible; no extant text or manuscript, Hebrew, Greek, Syriac or Aramaic, contains such a word. In fact, none of these languages ever contained a word corresponding to the English 'homosexual,' nor did **any** languages have such a term before the late nineteenth century....* There are of course ways to get around the lack of a specific word in a language, and an action may be condemned without being named, but *it is doubtful in this particular case whether a concept of homosexual behavior as a class existed at all*" [Italicized and bold emphasis added].

West, p. 1: "Biblical writers had no concept of sexual orientation or sexual development as we understand these today. *Therefore, passages that reference same-sex sexual activity should not be seen as comprehensive statements concerning homosexuality, but instead should be viewed in the context of what the ancient world that produced the Bible understood about sexual activity*" [Emphasis added].

In sum, the most direct response to the claim that the Bible condemns homosexuals and homosexuality is this: the Bible says nothing at all about either homosexuals or homosexuality. The biblical writers had no concept or understanding of either homosexual orientation or homosexual people. They knew only of same-gender sexual acts committed by individuals who were believed to be like everyone else and were therefore assumed to be acting contrary to their nature.

The other factor in the Wesleyan quadrilateral that argues strongly in favor of a change in the church's position is "experience," including specifically the testimony of LGBTQ+ people and others who know them about God's presence in their lives and God's working in and through them. As stated by Michaelson at pp. 8-9 of God vs. Gay?:

".... The question is not whether gay people can find a way to weasel around Romans and Corinthians, or whether anti-gay people can use them as a

brickbat. The question is what our deepest shared values ... tell us about the nature of same-sex relationships. That is an inquiry of value to us all.

“None of that healthy re-examination of values can proceed, though, if we continue to deny the existence of gay and lesbian people. Even in the twenty-first century, this is still a frequent tactic: to simply deny the existence of sexual orientation as a category, or pathologize it as a kind of deformity of character.... [T]here are still those who insist that homosexuality is a ‘lifestyle,’ a choice, or a pathology—and that all of us who feel [our sexual identity] in our souls are deluded, perverted, or worse.

“Fortunately, if religion provides much of the impetus for this willful ignorance, it also provides a remedy. Personal experience, personal testimony and meaningful communication within one’s faith community are part of every Western religious tradition.... All this is based on lived experience, on meeting the ‘other’ and acknowledging him or her. The common denominators are openness, honesty, and conversation—all sacred religious values themselves, now applied to the sacred task of understanding Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience [fn.: ‘This is John Wesley’s ‘four-legged stool’ of theology....’] To deny the testimonies of millions of people is an aberration, an unjustified departure from the norm of religious conversations.”

An example of such a testimony, that is, one that calls for the church to re-examine its position on homosexuality, is found in an essay written by Dwight W. Vogel, a professor of theology and ministry at Garrett-Evangelical Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, who identifies himself as heterosexual:

Loyal Opposition, “Homosexuality and the Church, Evangelical Commitment and Prophetic Responsibility: A Confessional Statement,” Dwight W. Vogel, pp. 66-67: “Although I have chosen to talk about Christian experience last, I must confess that its influence came very early in my journey in this area. My first encounter with homosexuals who shared the nature of their sexual identity with me could not have involved two more different people. One was a young man with serious emotional problems. Before I knew of his orientation, I had questions about his

fitness for ministry. I did know that he was not a whole person.

“Another was a young woman with many gifts for ministry. She was a leader in campus religious life. She was our children’s favorite baby-sitter. The grace of God was evident in her life. When she revealed that she was a lesbian, I discovered that my sense of her gifts for ministry did not change. God’s Spirit bore witness with her spirit that she was a child of God, called to minister in Christ’s name. After a brief period of reflection, my spouse and I did not hesitate to continue entrusting our children to her care. Because we knew her as a person, our trust in her concern for them and our knowledge of her love for Christ and the Church enabled us to begin to move in our understanding of homosexuality. And for that, I give thanks to God.

“Again and again I have discovered rich resources for ministry from homosexuals whom I have known and with whom I have worked. Their love of God, their commitment to the Church in the presence of incredible ambiguity and pain, their caring and compassion for God’s hurting children make it impossible for me to deny their calling. They have not been perfect people, any more than the heterosexuals with whom I have worked. But it has seemed clear to me that the healing and forgiveness they need is not based on their sexual orientation.

“There are others—both homosexuals and heterosexuals—for whom the same thing could not be said. They have not seemed as healthy or gifted for ministry as the Church demands. Their sexuality (or their fear of it) is a cause of concern. Their need for healing and forgiveness is deep.

“But among the others (and they are by far the larger group), I cannot deny the presence of the fruit of the Spirit in their ministry. I experience the presence of God at work in their lives as they minister in Christ’s name. I stand with them because to stand against them would be to refuse to go where God has led me.”

III. Three Bible Stories About the Inclusion of Those Who Were Formerly Excluded

The process of applying scripture to present-day situations is a two-step process that requires the reader to first determine the meaning a passage had at

the time it was written and then to determine whether the passage should continue to be given that same meaning in the present-day context to which the proponent seeks to apply it. See Robinson at p. 66, quoted above at p. 14. See also Loyal Opposition, “The Loyal Opposition and Scripture,” Victor Paul Furnish, pp. 33-34, 36 & 41: “[T]he claim that the Bible spells out God’s will once and for all contradicts Scripture itself, which attests that because God’s claim is as boundless as God’s grace, it can never be reduced to a static set of rules, laws or teachings. Scripture calls God’s people to the never-ending task of discerning what it means to be faithful within the varied and ever-changing circumstances of their life in the world. What is most distinctive about the Bible, and what accounts for its scriptural status within the church, is not what it reports or reflects about the specific moral judgments and decisions reached by our ancestors in the faith. What is most definitive and distinctive, as well as pervasive of Scripture, is the affirmation of One God who belongs to no other, and to whom all else belongs; and the attendant conviction that human flourishing—male and female—is utterly and continually dependent upon God’s grace and faithfulness.

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“... [E]very one of the specific moral rules and teachings of Scripture is time bound and culturally conditioned. All of them presuppose certain beliefs about the physical world, human beings, and social relationships that we can no longer presuppose, or even that we know to be in error.

“This is especially true of what the various biblical traditions and writings presuppose and say about gender, sex, sexual activity, and sexual relationships. Their moral rules and teachings on these matters were profoundly conditioned, for example, by the patriarchalism that pervaded ancient society; by that society’s stereotyping of gender roles; by its complete lack of knowledge of the female reproductive system; and by its total ignorance concerning the complexities of sexual identity and sexual orientation. This need not surprise us, for how could it have been otherwise?

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“In short, Scripture does not and, in the nature of the case, cannot be expected to offer timeless statements about God’s will. Rather, it summons the church to be constantly searching out what God requires.” [Emphasis added].

The Bible itself reveals that God’s laws and God’s will are not *always* eternal, rigid, and unchanging; at least in some instances God’s will, as embodied in the law, can change and indeed arguably has changed over time. This is the lesson to be drawn from three significant accounts in the book of Acts: the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39), the story of Peter and Cornelius (Acts ch. 10), and the account of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-29). *All three of these stories are stories about the inclusion of peoples who had formerly been excluded. They are also stories about conflicts between the restrictions of the Law, which was cited as the basis for exclusion, and the guiding of the Spirit, which was cited as the basis for inclusion. It is this same conflict that separates the two sides today on the question of what position the contemporary Church should take with respect to the LGBTQ+ community.*

In The Children Are Free: Re-examining the Biblical Evidence on Same-Sex Relationships, the two authors, an MCC (Metropolitan Community Church) pastor, Rev. Jeff Miner, and his congregant, John Tyler Connoley, analyzed these three biblical accounts and their relevance to the contemporary debate over inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in the Church and the Synagogue. They set forth the historical background to the stories found in Acts chs. 10 and 15, as follows: **Miner & Connoley**, pp. 75-76: “Virtually all of Jesus’ earliest followers came from Jewish backgrounds and, even after placing their faith in Christ, continued to observe the Law of Moses as set forth in the first five books of the Bible. This meant (among other things) [that] they ate only food designated as ‘clean’ in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. They also circumcised their male children as God commanded Abraham to do in Genesis 17:10-14.

“Early in the book of Acts, Christians had not yet drawn the conclusion that ‘Jesus declared all foods clean.’ (Mark 7:19). Mark’s Gospel had not yet been written, and Christians were still wrestling with the more daring aspects of Jesus’

teachings. In the meantime, they continued living as they always had, eating kosher (according to the biblical law) and keeping other aspects of the Law of Moses—after all, this was part of Scripture.

“But as the good news of Jesus began to spread, many non-Jews (often called ‘Gentiles’) began to accept Christ. Unlike their Jewish counterparts, Gentiles had not grown up keeping the Law of Moses. They found it difficult to understand and follow all the intricacies of the Law, and many of them simply refused. Perhaps they instinctively understood what Jesus had taught—that rules about food, clothing, shaving beards, and so forth don’t have any bearing on the soul. At any rate, they did not keep the Law of Moses, creating an enormous dilemma for the Jewish Christians who believed the biblical laws were binding. Jewish Christians, who held all the prominent positions in the Church, wondered what should be done about these Gentiles who claimed to believe in Jesus, but lived a lifestyle at odds with Scripture.

“Thankfully, the early Church did not break apart, but used this challenge as an opportunity to grow their faith. *We in the modern Church can learn much from their example, for the question they faced (what to do with Gentile believers) bears a striking resemblance to the question we face (what to do with gay and lesbian believers)*” [Emphasis added].

See also **Marshall**, pp. 242-43: “Luke’s account of the discussion regarding the relation of the Gentiles to the law of Moses forms the centre of Acts both structurally and theologically. Once the Christian mission had begun to evangelize Gentiles who had not previously been circumcised, the problem of the conditions of their membership in the church began to arise. It had evidently been the policy of the church at Antioch and its missionaries that such Gentiles should not be required to keep the Jewish law; although this point is passed over in silence in chapters 11-14, it is clear from 15:1ff. (cf. Gal. 2:11-14). But this policy was unacceptable to some Jewish Christians for two reasons.

“First, they found it hard to believe that Gentiles could be saved and become members of the people of God without accepting the obligations of the

Jewish law. One can sympathize with their position; after all, what evidence was there that the law, which represented the will of God for his covenant people, had been repealed? This was the point which was pressed by some Jewish visitors to Antioch, and it led to lively debate on the spot and a decision by the church to send representatives to Jerusalem to discuss the matter there. Here the point was reiterated by a group of Jewish Christians who still retained the attitudes of their pre-conversion days as Pharisees.

“Secondly, there was also the question of how Jewish Christians, who continued to live by the Jewish law, could have fellowship at table with Gentiles who did not observe the law and were therefore ritually unclean; not only so, but any food which they served to their Jewish friends would also be unclean. [See **Spong II** at pp. 263-65: ‘The kosher dietary laws are part of these religious regulations in the book of Leviticus. Their purpose[:] to prohibit the Jews from eating with anyone who was not Jewish.... If one does not eat with another outside his or her clan, one can hardly develop a relationship that might grow into a friendship or marriage. That was, of course, the point. The Jews were to remain isolated from all other people. Otherwise there could be no survival [of the Jews’ identity as a people].’] This problem would be particularly acute when the church met to ‘break bread’ [referring to Communion].”

The Hebrew Scriptures are inconsistent in their treatment of the relationship between Jews and non-Jews. The Mosaic law, at Deut. 23:3-8, included permanent exclusions of the Ammonites and the Moabites from the covenant community, as well as a temporary exclusion of the Edomites and the Egyptians (“the third generation that are born to them may be admitted to the assembly of the Lord”). Following the return of the exiles from Babylon and the adoption of a strictly legalistic interpretation of the Torah, the priest Ezra conducted a purge of the covenant community in which all of the foreign wives, and their children, were cast out of the community and sent into exile. See Ezra chs. 9 & 10. Yet, the prophet Isaiah foresaw a day in which foreigners, as well as another group of outcasts (eunuchs), would be included in the reconstituted

covenant community. See Isa. 56:1-8, which is quoted below at pp. 34-35.

It was in this context that the encounter between the apostle Peter and the Roman centurion Cornelius took place. [Note that Peter's first words when he encountered Cornelius and his household were "You yourselves know that it is *unlawful* for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile" [Acts 10:28 (NRSV) (emphasis added)].] Miner and Connoley summarized Chapter 10 of Acts as follows:

Miner & Connoley, pp. 76-77: "In Acts 10 we're told [that] the Apostle Peter was praying on the roof of his house one day when he became hungry and fell into a trance. While in the trance, Peter saw heaven open and a large sheet, lowered by its four corners, descend to where he could reach it. The sheet was filled with all kinds of unclean animals—animals considered unfit for food under the Law of Moses. As Peter watched the animals descend, a voice said, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' (Acts 10:13). Peter was horrified. He assumed it was the voice of God he heard, but the voice was telling him to violate Scripture.

"So, Peter refused, 'By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.' (Acts 10:14).

"The voice thundered back, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane!' (Acts 10:15). Twice more Peter refused. And twice more the voice told him not to call profane what God had made clean.

"After he came out of the trance, as Peter was struggling with the meaning of his vision, three men came to the door and told him a Roman centurion named Cornelius had sent them to bring him to the centurion's house. God told Peter he should go with these men without hesitation, so he did.

"From our perspective in the twenty-first century, it might be easy to miss the amazing aspects of this story. But, thankfully, the author of Acts knew his audience would be non-Jewish, so he recorded Peter's explanation of what he had learned. At Cornelius' house, Peter began by saying, '*You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile, but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.*' (Acts 10:28). Prompted by

his vision, Peter had begun to rethink his views, and had opened his heart and his mind to the possibility that people who didn't live exactly as he did might also be acceptable to God.

“Then, the story tells us, an amazing thing happened. As Peter preached to these Gentiles about Jesus, ‘the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word.’ (Acts 10:44). And the strict Jewish believers who’d come with Peter ‘were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.’ (Acts 10:45). They were amazed that God’s presence could dwell in people who were violating so many scriptural rules. But Peter, with his new perspective, said, ‘Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ (Acts 10:47). He remembered how God had told him not to call profane anything (or anyone) God had made clean, so he ordered these Gentiles baptized, thereby accepting them as equal members of the Church” [Emphasis added].

The authors of The Children Are Free went on to point out that this “unfortunately” was not “the end of the story”:

Miner & Connoley, pp. 77-78: “It would be years before the early Church finally put to rest the question of what to do with Gentile Christians. In fact, in the very next chapter of Acts [chapter 11], we find Peter forced to defend his actions against the attacks of legalistic Christians in Jerusalem. They demanded to know why he would go to the house of a Gentile and eat there when the Bible strictly forbade it. (Acts 11:3). Peter told them everything that had happened leading up to his visit with Cornelius, and concluded by saying, ‘If God gave them the same gift that was given to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?’ (Acts 11:17).

“When Peter’s critics heard this, the text says they were ‘silenced’ and stated with amazement, ‘Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.’ (Acts 11:18). At least for the time being, the legalistic Christians had to admit God wanted Gentile Christians in the community.

“Like many Christians today, the legalists of Acts were initially willing to

accept people who didn't follow Scripture the way they saw fit. However, many of them soon wanted to put stipulations on their acceptance.... Although legalistic Christians had lost the first battle, they weren't about to give up."

The "showdown" over this longstanding dispute took place at the Council in Jerusalem, which marked the turning point in the book of Acts and in the history of the Church. The authors of The Children Are Free described the Council and the events leading up to it as follows:

Miner & Connoley, pp. 78-80: "Around this time [of the events described in Acts chapters 10 and 11 and summarized above], the Apostle Paul began to rise in prominence as a Christian missionary to the Gentiles. His work began in the city of Antioch, located several hundred miles north of Jerusalem—a long way off at a time when most people walked everywhere. While the church in Jerusalem was still flirting with legalism, Paul enthusiastically embraced a non-legalistic approach to faith and Scripture. Under his leadership, Gentiles were flocking into the church at Antioch. Worse yet (from a legalist's perspective), the church at Antioch commissioned missionaries, and began spreading their message to other cities.

"Legalist Christians in Jerusalem were alarmed. Too many people were getting the idea they could become Christians without following the Law of Moses. It seemed as if Scripture was being watered down to appeal to as many as possible. So, they sent their own missionaries to Antioch to warn the Gentile believers. Their message was blunt, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' (Acts 15:1). They wanted the Gentile Christians to understand the importance of the biblical laws.

"Two camps soon arose in the Antioch church. One group sided with Paul and taught that Gentile Christians need not follow the Law of Moses. The other group sided with the legalists and insisted that every aspect of the Law still applied. The dissension became so vigorous it threatened to destroy the Antioch church. To resolve the dispute, they sent a delegation to Jerusalem to seek an official ruling from the apostles and elders who still lived there. This meeting, recorded in Acts Chapter 15, is often called the 'Jerusalem Council.'

“We don’t know how long the Jerusalem Council lasted, because the author of Acts only tells us what happened near the end of the meeting. The author says ‘after there had been much debate,’ Peter stood to speak (Acts 15:7). He reminded everyone of his experience with Cornelius and with other early Gentile converts. He reminded them how God, who knows everything about everyone, had given these people the Holy Spirit ‘just as God has given [it to] us.’ (Acts 15:8).

“‘God has made no distinction between them and us,’ Peter said (Acts 15:9). And then he made an appeal based on compassion, asking the Council to set aside their legalistic reading of Scripture. ‘Now, therefore,’ he pleaded, ‘why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear.’ (Acts 15:10). He didn’t try to use Scripture to argue against their reading of the Law of Moses; he simply pointed out that even the legalists couldn’t keep track of and follow every one of the 613 rules. So, how could they expect these Gentile converts to do what they themselves found impossible? It was a matter of compassion.

“Next Paul and Barnabas spoke, sharing ‘all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles.’ (Acts 15:12). Again, their argument wasn’t based on a nuanced interpretation of Scripture. It was an argument of common sense: If God is doing all these great miracles and transforming lives within the Gentile community, then how are we to argue against that?

“Finally James stood up to speak. James was the brother of Jesus and the most important leader in the Jerusalem church. He was also one of the more legalistic Jewish Christians. But he had been listening carefully, and with an open heart. He first reminded the Council of what Peter had said. Then he showed how Peter’s experiences fit nicely with his interpretation of some of the Hebrew prophets ... [quoting from Amos, Jeremiah, and Isaiah]. Finally, he stated his own opinion, ‘we should not trouble these Gentiles who are turning to God.’ (Acts 15:19). Instead, James recommended the Council simply ask Gentiles to abstain from several practices especially offensive to Jewish Christians. He suggested that they be asked to abstain from eating food previously offered to idols. And he

asked that they abstain from fornication, from eating animals killed by strangulation, and from eating blood. (Acts 15:20).

“The apostles and elders in Jerusalem agreed with James’s recommendation, and sent emissaries to Antioch to share the good news. They wrote a letter to the Christians ‘of Gentile origin’ in Antioch, welcoming them into the Church and asking only that they follow the short list of rules James had recommended. It was a stunning defeat for legalism.”

Emphasizing the role that the “experience” of Jewish Christians with Gentile Christians had played in the early church’s decision to open itself up to Gentiles, Miner and Connoley argued that, in the same way, the contemporary Church’s “experience” with LGBTQ+ persons, as well as the “experience[s]” of those LGBTQ+ persons, should now lead the Church to open itself up to members of the LGBTQ+ community:

Miner & Connoley, pp. 81-85: “As we evaluate the implications of the decision of the Jerusalem Council, it is important to note that both Peter and Paul presented very similar arguments [to the Council]. Neither is said to have made a biblical textual argument. Instead, both gave eyewitness testimony to the presence of God’s Spirit among the Gentiles. As the old saying goes, ‘Seeing is believing.’ Peter and Paul knew what they had seen; the Gentile believers were just as full of the grace, love, and power of the Holy Spirit as Jewish Christians. For Peter and Paul, this was conclusive. Why put God to the test?

“Peter and Paul were simply applying a principle Jesus himself had articulated. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, ‘By their fruits you will know them,’ and ‘A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.’ (Matthew 7:16, 18). The leaders of the early Church, recognizing the validity of this standard, humbly yielded, *even though accepting the Gentiles was counterintuitive and contrary to how they had interpreted Scripture.*

“Gay, lesbian, ... bisexual [and transgender] Christians ask nothing more than that they be judged by the same biblical standard....

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“.... Everywhere you look, the gift of the Holy Spirit (God’s seal of approval) is evident in the lives of gay and lesbian Christians and our worship communities. ‘By their fruits you will know them.’

“Will today’s Church leaders, like the apostles and elders at the Jerusalem Council, have the courage and humility to acknowledge what God is doing? Or will they, like so many legalists throughout the history of the Church, work to stifle the moving of the Holy Spirit? We believe the choice is clear –but not easy” [Emphasis added].

See also **Smith**, “Since the Bible seems only to condemn same-sex relations, how can some Christians affirm same-sex Marriage or the ordination of openly gay and lesbian Christians? Where is there any support for this approach in the Bible?,” Jeffrey S. Siker, pp. 43-44: “Scripture did not provide Paul with all he needed to know, nor did he always have a ‘word from the Lord’ regarding important new situations. But Paul did think he was able to discern the Spirit.... Paul felt himself led by the Spirit and believed that the experiences of Gentile Christians confirmed their reception of the Spirit apart from the law.

“The author of the Acts of the Apostles made the same kind of argument in his narrative of God’s inclusion of the Gentile Cornelius in Acts 10. Cornelius did not have to become a law-observant Jew in order to have proper faith in Christ. *This went completely against early Christian tradition.... Paul and Peter were calling on the church to acknowledge what God was doing, even though it scandalized the church and seemed to go against scripture and tradition.*

“In short, then, ... *Scripture does provide clear and direct testimony of God’s call to pay attention to the inclusion of the faithful whom the church has often failed to see as welcomed by God.* Peter paid attention to Cornelius’ faithful response to God’s Spirit, even though he was a Gentile. Paul paid attention to the Galatians’ faithful response to the Spirit, and made a point that their experience was to guide them in matters of faith and practice even against the testimony of time-honored interpretations of Scripture and tradition. (See Gal. 3:1-5).

“Scripture calls upon us in the church today to pay attention to the

testimony of God's Spirit as we have experienced the profound faith of gay and lesbian Christians in our midst. As Peter told the Jerusalem assembly, 'If God gave [Cornelius's household] the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?' (Acts 11:17). Surely we must see them first as brothers and sister in Christ who are baptized in the same Spirit that all Christians share, brothers and sisters who do not cease to be gay or lesbian by virtue of their Christian faith" [Emphasis added].

It has been argued that Acts 8:26-39, the third example from the book of Acts of God's changing will as originally embodied in the law, see discussion above at p. 25, is especially relevant in considering the issue before us, that is, what the Church's and the Synagogue's position should be with regard to the inclusion or exclusion of LGBTQ+ people. In the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, the conflict between the Law and the Spirit was particularly strong. Under the Law, eunuchs were expressly excluded from becoming a part of the Hebrew "congregation." Deuteronomy 23:1 (NRSV) states: "No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord." Yet, even before Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, the Spirit had begun moving the Israelites in the direction of inclusion. Led by the Spirit, the prophet Isaiah prophesied a day in which the formerly excluded would be included:

[1] "Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance [will] be revealed. [2] Happy is the mortal who does this, the one who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and refrains from doing any evil. [3] Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, 'The Lord will surely separate me from his people'; and do not let the eunuch say, 'I am just a dry tree.' [4] For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, [5] I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. [6] And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him,

to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant—[7] these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. [8] Thus, says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered” (Isa. 56:1-8 (NRSV)).

In The Children Are Free, the authors analyzed the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch and its significance for the LGBTQ+ community in the context of these earlier biblical passages. The story describes an encounter in the desert between Philip, an early Christian evangelist, and an Ethiopian eunuch returning to his home after visiting Jerusalem:

Miner & Connoley, pp. 42-44: “Acts 8:32-33 tells us the Ethiopian eunuch was reading from Isaiah 53:7-8. [‘He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people.’] This passage was seen by early Christians as a prophecy about Jesus. The whole chapter tells about the suffering of God’s anointed one. Verse 3 says, ‘He was despised and rejected by others.’ Verse 7 says, ‘He was oppressed and he was afflicted.’ It seems like a strange passage for someone to read just after worshipping in Jerusalem, the holy city. But it makes sense when we understand that the Ethiopian eunuch had probably found *himself* despised and rejected by the religious leaders in Jerusalem.

“Just like gay, lesbian, and bisexual people of today, eunuchs were the sexual outcasts of Jewish religious society. Deuteronomy 23:1 states, ‘No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD.’ By the first century, this verse was understood as applying to anyone who was incapable of fathering children (either physically or by reason

of what we today would call sexual orientation). The first-century teachers of Jewish law forbade converting such a person to Judaism, and they would have informed the Ethiopian eunuch when he arrived in Jerusalem that he could not even enter the outer court of the temple. Tom Horner tells us, ‘The eunuch was *persona non grata* both socially and religiously.’ [NOTE: Miner & Connoley earlier stated, at p. 41: ‘And what was ‘wrong’ with them? It is clear from the ancient literature that eunuchs as a class had a reputation for being attracted sexually to men, rather than women.’]

“So, in Jerusalem, the Ethiopian eunuch would have been assured by the people of God that he could not become one of them. He would have been despised and rejected, cut off from God’s grace by the religious leaders.

“Perhaps someone among his friends had furtively told him about Isaiah 56:3-5, which promises eunuchs who keep God’s commandments that someday they will receive a house, a monument, and a name within God’s walls. Perhaps, like gay, lesbian, and bisexual Christians today, he had gone to his religious leaders pointing to the Scriptures which affirmed him, hoping he might somehow be accepted. But instead, he had been clobbered once again with Deuteronomy 23:1 And so he had taken his precious scroll of Isaiah and begun his journey home, reading about another of God’s children who had been despised, rejected, and cut off.

“It was at this point Philip, *guided by the Holy Spirit*, happened along and asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ The Ethiopian eunuch, still seeking a religious authority figure, answered, ‘How can I unless someone guides me?’ (8:31) So, Philip started with this Scripture and ‘proclaimed to him the good news of Jesus.’ (8:35) Then they came to some water and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is some water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?’ *Philip’s answer should be astonishing to anyone who still holds a prejudice against gay, lesbian, and bisexual believers.*

“Philip responded, ‘If you believe with all of your heart, you may.’

“Philip did not say, ‘Let’s talk about Deuteronomy 23:1.’ He also did not say,

‘I realize since you’re a eunuch that you may desire men; can you promise me you’ll never have a sexual relationship with a man?’We have no way of knowing whether the Ethiopian eunuch was in fact gay. But we do know he was part of a class of people commonly associated with homosexuality and that this fact was completely irrelevant to whether he could become a Christian.

“.... This story illustrates that what matters is how we relate to Jesus – a point made over and over again in the New Testament, but which many modern Christians refuse to apply consistently....” [Italicized emphasis added].

LESSON 2 Reading the Bible from the LGBTQ+ Perspective

BIBLE PASSAGES: 1 Samuel 17:50-20:42; 22:6-8; 23:15-18; 31:1-13 & 2 Samuel 1:1-2:7; 4:4; 9:1-13 (David and Jonathan); the book of Ruth (Ruth and Naomi); Deut. 22:5 (“A woman shall not wear a man’s apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the Lord your God”); Gen. 1:27 (“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them”); Gen. 2:18-23 (creation of Eve out of Adam’s rib to be “a helper as his partner”; Isa. 56:3-8 (God’s promises to the eunuchs and foreigners “who keep my sabbath and hold fast my covenant”); Ps. 139 (God depicted as “knit[ing people] together” in their mothers’ wombs)

I. Introduction

LGBTQ+ people read the Bible differently than heterosexual, cisgender people (commonly referred to as “straight people”) do:

Take Back the Word, Introduction, pp.4-6: “With the rise of postmodernism we have seen a shift in biblical hermeneutics [that is, principles of biblical interpretation] that considers the role of the reader in assigning meaning to the biblical text. Not only have we come to realize that readers make meaning of texts, but readers also bring particular ‘selves’ to the text, which is shaped by a variety of factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, religious affiliation, socioeconomic standing, education, and, we would add, sexual orientation. The

focus on the reader has produced many new voices in the discipline of biblical criticism....

“These new voices have ... produced a biblical hermeneutic that considers the particular social location of flesh-and-blood readers. Readers are members of specific communities, and their history with that community shapes the way they approach the biblical text. According to James Earl Massey, reading the Bible from a particular social location can be characterized in the following way:

1. Groups such as African Americans and women ... read and interpret the Bible as members of a particular social community.
2. The community’s life experiences and the relation of scripture to the community’s needs determine the ways in which the community appropriates texts of the Bible.
3. Most of the communities who employ this method have a social history of oppression and marginalization and are wary of ‘mainstream’ biblical interpretation. Many of these groups have had the Bible used against them by the dominant culture to justify their oppression and marginalization.
4. Each group with this particular social history has found a point of reference from which to read, reclaim, and re-appropriate the meaning of scripture for the community in liberating and affirming ways.

“.... [For example, the] point of reference for an African American reading of the Bible is the theme of deliverance and freedom.

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“..... [The LGBTQ+ contributors to this volume] cross boundaries in order to take back the Word from fundamentalist, exclusionary readings that demonize our community or justify a rhetoric of hate that leads to violence against us.... [They] are resistant readers who struggle against heterocentric privilege that erases us from the text....”

There are arguably no better illustrations of these principles than the biblical stories of David and Jonathan and of Ruth and Naomi.

II. The Story of David and Jonathan

At p. 94 of God vs. Gay?, Michaelson states that any study of the Bible and homosexuality “would not be complete if [it] did not discuss the Bible’s clearest expression of same-gender love, the story of David and Jonathan.” While the exact nature of the relationship between these two men cannot be known with certainty, the biblical story of David and Jonathan, when viewed from the perspective of LGBTQ+ people and, particularly, of gay men, is unquestionably a love story, as the following analysis persuasively demonstrates:

Miner & Connoley, pp. 33-38: “....Some Christians point to Jonathan and David as an example of idealized male bonding—a type of ‘brotherly love’ not ‘stained’ by the romantic entanglements of male-female relationships. The biblical text, however, is completely inconsistent with this strained interpretation. We will present the biblical evidence and let you be the jury. You decide: Were Jonathan and David merely good friends (experiencing brotherly love), or was there a deeper (romantic) level to their relationship?

“The author of 1 Samuel tells of a man named Saul, who became king over Israel and fathered a son named Jonathan. David, who was a shepherd from the smallest of the tribes of Israel, came to the attention of Saul and Jonathan when he volunteered to fight a giant who was troubling their nation.... [After David’s victory over Goliath,] Saul was intrigued by this courageous young man, and so he called David to come talk to him, which brings us to **Exhibit A**. The text says:

When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father’s house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. (1 Samuel 18:1-4)

“Now, imagine if this story had been about Jonathan and a woman.... If 1Samuel 18:1-4 were about Jonathan’s first encounter with a woman, theologians

everywhere would be writing about this as one of the greatest love stories of all time.... But because the object of Jonathan's affection is a man, our cultural prejudice kicks in and we insist (notwithstanding the biblical evidence) that this could not have been more than deep friendship.

"This 'culturally correct' reading will not withstand scrutiny.... Let's face it, the author of 1 Samuel is describing a classic love-at-first-sight encounter that happens to involve two men.

"...The text goes on to tell us David became a mighty warrior, and his popularity with the people of Israel threatened Saul's throne, so Saul planned to kill David. But Jonathan warned David, and he fled the palace before Saul could act....

"Then Jonathan and David met in secret.... [T]hey made a plan: Jonathan would go home and try to find out what his father was thinking. If his father had cooled down, he would let David know it was safe.

"One night, at the royal table, the subject of David came up, and Jonathan spoke on his behalf. Saul's reaction is **Exhibit B**. Saul said to Jonathan:

You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen [David] the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives upon the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established. (1 Samuel 20:30)

"Many gay men have experienced dinner conversations that sounded very similar to this one. They made the mistake of talking about their lover at the table, and their father became furious. More often than not, the blame goes first to the mother, who was 'too soft,' or 'too harsh,' or 'perverted' her son somehow. Then the father turns his anger toward the son: 'Can't you see how you're shaming the whole family? Do you even care what this will do to your career? You'll never amount to anything until you give up this foolishness!'

"In the biblical text, the arguments are the same. And, even more significantly, Saul's reference to shaming Jonathan's mother's nakedness carries a

sexual connotation.... The implication is that Jonathan is bringing sexual shame on his family.

“Jonathan immediately ran from the table. And, that night, he went to tell David the sad news. The narrative of their final meeting is full of tragedy and pathos, and constitutes **Exhibit C**:

David rose from beside the stone heap and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. He bowed three times and they kissed each other and wept with each other. Then Jonathan said to David, ‘Go in peace, since both of us have sworn in the name of the Lord, saying ‘The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever.’ He got up and left; and Jonathan went into the city. (1 Samuel 20:41-42)

“This was the last time they would ever see each other. David went into hiding, and Jonathan was eventually killed in battle, alongside his father. Perhaps they had some idea this was the end. They certainly knew their love was doomed. And Jonathan reminded David of their covenant with each other.... Later, after taking the throne, David would remember this covenant and adopt Jonathan’s only son as his own—something completely unheard of in a time when kings were expected to kill anyone with any connection to a previous, rival king.

“So, we ask, was this merely deep friendship or a romantic relationship? In Exhibit A, upon their first meeting, Jonathan is said to have loved David as his own soul and to have given him his most precious possessions. In Exhibit B, Jonathan’s father uses language of sex and shame when he decries Jonathan and David’s relationship in a fit of rage. In Exhibit C, we see Jonathan and David’s passionate, tearful goodbye, and Jonathan reminding David of the eternal covenant they have made to each other—a covenant David still honors years later, even though honoring it is politically incorrect. But if you are still not convinced this was a romantic relationship, there is one more piece of biblical evidence—the smoking gun, so to speak....

“In the first chapter of 2 Samuel, the author tells us that after Saul and

Jonathan were killed in battle, David tore his clothes and fasted, a sign of deep mourning. He wept and wrote a song, which he ordered all the people of Judah to sing. In that song, he included these words, which are **Exhibit D**:

Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely!
 In life and in death they were not divided;
 They were swifter than eagles,
 They were stronger than lions.
 How the mighty have fallen in the midst of battle!
 Jonathan lies slain upon your high places.
 I am distressed for you my brother Jonathan;
Greatly beloved were you to me;
Your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.
 (2 Samuel 1:23, 26-27, emphasis added)

“Here it is in black and white. David states the love he shared with Jonathan was greater than what he had experienced with women.... This goes well beyond deep friendship between two heterosexual men.

“In this story, we have a direct biblical answer to our question: Can two people of the same sex live in a loving, committed relationship with God’s favor? The answer is ‘yes,’ because Jonathan and David did, and the Bible celebrates their relationship.”

[NOTE: In addition to the “evidence” cited by Miner & Connoley, chapter 20 of 1 Samuel contains two additional references to “covenant[s]” between Jonathan and David:

1 Sam. 20:8—[David said to Jonathan:] “Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a sacred covenant [literally, ‘a covenant of the Lord’] with you.”

1 Sam. 20:16-17—“Thus Jonathan made [another] covenant with the house of David, saying, ‘May the Lord seek out the enemies of David.’ Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him; for he loved him as he loved his own life.”]

In Jonathan Loved David, Tom Horner examined these same biblical

passages quoted above and concluded that the love story of Jonathan and David was in fact the story of two men who had a sexual relationship:

Horner, pp. 27-28 & 32-33: “For whatever reason, Jonathan was attracted to David.... [quoting 1 Samuel 18:1-4, see above].

“Jonathan was obviously smitten. ‘But cannot two men be good friends,’ someone said to me recently, ‘without the issue of homosexuality being raised?’ Yes, they can. But *when* the two men come from a society that for two hundred years had lived in the shadow of the Philistine culture, which accepted homosexuality; *when* they find themselves in a social context that was thoroughly military in the Eastern sense [with its longstanding heroic model of ancient warrior lovers]; *when* one of them [Jonathan] – who is the social superior of the two—publicly makes a display of his love [see 1 Samuel 18:1 above]; *when* the two of them make a lifetime pact openly [see 1 Samuel 18:3 above; see also 1 Samuel 20:8,16-17 & 42]; *when* they meet secretly and kiss each other and shed copious tears at parting [1 Samuel 20:35-42, quoted in part above]; *when* one of them proclaims that his love for the other surpassed his love for women [see 2 Samuel 1:26 above]—and all this is present in the David-Jonathan liaison—we have every reason to believe that a homosexual relationship existed. The only thing lacking was for someone who was close to both of them to make an issue of it openly, and this eventually happened too when Jonathan’s father rashly implied in an emotional outburst something that under ordinary circumstances he probably never would have, but these were no ordinary circumstances. King Saul feared for the chances of Jonathan’s succession if the liaison continued....

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“One final thing to notice in connection with this key passage [see 1 Samuel 20:30 above] is the Semitic practice of refusing to pronounce the actual name of a person or group—or even things, as in the case of homosexuality—that is being put down. There is either an epithet of some kind or no mention of the name or word at all.... There is, of course, more than one epithet or substitution to be

found in this crucial passage: ‘son of Jesse’ for David, ‘shame’ and ‘nakedness’ for sex.

“Thus, the implication of a homosexual relationship is clearly a part of Saul’s outburst. He knows perfectly well what kind of relationship existed between his son and son-in-law [1 Samuel 18:20-27 describes David’s marriage to Saul’s daughter Michal], had known for quite some time, and his bedouin blood had now reached its boiling point.... Precisely because it was David with whom Jonathan was involved, Saul’s anger exploded.”

As stated in the passage quoted above, one of the factors emphasized by Horner in his analysis of the relationship between David and Jonathon was the context (historic, geographic, and cultural) in which the story is told. Some of his observations on these matters follow:

Horner, pp. 20-22: “.... There can be little doubt..., except on the part of those who absolutely refuse to believe it, that there existed a homosexual relationship between David and Jonathan. We are told that Jonathan loved David ‘as his own soul’ (1 Samuel 18:1[and 1 Samuel 18:3; see also 1 Samuel 20:17 (“for he loved [David] as he loved his own life”)) and ... that David said of Jonathan, ‘Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women’ (II Samuel 1:26). These words are denied—or simply called metaphors—by those who believe that the people of the Hebrews could never have been so drastically influenced by the peoples around them to the extent that they would succumb to such an undignified and ‘unmanly’ type of love! But this is contrary to the point: it was both dignified and manly—in fact, often associated with heroes—in the cultures that surrounded Israel. And how could Israel not have been influenced by these cultures? How could it have adopted an entirely different sexual ethic, living as close as it did to foreign influences?

“Let us look for a moment at these foreign influences in panorama. Abraham, according to tradition, came from Ur, a city of Sumer, the land of Gilgamesh [referring to an ancient epic Sumerian tale of the noble and heroic love between two men, Gilgamesh, a king, and Enkidu, who was specially created by

the gods to 'provide the proper diversion for the young king's excessive vitality']. He migrated to Canaan and then went down to Egypt. Returning to Palestine, he bought his tomb from the Hittites, 'the people of the land.' His sons and grandsons chose wives, for the most part, from among the Bedouins of the country—namely, from among the Arameans, a people whose culture and way of life are best represented by the nomadic Arabs of the present day.... Samson and David lived a good portion of their lives among the Philistines, a people of Aegean descent who settled on the coast of Palestine and dominated it from about 1200 to 1000 B.C..... [Additional references to contacts with the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans omitted].

"How then can the sexual mores of the Bible not have been influenced—tremendously influenced—by the sexual mores of the peoples and nations in whose midst that same Bible was produced? For, among all the above-named people and nations, homosexuality existed alongside heterosexuality to a greater or lesser degree (even among the early Persians, who at first were most phobic in this regard), as any scholarly survey of sex practices among the peoples of the ancient East will show. The ancient Egyptians generally looked down on pederasty, although there is the very strong supposition that their adult males welcomed the opportunity to sodomize other males who were victims of war. Evidence regarding the Assyrians is ambiguous, there possibly being some reaction at one point against the excesses of earlier (i.e., Babylonian) times. But among the Hittites and especially among the Canaanites, the Old Testament's other 'people of the land,' there is no question about acceptance, and of the Greeks there is hardly a need to comment.

"In some of these cultures, in fact, homosexuality was so widely accepted that it was only thought worthy of comment in the most extreme (to us) situations; for example, the Hittites had rules that forbade a father to seduce his son, and other laws that actually regulated pederastic marriages. Otherwise they might never have mentioned the subject. Whenever such unusual topics as these find their way to the law books, we can only wonder about the prevalence of the

more conventional form (or forms) of homosexuality—or that which is more familiar to us from our knowledge of the Greeks—which must have gone entirely unspoken. A conservative deduction from an overview of all the references, as amassed by Vern L. Bullough, for example, is that homosexuality was ever-present in the Middle East but that it was not always thought to be a topic worthy of mention....”

Turning from the external to the internal, Horner also examined the psychological and cultural factors influencing the story of David and Jonathan, and Saul:

Horner, p.26-27, 28-29: “When we read of the prophet Samuel’s going to the house of Jesse the Bethlehemite, we encounter the young David for the first time. Here, in the words of the King James Version, we are told: ‘Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to’ (1 Samuel 16:12).... We do not know what Jonathon looked like or, until his introduction to David, anything about him except that he was the king’s son and the hero of the battle of Michmash, which had been the Israelites’ main encounter with their Philistine overlords up to the time that David came on the scene. These two facts, however, were enough to qualify him as an object of desire in the ancient Middle Eastern world of heroic love: first, he was an aristocrat, a usual requirement for participation in this form of love, and, secondly, he was a hero, an endorsement that is self-explanatory. Everyone loves a hero.

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“For whatever reason, Jonathan was attracted to David. Could he have seen in him what Michelangelo later was to envision: an unblushing naked youth, resolute but unassuming, vibrant with both strength and health, magnificent in bodily form? This of course is only the artistic imagination at work.... Whether Jonathan saw anything like the Michelangelo sculpture we can never know, but whatever he saw he liked it.... [quoting 1 Samuel 18:1-4, see above].

“Jonathan was obviously smitten....

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“Dr. George W. Henry, after a psychiatric career that spanned thirty years of practice and the clinical examination of nine thousand cases, analyzed the relationship in a book that included brief psychobiographies of several characters from antiquity. His conclusion was that the princely Jonathan was the aggressor and the ambitious young David the willing seductee. ‘Unreservedly responsive’ are Henry’s words to describe David’s reactions to Jonathan’s advances. Although homosexuality was for him only a passing phase, says Henry, it was one that David turned to good advantage by cementing a close alliance between himself and the royal family. So it seems. My answer to this is that, first of all, it was only natural that Jonathan take the initiative in the relationship. Ordinarily heroic love affairs in the ancient East were between two persons of equal rank. But there was no other youth in Israel who was precisely of Jonathan’s station (except his own brothers!). David was from a good family, but he was certainly not royalty. Therefore, it was only natural that Jonathan act as the initiator; David never could have. In like manner Achilles had to select Patroclus, and Alexander, Hephaestion. As for the implication, which has often been made, that a friendship with the king’s son would have placed David closer to the throne, one wonders how it could.... It was by no means determined that sons succeeded their fathers on the throne at this point in Israel’s history.

“Saul was Israel’s first king and there was no precedent for any kind of royal succession; only the nations around Israel had precedents—which were not successions through the male lines at all but through the female lines. [Thus, it would not be Jonathan who was the expectant heir, but it would be the one who was the husband of the king’s daughter]. A most interesting aspect of the whole issue is that even a casual reading of the First Book of Samuel will reveal that there was never any indication on Jonathan’s part of an expectation that he would be king.... My feeling is that Jonathan knew about the prevailing matriarchal system and did not expect to be king. Saul, however, *did* want

Jonathan to be king, and he clearly intended to try to buck the principle of the matriarchate and establish his son as his successor. Herein lies the root of his antagonism to David, an element that occupies such a major role in this narrative....”

Finally, as indicated in the previous passages, Horner placed the story of David and Jonathan squarely within the ancient tradition of heroic warrior lovers, a tradition that includes Gilgamesh and Enkidu, Achilles and Patroclus, and Alexander and Hephaestion:

Horner, pp. 37-39: “There are so many examples of similarities in the Aegean and Israelite cultures at this stage of history that it would take us far afield at this point to name them all, but the serious student could begin a comparative study of these parallels by reading Cyrus H. Gordon’s popular book, *The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations*. Gordon includes, of course, materials from Mesopotamia as well as from Greece and Israel, for they all shared in a ‘common East Mediterranean heritage.’ Among the parallels cited are: the motif of the abducted bride (Helen, Sarah, Rebekah), the popularity of long hair (Minoans, Enkidu, Samson, Absalom), and the devotion of comrades (Gilgamesh-Enkidu, Achilles-Patroclus, David-Jonathan).

“In these three pairs of heroic friends, their sexual relations with women should be carefully noted, as well as their love of comrades. As for the possibilities of homosexuality in the third and most famous pair, Marvin H. Pope comments that ‘the friendship of David and Jonathan has provoked suspicion’ but adds: ‘Whether there was a sexual involvement in the intimacy with Jonathan, David’s heterosexual character is well attested and his ample experience with women enhances the tribute to Jonathan’s love.’

“Such men were usually also the fathers of children. Thus, a prominent feature of the biblical narrative is that David later showed a fatherly concern for Jonathan’s surviving (or only) son, Meribaal [or Mephibosheth], who was lame. For, after he became king, David invited the young man to come and eat at the royal table—‘for Jonathan’s sake,’ it is specifically noted (II Samuel 9:1-13). Even

after Meribaal was later accused of treason, David did not entirely write the young man off. For, aside from the matter of the 'covenant' that had been between David and his friend, Meribaal was all that remained of the physical presence of Jonathan. So far as we know, Jonathan had married only once, and no other children by him are mentioned. David, however, married eight times and had many children. Nevertheless, *this does not preclude the possibility of homosexuality during his youth, during his soldier days, when the comrade relationship in a military context was the pattern.*

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"... Israel's greatest king and hero did have such an affair and he made no secret about it. On the contrary, he boasted about it in his famous lament which is not only of undoubted authorship but, because of its majestic language and depth of feeling, is one of the poetic gems of world literature. And for those who still suppose, or choose to believe, that this situation was uncommon or unique, the words of Raphael Patai indicate that the opposite was more likely: 'The love story between Jonathan, the son of King Saul, and David the beautiful hero, must have been duplicated many times in royal courts in all parts of the Middle East in all periods.'" [Emphasis added]

The Bible therefore tells the story of two men who loved each other. There is no hint of condemnation, only commendation. Indeed, it seems likely that the story of Jonathan and David is included in the Bible because it was so critical to the accomplishment of God's purpose, which was the replacement of King Saul, Jonathan's father, by King David, the king who was loved not only by Jonathan but also by God.

III. Lesbianism in Biblical Times

Almost totally absent from the vast majority of the source materials that have been examined in preparing this course are any discussions of female homosexuality or lesbianism. See Bibliography for Volume II. [NOTE: the notable exceptions are the historical treatises cited and quoted in this volume [Volume I]].

Almost always, the issue of homosexuality as it relates to the Bible is discussed exclusively in terms of same-sex relationships between men. When same-sex relationships among women are discussed at all, that discussion usually occurs in the context of the biblical story of Ruth and Naomi, which is seen by many as the female counterpart to the story of David and Jonathan. For example, in God vs. Gay?, at p. 95, Michaelson includes the following “prefatory note” before beginning his much lengthier analysis of the David and Jonathan story: “... [T]here are other stories of same-sex love in the Bible, but I have chosen to focus on this one [Jonathan and David] because it is the one that most likely contained a physical component. I recognize that this choice is problematic, because it may exclude other, nonsexual forms of same-sex intimacy, particularly among women. The story of Ruth and Naomi, for example, is one of the Bible’s rare explorations of love between women. Ruth is clearly devoted to her mother-in-law, and her poetic words—‘Wherever you go, I will go’—have been an inspiration to lovers of all configurations over the centuries. Likewise, the pairs of female emissaries in the New Testament, Tryphaina and Tryphosa (Rom. 16:12) and Euhodia and Syntyche (Phil.4:2), indicate, at the very least, deep friendships between women. If we take seriously the notion of the ‘lesbian continuum’..., that may be enough, and many religious scholars have applied it to these stories.” That is basically *all* that Michaelson has to say on the subject of same-sex relations between women. [Bisexuals and transgender people fare even worse; with only rare exceptions, they are totally disregarded in the course’s source materials, including God vs. Gay?].

In Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times, Tom Horner discussed some of the reasons for this relative silence concerning same-sex relations between women, again in the context of his analysis of the book of Ruth, as follows:

Horner, pp. 40-41, 44-45: “Jeannette Foster says that the story [of Ruth and Naomi] might well have been written by a woman. There is much to commend

this view, not the least being that it ‘gives the impression of having been intended primarily for feminine circles.’ But the truth of the matter is that we do not know enough about the authorship of this book to say; however, for all books of the Old Testament about which we can make such a statement, a male author is indicated. And as for male writers reporting on the sexual activities of women, *men in the ancient East usually did not pay much attention to what women did so long as they maintained their family duties and did not disgrace their menfolk publicly. So whether they did or did not engage in erotic activity with one another very seldom got reported, even in the larger Mediterranean world—in the Old Testament record, never.* However, women spent almost all their time together and very, very little of it with men. History accords us ample evidence of the presence of homosexuality wherever and whenever the sexes have been separated for long periods. Segregation by sex was a way of life in the ancient East; and in some parts of it, it still is....

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“.... *The men, who did most of the writing in antiquity, would certainly not have recorded the homosexual activities of their own or their neighbors’ wives, even if they knew about them, which most likely they didn’t.* As has already been noted, men in the ancient world were not much interested in what women did among themselves, it supposedly being of no importance (to the men anyway). *And then, as now, few women were eager to advertise their sexual activities with other women, or even to discuss in public the existence of such activities.* The secrecy of the women’s world, like that of the children’s, was an established convention and a valued advantage. So, in general, we don’t hear about it. And G. Rattray Taylor adds still another dimension to the problem when he writes: ‘To say that we hear little about homosexuality does not mean that it did not exist, but rather that it was not a source of neurotic anxiety.’ This would mean, in Taylor’s terms, that *female homosexuality, not once singled out for mention in the Old Testament, was not a subject of any concern.*

“We cannot help observing, however, that in the semi-matriarchal societies of early Greece, such as that of Dorian Sparta in its early stages, female homosexuality did take place because of the greater freedom that women enjoyed; and at the same time we cannot help concluding that in the strongly patriarchal societies where women were more restricted, it existed because there was little or no sexual enjoyment open to them except on those occasions—and for many, those were rare occasions—when a male decided to come to their bed or, more likely, to send for them to come to his....” [Emphasis added].

IV. Ruth and Naomi

In his book, Horner raises the question of whether Ruth and Naomi had a lesbian relationship and essentially concludes that that question can’t be answered:

Horner, p. 40, 43: “Was there a sexual attraction between the long-suffering widow, Naomi, and her loyal daughter-in-law, Ruth? To my knowledge no one has ever said there was except Jeannette Foster, who [in a book written in 1956] sees it as ‘the first of a thin line of delicate portrayals, by authors seemingly blind to their full significance, of an attachment which, however innocent, is nevertheless still basically variant.’ On another level Louise Pettibone Smith, after saying that the ‘Entreat me not to leave thee’ speech (Ruth 1:16-17) still expresses for us ‘the closest of human relationships,’ compares the friendship of the two women to that of David and Jonathan. But isn’t the ‘closest of all human relationships’ a little more than an ordinary friendship, or even a very special friendship? It is as close as two people can possibly get; and when the two are in no way related by blood, then that friendship can definitely have erotic undertones. However, the author of this little story—and it is a story, although one generally quite accurate in historical background—was a typical Middle Easterner, one who was no doubt accustomed to warm human relationships in his own life. Therefore he could express them in story form without feeling any necessity to spell out for his audience what women did or did not do—that is, personally, among themselves—in his society.

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[Analysis of book of Ruth omitted. Author's conclusion:] "There still are not sufficient grounds to say with certainty ... that a homosexual relationship existed between Naomi and Ruth, but there are enough to point out that the possibility of such a relationship cannot be overlooked...."

In her essay "Love Your Mother: A Lesbian Womanist Reading of Scripture," Rev. Irene S. Travis provided her perspective as an African-American feminist on all of these matters:

Take Back the Word, pp. 37-38: "What did women attracted to women do in ancient times? They definitely had little choice and were compelled to marry men. Often these marriages were arranged, making input from the bride unnecessary. Many of these arranged marriages were the result of economic and power deals among men. Women were just so much property, like children or cattle. But women have always been resourceful and have created clever ways to remain together. In those times, having offspring was not only expected but required.... Barren women were a disgrace. Enslaved women and barren women found God in their struggles for life and wholeness despite what patriarchs believed. They found the stories of Hagar, Rachel, Ruth, Esther, and other women inspiring hope in the midst of their struggles. They found diverse communities, crossing age, race, and religion; they created womanist ways of mutually relating to each other and testifying to the image of God in their relationships of mutuality [quoting Ruth 1:16]

"So it appears that most lesbians of previous ages married, reproduced, and found comfort in one another's very close company. What about the plight of widows and single lesbians? Widows certainly found strength in their children and in one another, and single women created bonds with other women. Were all of the sisters actually biological siblings? Were Mary and Martha sisters? Women have often called each other 'sister,' and lesbians have found that ploy useful throughout the centuries. It also leads women to ponder the extraordinary bond

between Ruth and Naomi that crosses boundaries of age, ethnicity, and religion. Female friendships have formed across cultural, racial, intergenerational, and religious boundaries.

“What if more portions of the Bible had been written from the unique points of view of women? In the case of the particular time-honored female couple of Ruth and Naomi we query, where does duty and honor end and romantic love begin, if at all? *What was Ruth thinking? It is a story of the love between women, celebrating faithfulness, passionate care, commitment, devotion, and loyalty. Ruth was willing to leave her homeland for the love of another woman. We now know that many women such as Ruth and Naomi exist, and have existed throughout the history of the world, as emotionally intimate lesbians and that genital expression is not necessarily the defining quality of lesbianism.* (Some men find that hard to comprehend.) And, of course, lesbianism does not exclude motherhood. The biological urge and the psychosocial desire to perpetuate the human race continue to remain strong....” [Emphasis added].

Leaving aside the unanswerable questions of whether there was a sexual component to their relationship and whether they can nevertheless be classified as “emotionally intimate lesbians” even in the absence of that sexual component, the entire book of Ruth is clearly the story of two women who loved each other deeply and were in a committed, life-long relationship. The fact that this relationship was not condemned in the Bible but rather celebrated is an affirming message to the LGBTQ+ community. (For Christians, it is particularly noteworthy that Ruth, who became the great-grandmother of King David, is one of only six women who are listed by Matthew in his genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:5)). The following two commentaries both emphasized how central the relationship of Ruth and Naomi is to the story that is told in the book of Ruth:

Wilson, pp. 3-4: “The Book of Ruth is a romantic novel but not about romance between Ruth and Boaz. Naomi is actually the central character, and Ruth is the ‘redeemer/hero.’ Boaz’ relationship with Ruth, far from being romantic, is a matter of family duty and property.

“This story contains the most moving promise of relational fidelity between two persons in all of the Bible: ‘And Ruth said, ‘Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people will be my people and thy God my God’ (Ruth 1:16).

“Although used in heterosexual marriage ceremonies for years, this is a vow between two women! When their husbands die in battle, Ruth makes this vow to Naomi, her mother-in-law. Ruth marries Boaz, a close relative, and redeems Naomi’s place in her own family, also bearing a child for Naomi. *Did Ruth and Naomi have a lesbian relationship? There’s no way to know, but it is clear the two women had a lifelong, passionate, committed relationship celebrated in Scripture*” [Emphasis added].

Miner & Connoley, pp. 30-33: “[After Ruth’s vow of commitment to Naomi, which is spoken in the first chapter of the book of Ruth, see above,] the story moves on to tell of Ruth and Naomi’s life together. The focus is on the quality of *their* relationship. The biblical storyteller chronicles how Ruth cared for Naomi by taking the only job available to a husbandless woman, gleaning. When the author tells of Ruth’s eventual marriage to a much older man, the marriage is portrayed as one of convenience, contrived to help Ruth and Naomi survive the harsh conditions of widowhood. No mention is made of Ruth’s love for her husband. And when Ruth finally bears a son from her marriage, the text focuses on Naomi and her reaction to the great news, not on the father. In fact, the women of the village (and the author) ignore the father entirely, saying, ‘A son has been born to Naomi.’ (Ruth 4:17). They remind her that Ruth ‘who loves you, is more to you than seven sons.’ (Ruth 4:15). *Everyone seems to understand that, for Ruth and Naomi, their most important relationship is the one they share.*

“Here then is the story the Bible tells: Ruth gave up everything so she could be with Naomi; she put her own life at risk, so she could spend it caring for Naomi; and, even after she married a man, her most important relationship remained the one she shared with Naomi. These actions and emotions are

difficult, almost impossible, to explain as mere friendship. *If we set aside our preconceptions of what is possible in the Bible, the book of Ruth reads like the story of two women in love.*

“Instinctively, and perhaps unwittingly, Christians throughout the centuries have acknowledged the validity of this interpretation. The vow Ruth makes to Naomi has been read at Christian weddings for centuries because it so perfectly captures the essence of the love that should exist between spouses....

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“The Bible is clear. Here we have two women who made vows, lived together for life, loved each other deeply, adopted each other’s extended families as their own, and relied on each other for sustenance—as do many lesbian women today. Instead of condemning these relationships, the Bible celebrates them, giving them their own book in Scripture” [Emphasis added].

V.A Bisexual Midrash

Still another perspective on the book of Ruth has been provided by an MCC pastor who self-identifies as a *bisexual* woman: “While I have only been in two long-term physical relationships, one with a man, one with a woman, my life has been enriched by a number of bisexual relationships that have had nothing to do with sex or even sexuality yet have been deeply gratifying, connections so spiritually rewarding that, like Ruth with Naomi, a bond has been formed that has gone far beyond simple friendship, far beyond concern or thought that the bond was formed with either male or female.” **Take Back the Word**, “The Book of Ruth: On Boundaries, Love, and Truth,” Celena M. Duncan, p. 93. At the outset, Rev. Duncan states that “I read the book of Ruth as a bisexual midrash [defined as “an ancient commentary on part of the Hebrew scriptures, deduced from Scripture by exegesis and attached to the biblical text”].” *Ibid.*, p. 92. She then proceeds to analyze the relationship between Ruth and Naomi, as follows:

Take Back the Word, pp. 94-95: “Ruth crossed the boundaries into a deep, mature form of love by responding to what, in Naomi, compelled her. Ruth

committed herself to a relationship with another woman, a deep bond that went beyond sexuality, gender, and ethnicity and one that sought the physical, the spiritual, all the things attracting one person to another. What Ruth saw in Naomi was the elder woman's goodness, compassion, and kindness, but it was a bond of love between women that could only exist under the rubric of patriarchal marriage and family. Ruth was not deterred by Naomi's despondency. If anything, it was as if Naomi's sense of futility and emptiness made Ruth love her only so much more. She wanted to help Naomi through this difficult time, as would anyone who cares deeply for another.

"Ruth was drawn to a certain, very specific relationship. Ruth entered the relationship believing she was relinquishing the one thing by which a woman's worth, value, accomplishment and purpose were measured: her ability to bear children, in particular sons. Yet she had found a path she could not quit, a path that stirred her to make a vow. Her love for Naomi superseded her procreative responsibilities. She did not choose to follow Naomi to shock or to be different. She was drawn by her heart and could only choose in favor of what would provide her the greatest emotional and spiritual health and well-being. Not even family ties could hold her or draw her back when measured against the forward pull of her love for Naomi. Ruth's words expressed the primacy of her bond with Naomi, and she would give up everything that mattered in her society in order to stay with, as Naomi saw herself, a dried-up old woman who was out of favor with her own God and who may well have been walking back into disfavor and scorn from the townspeople in her homeland. Even so, in her silence, Naomi accepted what the younger woman offered, a bond of support, companionship, assistance, loyalty, and love. Are these not the elements of a marriage? It was a bond unbreakable by death because the God of Naomi forged it; they were both being drawn forward by God, who was weaving a grand tapestry that would forever include the names of these two humble women. God broke the boundaries that had separated the two, and who would break apart or deny what God has wrought?" [Emphasis added].

It is clear that Rev. Duncan's analysis of the book of Ruth was strongly influenced by her own experiences as a bisexual woman, as she herself revealed by telling the biblical story intertwined with her own personal story. Nevertheless, up until this point, her analysis did not differ substantially from the views, as stated previously, of her three MCC colleagues, the Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (a lesbian) and the Rev. Jeff Miner and John Tyler Connoley (two gay men). On the other hand, she unmistakably diverged from the others when, again strongly influenced by her own experiences, she went on to discuss the relationship of Ruth and Boaz and the family unit that was created by Naomi, Ruth and Boaz: **Take Back the Word**, pp. 97-98, 101-102: "Just by virtue of his being a well-to-do landowner, Boaz was a community leader. If he had been suspicious and barely tolerant of [the foreigner] Ruth, the community, starting with his own workers, would have followed that lead. Instead, he was generous and respectful, even seating her at mealtime and bringing her food himself, a task that was surely far outside of his male status as a landowner and head of household. Boaz was fair-minded, compassionate, willing to question long-held beliefs and opinions and to step across cultural boundaries if those boundaries stood in the way of justice and loving-kindness. *Boaz and Ruth were thrown together in circumstances that allowed cultural suspicions to fade so that each could see the common humanity that they shared and eventually a relationship would exist when Ruth and Boaz dropped all defenses.* If asked what they each saw when looking at the other, I believe the response would have been a paraphrase of Jacob's exclamation on meeting Esau the day after Jacob's fateful wrestling match: 'I have looked into the face of a Moabite, and I have seen God!'

"The scene on the threshing floor was a pivotal and critical moment. An uncertain moment became a moment of grace, and the loving-kindness of God shone through this couple more brightly than the sun at noon. Boaz praised Ruth's actions, revealed the presence of a nearer redeemer, and promised a resolution before the next day was done. I cannot but feel that their love and respect for each other grew only deeper that very night.

“Boaz was clearly motivated by more than just Levirate duty.... Boaz wanted Ruth, yet not at the expense of integrity, his or hers. All had to be done properly....

“While I am not by any means an expert in the customs during the time of the judges, it seems to me that Boaz, in bringing Ruth into his home, was also willing to run the potential gossip gauntlet on behalf of Naomi, for she was certainly part of the bargain as well. Where Naomi went, Ruth went. Where Ruth went, there went Naomi. They neither could nor would be parted. In marrying Ruth, Boaz was also entering into a very close, though certainly nonsexual, relationship with Naomi. Boaz did not seem to have to think it over for very long.

“We have here a portrait of two very deep relationships dealing with love: one, I assert, as deep as the other. Ruth would have been hard-pressed to part from either of them, and in that sense, she was in two deeply committed relationships, both vital and precious for the rest of her life....

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“Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz caught just a glimpse of God’s creational love, unbounded and all-encompassing, and they dared to do the painful work of questioning their own prejudices and boundaries. They dared to let go of long-held biases in favor of what God was revealing, and they realized how similar all humans are, rather than how different. In the foreigner, they each saw their own dreams, fears, hopes, the same longing for peace, happiness, and love, no matter our skin color, no matter our cultural oddities, no matter our dress, no matter whom we date or with whom we coupled. This vision led them to establish relationships that were outside the boundaries of their traditional culture.

“Were Ruth and Naomi close in-laws? or friends? or sexual intimates? Labeling their relationship is to limit and diminish what they had. Special friendship does not even describe it. What I have described is, to me, precisely what bisexuality is all about. It breaks boundaries of all kinds, not because one wants to shock, but because the attraction intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and finally physically is greater than one can resist, in the best sense. One sees

God in the other, and where God is, there is respect, loving-kindness, and responsibility toward each other....” [Emphasis added]

VI. The Bible and Transgender People

Unique among all of the sources listed in the Bibliography for this course is a book titled Transforming: The Bible & the Lives of Transgender Christians. Written by a transgender man, Austen Hartke, it is the only book dealing with the subject of the Bible and transgender persons. All of the citations in this section are to that book or to other sources cited in that source.

Chapter 3: Sin, Sickness or Specialty?

In Chapter 3 of his book, Hartke describes and analyzes three alternative “frameworks” for dealing with issues relating to transgender people, frameworks that were originally developed by the Christian psychologist Mark Yarhouse in his 2015 treatise *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*. [NOTE: Hartke defines “gender dysphoria” as “the sense of restlessness, anxiety, dissonance, or distress that can be caused by the conflict between a transgender person’s gender identity and their assigned sex.” Hartke, p. 22]. He describes the first of these three “frameworks” as follows:

Hartke, pp. 34-35: “Yarhouse calls his first way of understanding trans identities ‘the integrity framework.’ Someone who holds to this framework would consider conflict between one’s assigned sex and gender identity sinful because it messes with what they believe to be the strictly male or female nature God gives each of us... [P]roponents of this view tend to see any attempt to move away from one’s assigned sex as rebellion against what God has ordained....[O]ne’s gender is predetermined and set in stone.

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“....Men should be protectors, providers, and leaders; women should be nurturers, helpers, and submissive to the leadership of the men in their life.

“...[A]nyone who has a gender identity that doesn’t match their assigned sex needs to find a way to get that gender identity to fall in line....Diversion from the assigned role is considered sinful, and repentance is necessary.”

Hartke, pp. 36-39: “The second framework Yarhouse introduces is called ‘the disability framework.’ He explains that in this framework ‘gender dysphoria is viewed as a result of living in a fallen world in which the condition—like so many mental health concerns—is a nonmoral reality.’... *As a psychologist and major proponent of this view, Yarhouse does **not** see people as having a trans identity, but rather as individuals who are currently struggling with a mental-health condition in the form of gender dysphoria....*[see above, definition of this term].

“This change in moral status is the main difference between the identity framework and the disability framework. In the former, the transgender person is deliberately disobeying God; in the latter, they’re merely a victim of original sin like every other human being.... Yarhouse works hard to create a bridge to help move Christians from an accusatory view to a compassionate view, and for some trans people, that shift may ultimately be life-saving.

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“The main failing of the disability framework is that it refuses to recognize the different kinds of suffering that transgender people experience. By assuming that all the suffering trans people experience is a result of that trans identity, *the disability framework lets the individuals and institutions that don’t affirm transgender people off the hook for the harm they cause. Instead, by looking at transgender people through a clinical lens, it suggests that trans persons must change to fit the mold, rather than changing the mold that constricts them.*

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“.... Though Yarhouse himself may not actively discourage anyone from transitioning, if that’s what they want, *the disability framework inherently treats the transgender person’s identity as an illness that should be cured, and in the hands of other mental health practitioners it can quickly become an excuse for so-called ‘reparative therapy.’... [T]his kind of treatment can lead to irreversible harm, especially for children and youth*” [Emphasis added].

Hartke, pp. 39-40, 43: “But what if there’s another option? The ‘diversity framework’ is Yarhouse’ third example of the ways in which we might view

transgender identities. He explains that *this model ‘highlights transgender issues as reflecting an identity and culture to be celebrated as an expression of diversity.’* Rather than seeing transgender folks as sinful people rebelling against God, or as mentally ill people who need treatment that helps reorient them back toward their assigned sex, *the diversity framework suggests that differences in gender identities might be a natural variation in a vibrant world.*

“... [I]t is worth noting the outcomes of this affirming third structure. Unlike the results produced by the two other frameworks—where nonaffirming religious views are tied to suicidal behaviors in transgender youth—the supportive results that come out of the diversity framework have been shown to reduce levels of depression and anxiety in transgender kids. This alone makes the diversity framework worth taking seriously as an option.

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“Without oversimplifying the argument too much, it seems that the biggest stumbling block for many Christians when it comes to the diversity framework is the belief that biological sex is both cut-and-dried and also divinely decreed.

Yarhouse goes on to say that while the ‘strong form’ of the diversity framework is unacceptable to most evangelical Christians for this reason, the ‘weak form,’ which gives trans people a sense of identity and community, may be worth considering....

“In the following chapters, we will hear stories from transgender Christians whose lives today are very much affected by these lenses and the conversations that surround them. We’ll look at Genesis and the first illustrations of sex and gender, and we’ll explore God’s reaction to the people who color outside those lines.... We’ll ask whether or not gender really is set in stone, and whether God commands any specific kind of gender conformity” [Emphasis added].

Chapter 4: And God Said, Let There Be Marshes

Beginning with Chapter 4 of his book, Austen Hartke shifts his focus to Bible studies. Not just any Bible studies, but Bible studies with a unique perspective, the Bible as interpreted and applied by transgender Christians, including but not

limited to the author himself. Chapter 4, for example, includes a dialogue between Hartke and the Reverend M Barclay, who identifies as “nonbinary” and uses the pronouns “they,” “them,” and “theirs,” while Chapter 5 relies heavily on a dialogue between Hartke and Aidan Wang, a Taiwanese transgender man from Taipei, where only 3.9 percent of the population identifies as Christian. Chapter 7 is primarily autobiographical, focusing on Hartke’s own personal spiritual journey. And so on throughout the book. [NOTE: Due to the length of Hartke’s book and the vast number of biblical issues it covers, only a few of his chapters will be discussed herein as a representative sampling of transgender biblical interpretation].

The key Bible passage at issue in Chapter 4 is Genesis 1:27, which states (in the NRSV translation): “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” This verse serves as the foundation for the argument that God created two and only two genders, which are complementary and mutually exclusive. For example, Hartke cites the theologian Robert Gagnon “as an example of someone who believes that one’s gender is predetermined and set in stone”:

Hartke, p. 34: “For Gagnon, the root of the problem with trans identities has to do with gender complementarity. He believes that ‘there are only two primary sexes, ‘male and female’ or ‘man’ and ‘woman,’ and that sexual intercourse represents the merger of the two halves of the sexual spectrum. What a man brings to the table, so to speak, of a sexual union is his essential maleness; a woman, her essential femaleness.’ Gender complementarians believe that ‘distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart.’” [See also Lesson 4 below, at pp. 142-44 (further discussion of Prof. Gagnon’s views)].

Hartke and M Barclay, however, present two very persuasive counter-arguments as to why the reliance of the complementarians on Genesis 1:27 is misplaced. First, it is clear that the creation account in Genesis chapter one is **not** intended to be a **comprehensive** catalogue of everything in the universe

that has been created. Chapter one is almost entirely focused on dualities like light and dark, earth and sky, and land and water, while ignoring everything else that falls in-between these two polar opposites. For example, Gen. 1:4-5 describes God's creation of Day and Night, but makes no mention of dawn and dusk. Gen. 1:16-17 describes God's creation of the Sun and the Moon but makes no mention of other astronomical phenomenon like the planets, comets and black holes. Gen. 1:10 describes God's creation of the Earth and the Seas but makes no mention of marshes, estuaries, and coral reefs (areas that are neither land nor sea).

Hartke, p. 51: "....Then we get to verse 27:

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

"Based on the dualities we've seen in this chapter, it's not surprising to find humans broken into two groups here: male and female God created them. *But this verse does not discredit other sexes or genders, any more than the verse about the separation of day from night rejects the existence of dawn and dusk.* As M Barclay puts it, 'This chapter talks about night and day and land and water, but we have dusk and we have marshes. *These verses don't mean 'there's only land and water, and there's nowhere where these two meet.'* These binaries aren't meant to speak to all of reality—they invite us into thinking about everything between and beyond.' In the same way we call God the Alpha and the Omega, implying all things from first to last and in between, the author of Genesis 1 is merely using the same dualistic poetic device to corral the infinite diversity of creation into categories we can easily understand" [Emphasis added].

The second reason that the reliance of the complementarians on Gen. 1:27 is misplaced is that the existence of people who *don't* fall into the two major categories of "male" and "female" was known to literate people at the time that Genesis was written:

Hartke, pp. 51-53: "*The reality is that, for as long as there have been humans,*

there have been people who fall outside of the male/female binary.... In the Mishnah and the Talmud, the Jewish compilations of oral law put together between 200 CE and 500 CE, we see several examples of individuals who don't fit male or female categories within Jewish culture, including those whose sex is indeterminable, those who have characteristics of more than one sex, and those whose characteristics change over time. This tells us that even the descendants of the Hebrew people who recorded Genesis 1 did not necessarily assume that the gender or sex categories seen in verse 27 were all-encompassing.

"In Greek and Roman times, people born with indeterminate or ambiguous sex characteristics were called hermaphrodites.... Today people with a combination of different sex characteristics identify themselves as intersex, and we know that they make up between 0.018 percent and 1.7 percent of the world's population...

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"When we attempt to box God's creation in by looking to Genesis 1:27 and expecting every person on earth to fall into line, we're asking the text the wrong question. If Genesis 1 was meant to describe the world as it is, the biblical authors would have needed a scroll hundreds of feet long! *Just as we wouldn't expect astronomers to cram things like comets and black holes into the categories for sun or moon, we shouldn't expect all humans to fit into the categories 'male' and 'female,' just because those are the only two listed in Genesis 1.* Instead of asking the text to define and label all that is, we can ask God to speak into the space between the words, between biblical times and our time, and between categories we see as opposites" [Emphasis added].

Chapter 5: Biblical Culture Shock

Hartke begins Chapter 5 of his book with a discussion of the one Bible verse that seems to be the most directly applicable to transgender people and that has, in fact, been cited as justification for discriminatory treatment against or even outright exclusion of transgender people from Churches and Synagogues:

Hartke, pp. 60-62: "All over the world people use clothing as part of their gender

expression—from kilts in Scotland, to the huipil in Central America [described by Wikipedia as the most common traditional garment worn by indigenous women from central Mexico to central America, a loose-fitting tunic made from two or three rectangular pieces of fabric joined together by stitching, ribbons or fabric strips], to the gho in Bhutan [the traditional national dress for men in Bhutan, described as a knee-length robe tied with a handmade belt], to the hijab worn by many Muslim women. We have expectations about what certain kinds of clothing mean in our own culture, and we use that clothing to signal things about ourselves to other people....

“Gender expression was scrutinized in biblical times too, and we have one specific verse that often gets leveraged against people who dress ‘outside their gender.’ That verse is *Deuteronomy 22:5*: ‘*A woman shall not wear a man’s apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the LORD your God.*’ But what exactly is women’s clothing and men’s clothing? Is this verse referring to clothing within one particular culture in one place and time, or is it a hard-and-fast rule for everyone?

“The answers to those questions depend on whom you ask. Some biblical scholars believe that *Deuteronomy 22:5* was written specifically for the Hebrew people in their time and place, because dressing in the clothes of another gender was associated with the cults of other gods. Other theologians believe this verse to be a continuation of the Torah laws ... [that classify all life and separate it] into different categories that [people] are forbidden from mixing. [See, for example, *Lev. 19:19*: ‘...You shall not let your animals breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall you put on a garment made of two different materials.’]. In the Talmud, Rabbi Eliezer ben Jacob suggests that the ‘man’s apparel’ in the verse refers to armor and weapons for war, and that the verse’s original purpose was to keep women from going into battle. The Jewish scholar Rashi says in his commentary on *Deuteronomy 22:5* that the prohibition is against anyone dressing in the clothes of another gender in order to mix among that other gender for the purposes of adultery or some other kind of

heterosexual immorality.... [H]e suggests that it's OK to wear the clothing of another gender as long as you're not using it to sneak off and make out with somebody you shouldn't.

"Regardless of why this verse was written, we have to ask, is it still relevant for us today? Many Christians say no, citing the fact that it's part of the Mosaic law that Jesus came to fulfill. [See Lesson 7 below, at pp. 227-47, where the applicability of Mosaic law to Christians is discussed in considerable detail]. Additionally, we no longer pay much attention to the laws in the verses before 22:5 ... or the verses after it Even if we look at other instances of the use of the word for 'abomination' in Deuteronomy, we find rules that hardly seem relevant for us [See Lesson 3 below, at pp. 85-97].

"Let's say we're going to take Deuteronomy 22:5 at face value and hold to it strictly. We have to ask ourselves if that's possible in an era of global Christianity, where different cultures with contrasting ideas about dress and gender gather together to become the church. Will we demand that all Christian women from Seoul to Sao Paulo wear sun dresses, or that all Christian men from Mogadishu to Memphis wear a kanzu (the white robe worn by men from eastern Africa)? Will we make space for diversity, or will we try to homogenize everyone into accepting our personal cultural expectation?" [Emphasis added].

Hartke then turns to the similar but broader issue of "biblical gender roles," which is related to the previously-discussed doctrine of "gender complementarity": **Hartke**, pp. 62-63: "...The doctrine that supports biblical gender roles in many evangelical circles today comes from the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), a group formed in 1987 'to set forth the teachings of the Bible about the complementary differences between men and women.' According to the CBMW's founding document, biblical manhood looks like 'loving, humble headship,' and biblical womanhood looks like 'intelligent, willing submission.' *In short, complementarity and biblical gender roles insist that men are created to lead and women are created to follow, and that these two genders are fundamentally different, but must be paired.*

“The Christians who subscribe to these views cite several biblical passages in support of their argument, one of which can be found in Genesis 2. Here we read another version of the creation story, in which Adam and Eve are created at different times. In Genesis 1, God creates the first two humans simultaneously, but in Genesis 2:7 we read ... [that God created the man (Adam) first]. It’s much later in the narrative, when God has already created the garden of Eden, that another human comes on the scene. In Genesis 2:18 God says, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’ God brings every created animal to Adam, hoping to find the right mate, but unfortunately Adam is not keen on any of them. Finally, God puts Adam to sleep and takes a piece of his side—usually translated as ‘rib’—which God makes into Eve. Adam sees Eve for the first time and says, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken’ (Gen. 2:23).

“When complementarians look at this text, they note that Adam was created first and that Eve is described as a ‘partner’ (‘helper’ in some translations)—all evidence that women were created to follow....

“Then there’s that word ‘helper.’ Does it really mean that Eve was created as a sort of godly secretary? Rachel Held Evans argues no, and that when you look at the Hebrew words ezer kenegdo used to describe Eve, you actually get a much more powerful sense of her purpose. Ezer, ‘helper,’ is used in reference to three people or types of people in the Old Testament: twice to refer to Eve, three times to refer to nations that help Israel militarily, and sixteen times to refer to God as the helper of the Hebrew people. The other part of the phrase, kenegdo, essentially means ‘of the same type’; so, when Adam first sees Eve, his song that affirms her as ‘flesh of my flesh’ is spot-on—they share a special connection as the only two of their kind,” citing Rachel Held Evans, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood: How a Liberated Woman Found Herself Sitting on Her Roof, Covering Her Head, and Calling Her Husband ‘Master’* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012) [Emphasis added].

Hartke also disputes the complementarian view of marriage as the reuniting of two incomplete and complementary entities (the male and the female) to create a new entity that is both complete and whole:

Hartke, pp. 63-64: “Additionally, some non-LGBTQ+-affirming theologians believe that this splitting of one human into two [Gen. 2:21-22] shows us that men and women are created heterosexual and cisgender, and have a biological and theological imperative to come back together again, sexually and in marriage. *Theologian James Brownson* takes them to task when he *points out that ‘the Genesis text portrays marriage as a solution, not for ‘incompleteness,’ but for aloneness.’* It’s not Adam’s sex or gender, or lack of those characteristics that causes a problem—it’s the fact that he craves relationship and community. *Additionally, rather than suggesting that Adam and Eve or men and women are created to be different from each other, Brownson points to Adam’s recognition of their sameness.* He confirms that *‘the primary movement in the text is not from unity to differentiation, but from the isolation of an individual to the deep blessing of shared kinship and community,’* citing James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church’s Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013) [Emphasis added]. [See also Lesson 4 below at pp. 148-54: responses to argument, based on Gen. ch. 2, that Marriage = 1 man + 1 woman because God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve].

Chapter 7: God Breaks the Rules to Get You In

Isaiah 56:1-8 is quoted above in Lesson 1 at pages 34-35. The key verses in this passage, from the perspective of LGBTQ+ people, are verses 3-5, which read:

[3] Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, ‘The Lord will surely separate me from his people; and do not let the eunuch say, ‘I am just a dry tree.’ [4] For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast to my covenant, [5] I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give to them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

In Chapter 7 of his book, Austen Hartke discusses the impact that this scriptural passage has had on his own spiritual journey:

Hartke, pp. 87-90, 94-99: “In mid-November 2013 I stumbled across a piece of Scripture that changed my life. I was twenty-five years old at the time, starting my second year of work for a master’s degree in biblical studies, and just beginning the process of coming out as transgender. On the one hand, I felt a sense of relief at finally facing something I’d been running from for so long. On the other, now that I had internally admitted this truth about myself, I felt as if I was harboring a dangerous secret. The happiness I felt at making some sense of my own inner workings was quickly overshadowed by the potential for crisis that hovered over every conversation with my parents.

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“I knew that, if I told them I was trans, ... [w]e would be asked to explain how my trans identity fit into our faith, and that was something I didn’t have an answer for yet....

“... I still had this tickle in the back of my mind—an echo of conservative theology I’d internalized growing up—which whispered that it was fine if my gender was a little bit unconventional, as long as I didn’t attempt to do anything about it....

“As a student of biblical texts, I had found only one verse that had anything to say about changing one’s body in relation to one’s physical sex characteristics. Deuteronomy 23:1 commands, ‘No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD.’ I had to wonder whether this verse was meant as a prohibition against any kind of bodily modification of sex characteristics, or whether it was meant to be read plainly—as a constraint placed solely on people with those particular reproductive organs. [NOTE: As a person who was born female, a literal reading of the verse would not have been applicable to me]....

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[In the midst of grappling with these issues, over Thanksgiving break that

same year, Hartke randomly opened his large study Bible, “let[ting] it fall open on its own.... Right smack in the middle of the page on the right-hand side, Isaiah 56:3-8 floated slowly off the page and into my heart: [quotation of passage, see above at pp. 34-35, omitted].

“I was floored. I could swear I had never heard these verses before in my life, despite having read through the book of Isaiah for a class only the year before. *I felt an immediate connection to the eunuch and the foreigner. Their fear of separation, fear of being forgotten, fear of being kept out of God’s family—all based on identities as unchosen as the place of their birth and as intrinsic as the shape of their body. Their fears were my fears too. Yet here was God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, quieting those fears and promising an unequivocal welcome.*

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“It was hard for me to explain initially why I felt such an immediate connection to the eunuch in Isaiah’s passage. In terms of cultural experience, our lives could not have been more different. I had no idea what it felt like to be taken away from your family and your home; to be forced into slavery; then to have your body modified against your will. *But there were elements of the story of the eunuch’s return to Israel that I did recognize: becoming unwelcome in your community of faith, for example.*

“In fact, eunuchs in the ancient world found themselves in many of the same kinds of in-between spaces that transgender people often experience today. Historically, eunuchs were keepers of the king’s harem, charged with looking after the many wives that any given king might have banded together. They were trusted with this duty specifically because there was no chance that a eunuch would impregnate anyone and cause trouble with the legitimacy of the royal line.... Eunuchs also acted as court advisers and were allowed into spaces specifically reserved for men, though they weren’t considered men themselves. They lived in limbo between genders, caught somewhere on the social ladder a few rungs below men and a couple of steps above women.

“In the Babylonian and Persian Empires this liminal gender state was not considered a problem, but back home among the Israelites, anything that couldn’t be categorized was suspect. Strict boundaries were the backbone of Israelite law—encoded in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy—and prohibitions were placed on things like clothing made of mixed fibers and fields planted with two kinds of crops. Eunuchs did not have a place in Israelite society. They were neither fish nor fowl.

“In Leviticus 21:16-21, Moses is told that descendents of Aaron—those of the priestly family—must not have physical blemish and must not have crushed testicles, if they are to be admitted to serve in the temple. This strikes all eunuchs from the list of possible clergy. Then in Deuteronomy 23:1 we see the eunuchs forbidden from ‘the assembly of the LORD’ as well, which may have been interpreted as expulsion from places of worship, or may have been a broad stroke that ousted them from Israelite society in general. Whatever the case, eunuchs returning from exile would have found themselves in the midst of institutions that attempted to legislate them out of existence.

“For transgender folks in Christian communities today, this description may be all too familiar. We still find ourselves standing on the steps of many churches wondering if we’ll be allowed in. We’re still denied ordination in the majority of Christian denominations, alongside our lesbian, gay, and bisexual siblings.

“The other major connection between the eunuchs of ancient times and transgender people living today is the complexity of our reproductive relationships. Though being transgender doesn’t make biological children impossible, the process becomes far more complicated. Trans folks who choose to have genital gender-confirmation surgery may have reproductive organs removed, and at that point—unless sperm or eggs have been preserved—we do find ourselves squarely in the eunuch’s shoes.

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“The ability to produce offspring was such an intrinsic part of Israelite identity that it seemed nonnegotiable. When eunuchs experienced the physical

cutting off that changed their identity, they also experienced a cutting off from the future and from their culture. Still, throughout the Bible, many women who were thought to be barren were blessed with family and subsequently brought in from the margins of their society. Could something similar be done for the eunuch?

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“God remedied this situation by presenting the eunuch with a gift that embraced their identity as a eunuch while also providing them with a key back into Israelite society. In direct opposition to the physical and social cutting off that the eunuch had experienced, God bestowed a name that could never be cut off, a name that ... would ‘function in the same way as children. For the eunuch, a life without offspring is a life without blessing, [which was] the same issue for Abraham in Genesis 15:2.’

“Suddenly, as I thought about the word ‘blessing,’ and the story of Abraham and Sarah, something clicked for me.... *What God was giving the eunuchs, through Isaiah’s proclamation, was not just a place in society, and not just hope for a future. By giving the eunuchs the same kinds of gifts given to Abraham and Sarah—a name, legacy, family, acceptance, and blessing—God was consciously associating the two stories in the minds of the people. God was giving the eunuchs a story to connect to—a story that set a precedent, grounded in divine grace.*

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“It is that combination of affirmation and shared narrative that can give transgender Christians the courage to carve out a space for themselves in a global church that often ignores or actively persecutes them. *To know that you belong to a God who gathers the outcasts and who commands doors to open before those sitting outside the gates: this is the kind of love that leads to liberation. God did not ask the eunuchs to pour themselves into the mold of Israel’s previous societal norms, nor to bend themselves to fit by taking on specifically gendered roles in the current system. Instead, God called for a transformed community that looked like*

nothing the people had ever seen” [Emphasis added].

Chapter 10: Even Jesus Had a Body

In Chapter 10, Hartke asserts that “[m]any trans Christians find themselves asking questions about the connection between their body and their faith.”

Hartke, p. 130. He suggests that these questions may arise at least in part as a result of Paul’s letters to the Romans, to the Galatians, and to the Ephesians, three letters in which Paul creates a dichotomy between “flesh” and “spirit.” “[B]y using ‘flesh’ as a catchall for bad things and ‘spirit’ as a category for good, he sets us up to think that our physical bodies are intrinsically sinful and bad.” *Ibid.*

[Compare Lesson 4 below, at pp. 137-40 (influence of Stoicism on early Christian theology -- the conflict between the mind and reason, on the one hand, and the body and irrational passions on the other)]. In response, Hartke points to the many scriptural passages that portray the body in a more positive light, beginning with First Corinthians chapter 12, where Paul analogizes the Church to a human body:

Hartke, pp. 135-36: “This text is absolutely essential to understanding why the church is called to affirm transgender Christians. Here we are told that no member of the body is dispensable, no member can deem any other person unnecessary, and just because someone does decide to say someone else is dispensable or unnecessary does not make it true. Through his baptism Asher [O’Callaghan, a transgender man,] is just as much a part of the body of Christ as any other Christian in the world, and his gifts and needs and suffering and joy affect all other members.

“Biblical scholar Christina M. Fetherolf believes that Paul intentionally chose to use this metaphor in his letter to the Corinthian Christians because they had such a negative view of physical bodies. She writes, ‘At least some of the assembly believe that the physical body is irrelevant, a notion which Paul negates when he weds the physical and material to the divine and spiritual through his use of these bodily metaphors. It is the collective, physical community, not any building, which houses the Spirit of God.’

“Of course, the most undeniable confirmation of the importance of bodies comes in the form of a baby born in a manger in Bethlehem. As Asher puts it, ‘God coming as a child and then growing up and going through puberty, and having a human life with a human body—I think that declares once and for all unequivocally, undoubtedly, that flesh is hallowed. That our bodies are holy.’

“Theologian James B. Nelson echoed this in a joyful way when he said about the opening to the Gospel of John:

‘We claim an incarnational tradition. ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’ And when the Word came to dwell with us, it became—what? A book? A creed? A theological system? A code of morality? No! **To the everlasting embarrassment of all dualistic piety, it became flesh....** *The opening words of the Fourth Gospel were undoubtedly shocking to its first readers, steeped as they were in the belief that the world was impure and that ‘flesh’ was the cause of that impurity. Now they are told that God was living and loving in the fleshly and fully human life of a carpenter, turned itinerant rabbi. It was a jarring claim’* [Bold and italicized emphasis added].

“So if Jesus himself had a body, and it was through life and death in that body that the whole world was redeemed, why do we subscribe to the idea that bodies are awful things we must overcome, or that they’re a secondary and disposable thing separate from our true identity?” [Emphasis added].

Hartke then turned to a question of particular concern to transgender people and a scriptural passage that arguably applies to that question:

Hartke, pp. 140-41: *“Once transgender Christians have gotten to the point where they understand their bodies to be both whole and holy, the next question is often, ‘Is it all right to change my body?’* Answers to this question usually dovetail into conversations about whether God made a mistake during someone’s creation and conception. *Some Christians will cite Psalm 139 as proof that God foreordained certain things about a person, and so those particular characteristics shouldn’t be changed.* But is that an accurate reading of this passage?

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
 you knit me together in my mother's womb.
 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
 Wonderful are your works;
 that I know very well.
 My frame was not hidden from you,
 when I was being made in secret,
 intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
 Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
 In your book were written
 all the days that were formed for me,
 when none of them as yet existed.
 How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
 How vast is the sum of them!
 I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
 I come to the end—I am still with you.

(Psalm 139:13-18)

“When I asked Asher about his thoughts on this psalm, he was quick to point out that these verses don’t refer only to God’s creation of our bodies, that the reference to our ‘inward parts’ or ‘inmost parts’ encompasses us as whole beings. ‘I think God knit together my body and my identity,’ Asher explained. ‘I think God gave me this body and this identity, and that’s exactly what God intended from the start.’

“Even though we’re made in a certain way before we’re born, we don’t stay exactly as we were originally made. ‘I think that God knit us together in our mother’s wombs, but I also think that God is active in our lives, knitting us together in every moment,’ Asher said. ‘God’s been knitting me together every day since. I don’t think that as soon as we were born God was like, OK, all done! I think that creation continues.’

“Asher and I notice the wonder the psalmist feels toward the end of the

passage when he tries to comprehend God's infinite thoughts, the incredible variety and wide expanse of God's creative abilities. It's too much for the psalmist to take in, and surely too much for human beings to understand. So *why is it that we seem determined to put limits on what God can and can't do, and when that work is finished?*" [Emphasis added].

PART THREE – THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST LGBTQ+ INCLUSION

LESSON 3 Responses to the Biblical Arguments

Against LGBTQ+ Inclusion (Arguments A & B)

BIBLE PASSAGES: Lev. 18:22 (NRSV): "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination."; Lev. 20:13 (NRSV): "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them."; Gen. 18:1-19:29 (the story of Sodom and Gomorrah); Judg. ch. 19 (a parallel story to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah); Ezek. 16:44-50; Isa. 1:10-17; Lk. 10:1-12; Mt. 10:5-15 (four biblical passages referring to the "sin" of Sodom); Rom. 1:26-27 (NRSV): "For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error."; 1 Cor. 6:9-10 (ten categories of wrongdoers listed who "will not inherit the kingdom of God," including *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*); 1 Tim. 1:8-11 ("the law is laid down not for the innocent but for" 14 categories of wrongdoers, including *arsenokoitai*); Gen. 1:1-2:24 (the creation accounts).

Introduction to the "Clobbering Passages"

Those Christians who argue against the full inclusion and participation of LGBTQ+ people within the Church base their arguments on a few stories from the Hebrew Scriptures and a mere handful of other passages scattered throughout the Bible:

West, p. 1: “Only a small number of passages in the entire Bible reference same-sex sexual activity (six out of sixty-six books of the entire Bible). Obviously this topic was not of great concern to the biblical writers. Yet these verses have been used to justify hatred, condemnation and exclusion of God’s lesbian and gay children.”

The seven “clobbering passages,” which are contained in six books of the Bible, are: Genesis chs. 18 & 19 (the story of Sodom and Gomorrah); Leviticus 18:22; Leviticus 20:13; Judges ch. 19; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; and 1 Timothy 1:8-11. See above. In addition, Genesis chs. 1 & 2 (the Bible’s two creation accounts) are cited as authority for the proposition that homosexuality is “unnatural,” even though neither account contains any reference to same-gender sexual activity. Of the seven passages that do refer to same-gender sexual activity, only Romans 1:26-27 refers to sexual activity between women as well as sexual activity between men. Finally, there is an additional “clobbering passage” that is used to justify exclusion of or discrimination against transgender people. Deuteronomy 22:5 states that “[a] woman shall not wear a man’s apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the Lord your God.” See above, Lesson 2 at pp. 65-67.

Commentators who are supportive of the LGBTQ+ community have found numerous flaws in the case against LGBTQ+ inclusion. Responses to the most frequently cited anti-LGBTQ+ arguments follow:

A. Leviticus and the Holiness Code

The History of the Holiness Code

As stated above, at Lesson 1, p. 5, the New Oxford Annotated Bible asserts that the book of Leviticus, which includes the Holiness Code, was written by several different authors or groups of authors during the “exilic period,” that is, sometime between 586 and 538 BCE, or roughly 900 years after the death of its purported author, Moses. This assertion is consistent with the views of most modern biblical scholars, who conclude that the writing of the Torah or the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) took place in four stages and that the

book of Leviticus was not added until the fourth or final stage. In chapter 29 of his book The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible's Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love, the Episcopalian Bishop John Shelby Spong gives a detailed history of this process, which can be summarized as follows:

Stage 1—the Yahwist Document (ca. 950 BCE). So-named because God is referred to throughout as Yahweh, the most likely pronunciation of the Hebrew letters JHWH or YHVH, this is the oldest continuous narrative that can be identified in the Bible. It included the second of Genesis' two creation accounts [Note: the first account, in chapter 1 of Genesis, wasn't added until Stage 4], and the stories of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the tower of Babel, and God's covenants with the patriarchs and later the kings. It focused on three predominant institutions, each of which is associated with the Southern Kingdom, Judah: the monarchy, the city of Jerusalem, and the temple in Jerusalem. **Spong II**, p. 258.

Stage 2—the Elohist Document (ca. 850 BCE). So-named because God is referred to throughout as Elohim, this is the second oldest continuous narrative that can be identified in the Bible. It gave an alternative version of the Jewish people's history, a version written more from the perspective of the Northern Kingdom, Israel. For example, it emphasized the role of Joseph, whose descendants (through his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh) were to be the dominant powers in the Northern Kingdom.... The merger of these two epic accounts (the "dominant" Yahwist document and the "recessive" Elohist document) occurred at about the time that the eighth century turned into the seventh century BCE.

Spong II, p. 259.

Stage 3—the Deuteronomistic Writer (ca. 625 BCE). In the latter years of the seventh century BCE, a massive revision of the Jewish epic was undertaken. The history leading up to this revision is related in 2 Kings chs. 22 & 23. In the reign of King Josiah of Judah, the king's religious zeal led him to undertake renovations on the temple. During those renovations a book of the law, purported to have been written by Moses himself, was discovered in the temple by the high priest and

brought to the attention of the king. Scholars believe that that book was “substantially the book of Deuteronomy.” Following its discovery, Josiah initiated the “greatest transformation in the way people worshipped in Judah in all of that nation’s history” (2 Kings 23:15-27). Under “the purging zeal of the Deuteronomists, as this reforming group came to be called,” the book of Deuteronomy was added to the Yahwist/Elohist Document and the entire text was edited in the light of the Deuteronomists’ values. **Spong II**, p. 261.

Stage 4—the Priestly Writers (ca. 580-520 BCE). This final revision of the Pentateuch occurred as a result of what, up until that time, was the most “traumatic” incident in the history of the Jewish people, the Babylonian exile. Among the people carried into exile was a priest-prophet named Ezekial, who along with his priestly cohorts would “radically rewrite the sacred epic of the Jewish people in the light of the needs of their particular time.... When they finished this work the Jews finally had what we today call the Torah.” **Spong II**, p. 263. In this process, the document was “massively edited and expanded by the priestly addition, almost doubling the size of their sacred story.” *Id.* Bishop Spong described these revisions, as follows:

Spong II, pp. 263-65: “The one thing the Jews had and to which they clung with a tenacious ferocity was their sacred story, their defining epic.... Their new circumstances were of such painful significance that it was felt with an overwhelming intensity that their defining epic had to be revised anew.... *The survival of the Jews’ identity as a people was the first priority of these priestly writers. In order to survive as a separate people, these Jewish leaders believed, the Jewish people had to be distinct and different. Three traditions were therefore either inaugurated or revived to create this distinctiveness. All three are still today major identifying aspects of what it means to be Jewish.*

“The first was the observance of the Sabbath....

“*The second tradition inaugurated in the Exile was the collection of the ritualistic laws that bound the Jews into proper worship.* These laws are spelled out in detail by the priestly writers in the latter part of the book of Exodus and in

the entirety of the book of Leviticus, which were both the products of the Exile. *The holiness code of the book of Leviticus, which includes the prohibitions ... about sexuality, were designed to make the Jews morally different from their pagan captors. Here are located the prohibitions against touching menstruating women and engaging in same-sex unions, as well as hundreds of other prohibitions. Needless to say, the Jews knew little about either menstruation or homosexuality, but they treated both as somehow unclean. It was their way of maintaining a separate kind of ethical puritanism.* The kosher dietary laws are part of these religious regulations in the book of Leviticus. Their purpose[:] to prohibit the Jews from eating with anyone who was not Jewish.... If one does not eat with another outside his or her clan, one can hardly develop a relationship that might grow into a friendship or a marriage. That was, of course, the point. *The Jews were to remain isolated from all other people. Otherwise there could be no survival.*

“The third tradition that was revived and made mandatory for Jewish males was the rite of circumcision....” [Emphasis added].

The Prohibition of Male Same-Gender Sexual Relations

As stated and quoted above, at p. 77, the Holiness Code’s two prohibitions on male same-gender sexual relations are found at Lev. 18:22 and Lev. 20:13. Scholars who dispute the use of these passages to condemn modern-day homosexuality present a whole range of opinions about how these passages should be viewed. *The one thing they agree on is that the prohibitions should **not** be applied to homosexuality as it is known and understood today.* Three principal arguments are presented in support of this conclusion:

First, the Holiness Code prohibitions were developed in a historical and cultural context that has little relevance to the world of today, and were developed for the purpose of dealing with a particular threat to the Hebrew religion that no longer exists

Day, pp. 72, 87-88, 73-75: “When the Hebrews settled in Canaan, they were faced with an enormous cultural challenge. They were a nomadic people who had been living in tents in the wilderness. Theirs was a life of tending herds and traveling

through the wilderness in an encapsulized Hebrew society. There were no outside influences on their children. Now they began to assimilate the sophisticated Canaanite culture. This society was based on agriculture and had established cities and customs which changed the people of the tents. In comparison to the Canaanite culture, the Israelite culture was crude. The young people of Israel began to be absorbed by Canaanite society. There was a threat that the Israelite culture might disappear. *The priests of Israel became concerned with the need to guard their traditions against heathen intrusion. In response to that challenge was the composition of the Levitical laws.*

“One great concern was the sexual practices of the Canaanites. They were deeply interwoven with idol worship. Sex was elevated to the realm of the divine. The Baal worshippers believed that divine powers were disclosed through fertility. Their gods were sexual and were worshipped in sexual rites.

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“[T]he Hebrew’s neighbors in the land of Canaan recognized various types of homosexual prostitutes, including sacred male prostitutes in their places of worship, and ... this practice even carried over into the Hebrew temple.

“The Hebrew religious practices for a time actually involved sacred prostitution with male prostitutes active in the temple....

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“The three passages listed here [1 Kings 14:24, 1 Kings 15:12, and 2 Kings 23:7] give good scriptural documentation for at least 300 years of the presence of male sacred prostitutes in the Hebrew Kingdom of Judah.

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“... [A] number of Biblical scholars believe that the Holiness Code was recorded during the Babylonian exile. *It is believed that while the Jews were being held captive in Babylon the Hebrew priests developed the Holiness Code to purify and protect the culture and the religion. The present form of Leviticus could not*

have been recorded before the exile because there is a clear reference to [the exile] in Leviticus 26:43-44. It was during the Babylonian exile that many of the most learned and talented Hebrews were taken into captivity. There was a great deal of pressure on them to accept Babylonian worship.... [citing the stories in the book of Daniel of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego being thrown into the fiery furnace and Daniel being thrown into the lion's den, two instances of Jewish heroes who refused to embrace 'the heathen religion' even under the threat of death].

"It should be no surprise that the Hebrews would associate male-to-male prostitution with Babylonian culture. Babylon approved of large-scale homosexual prostitution.

"You will find that the Levitical reference to homosexual practices in Leviticus 18:22 is prefaced at the beginning of the chapter by a prohibition against idol worship which makes clear the purpose of what followed:

After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances

(Leviticus 18:3 KJV).

"The obvious purpose of this is to separate Hebrews from foreign cults. Throughout the book of Leviticus there is a setting apart of the Israelites from idolatrous heathen. The male-male sexual activity that the Hebrews would have seen prominently displayed in Babylon would have been in the form of prostitution—cult prostitution honoring a Babylonian god" [Emphasis added]. See also **Miner & Connoley**, pp. 10-12: "Three different times we are specifically told that the rules set forth in chapters 18 and 20 [of Leviticus] are meant to prohibit the Israelites from doing what the Egyptians and Canaanites did.... It follows, therefore, if we can determine what type of homosexual behavior was common among the Canaanites and Egyptians, we will better understand what these verses were meant to prohibit.

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“This is what was going on in Canaan and Egypt at the time the Levitical rules were announced—homosexual temple prostitution. And as already noted, Leviticus 18 and 20 specifically say they were written to address pagan religious practices.... And both chapters include long lists of sexual practices common in the cultic rituals we mentioned above. *However, neither of them speaks to the question of whether two people of the same sex can live in loving relationship with the blessing of God.*

“In fact, historians tell us our model of loving, long-term homosexual relationships did not meaningfully exist in Canaanite culture. This was a tribal culture in which it would have been virtually impossible to form such relationships....

“It simply is not reasonable to believe that the author[s] of Leviticus intended to prohibit a form of homosexual relationships that did not exist at the time. When read in textual and historical context, the prohibitions of Leviticus 18 and 20 are clearly directed at homosexual temple prostitution, and that is how they should be applied” [Emphasis added].

In God vs. Gay?: The Religious Case for Equality, Jewish and interfaith biblical scholar Jay Michaelson argues for a narrow and literalistic interpretation of the two Levitical passages at issue, emphasizing in particular the meaning of several Hebrew terms used in the texts:

Michaelson, pp. 61-65: “The third important term in the verse is *mishkevei ishah*, which literally means ‘the lyings of women.’ This may seem obvious—don’t lie with a man as you lie with a woman—but its scope is not actually clear. The Hebrew words *tishkav* (‘lie’) and *mishkevei* (‘lyings’) are basically the vulgar words for sex. When the Bible refers to making love, it uses the word *yada*, as when Adam ‘knew’ Eve his wife; *tishkav* is having sex, not making love. Moreover, *biblical and Jewish law regard this ‘lying’ as requiring penetration by a penis. That’s what sex is for these sources, and without penetration there isn’t any sex. Mishkav zachar* (the lying of a man) means penetration; *mishkevei ishah* [the term used in the Levitical passages at issue] *means being penetrated.* Thus Rashi,

perhaps the most well-known of the Jewish biblical commentators, states that *there are two ways to 'lie' with a woman (vaginally and anally). Since only one of these 'lyings' is possible with a man, what is prohibited here is anal sex.*

"This is an important detail, and forms the basis for the current understanding of the verse in many religious Jewish communities. Anal sex is prohibited by the Torah, this view holds, but other forms of sex are not. Now, many sexual activities are prohibited for straight, married people too.... So, this opinion holds, just as we don't intrude on the private lives of straight people [to make sure they are not performing any prohibited acts], so we don't intrude on the private lives of gay people. We assume that married gay couples are observing the law—i.e., not having anal sex—and we don't inquire any further. (Contrary to stereotype, about a third of gay men do not regularly engage in anal sex).... Since other forms of male sexual activity are permitted, this allows us to bless same-sex unions while maintaining a strict interpretation of Leviticus 18:22. We only need to read the verse according to its plain meaning: that tishkav means anal sex—and only that.

"The last key word of the verse is, in my opinion, the most important: *toevah*. As I've lectured and taught across the country, I've been amazed at how everyone thinks they know the meaning of this obscure Hebrew word: Abomination, right? Isn't that what it says in the Bible?

"No. *Whatever toevah means, it definitely does not mean 'abomination.'* Colloquially, abominations are things that should not exist on the face of the Earth: three-eyed fish, oceans choked with oil, and maybe Cheez Whiz. The word 'abomination' is found in the King James translation of Leviticus 18:22, a translation which reads, 'Thou shall not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it [is] abomination.' Yet *this is a misleading rendition of the word toevah, which actually means something permitted to one group and forbidden to another.* Though there is (probably) no etymological relationship, *toevah means taboo.*

"The term toevah (and its plural, toevot) occurs 103 times in the Hebrew Bible, and almost always has the connotation of a non-Israelite cultic practice. The

primary toevah is avodah zara, foreign forms of worship (often called ‘idolatry’), and most other toevot flow from it. The Israelites are instructed not to commit toevot precisely because other nations do so. Deuteronomy 18:9-12 makes this quite clear....

“Toevah is used four times in Leviticus 18—once to refer to male anal sex, and then three times as an umbrella term. As in Deuteronomy, the signal feature of toevot is that the other nations of the Land of Israel do them: ‘You shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit these toevot ... because the people who were in the land before you did these toevot and made the land impure [tameh].’ (Lev. 18:26-27; see also Levit. 18:28). The term is repeated with reference to homosexual activity in Leviticus 20:13.

“Toevah is also culturally relative. For example, there are things that are toevah for Egyptians but perfectly acceptable for Israelites... [citing Gen. 43:32, Gen. 46:34, and Ex. 8:26].

“So, if (1) toevah is a culturally relative taboo related to boundary between Israelite and foreign, and (2) male anal sex is specifically called a toevah, unlike other prohibitions (e.g., incest), then: (3) male anal sex is a culturally relative taboo related to boundary between Israelite and foreign.

“This isn’t about abomination or nature, or even morality—this is about a ritual purity law that distinguishes Israelites from foreigners.

“Other books of the Bible bear this out.... [citing passages from the books of Kings and Chronicles, Ezra, Jeremiah, Malachi, Ezekial, and Deuteronomy]

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“The only major exception to this biblical trend, and it is a unique case, is the book of Proverbs, where toevah is used twenty-one times to refer to various ethical failings....

“Aside from Proverbs, though, toevah has nothing to do with ethics, and everything to do with cultic behavior, idolatry, and foreign ritual. However we may understand this type of transgression, it is certainly not ‘abomination’ in the

*modern sense.... [See also **Boswell** at p. 100 (“The Hebrew word ‘toevah’, here translated ‘abomination’, does not usually signify something intrinsically evil..., but something which is ritually unclean for Jews.... It is used throughout the Old Testament to designate those Jewish sins which involve ethnic contamination or idolatry....”)].*

“Finally, it is noteworthy how *toevah* is used in Leviticus 18:22. The chapter describes several sexual sins, then mentions Molech worship (a form of Canaanite idolatrous practice) [in the verse that immediately precedes Leviticus 18:22], then says specifically that male anal sex is *toevah* [in 18:22], then describes the whole list of sins as *toevot* that the Canaanites performed. Now, imagine if a similar structure were used today. Imagine if someone said to you, ‘Don’t Kill, Don’t Steal, and Don’t Eat the Cheese—It Is Spoiled.’ The first two instructions have no conditions; they are universal prohibitions. The third one, though, provides a reason for the ban, implying that when the cheese isn’t spoiled, the ban won’t apply. Likewise here. *Leviticus says very clearly: no incest, no idolatry, no male anal sex because it is toevah. It’s almost as if Leviticus is going out of its way to specify that male anal sex is prohibited because it is a Canaanite cultic practice.*

“Which it was. We learn from Deuteronomy 23:18 and 1 Kings 14:24 that the Canaanites had qedeshim, sacred prostitutes, both male and female, who would enact the role of a god or goddess in an ecstatic, sexual ritual. Campaigns against cultic prostitution were undertaken by King Solomon and King Josiah. Similar forms of cultic prostitution were found in Babylonia, as recorded by Herodotus, and elsewhere in the Ancient Near East. Especially since Leviticus 18:22 follows Leviticus 18:21 [which relates to worship of the Canaanite god Molech], it seems clear that what’s being forbidden here is what the Bible is always interested in forbidding: idolatry” [Italicized and bold emphasis added].

Michaelson’s conclusion, *id.* at p. 66: “Leviticus 18:22 is a prohibition on male anal sex in the context of idolatry. Nothing more.”

Second, the Holiness Code prohibitions were based on ancient views of sexual relationships that have largely been discredited by modern-day scholars

Robinson, pp. 71-76: “The context of these two passages is the holiness and purity codes recorded for the people of Israel—rules enumerated to define what was clean and unclean before God, as well as what set the Hebrew people apart from their heathen neighbors who worshipped gods other than the one true God. *These holiness and purity codes take as their premise the notion that there is a natural or normal state of things, and because it is ‘natural’ or ‘normal,’ it must be God’s will. And therefore any deviation is by definition deviant, not normal, unclean, and against God’s will.* Because women spend only a portion of a month menstruating, their ‘normal’ state is between menstrual cycles, and therefore they are ‘unclean’ during menstruation. Because eyesight is ‘normal,’ blindness is abnormal, and therefore unclean. Because ambulatory movement is ‘normal,’ lameness is abnormal and unclean—which is why lameness was an impediment to being a priest in ancient Israel.

“Similarly, it is ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ for men to desire women, and therefore men who have sexual relations with other men are not ‘normal’ and indeed are acting ‘against their nature.’ ... Because everyone was understood to be ‘heterosexual’ (presumably this word did not even exist at the time, since it only has meaning in contrast to ‘homosexual’), any same-gender activity was unclean and prohibited as acting against one’s own nature. Indeed, it would have been an ‘abomination’ to God and God’s natural order.

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“So in saying that sexual orientation was unknown to the ancient mind, we are trying to imagine a world before there was any understanding of the possibility that some human beings would naturally be erotically drawn to a person of the same gender, rather than the opposite gender....

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“One other guiding principle in these codes that I presume most modern-day Christians and Jews would not espouse is the bias against women. Women are generally regarded as problematic and less worthy and more unclean

than men. A man who had a discharge of semen was ritually unclean until sunset, but a woman who menstruated was unclean for a week. When a woman gave birth to a boy, she was unclean for a week, but when she gave birth to a girl, she was unclean for twice as long! *I would maintain that part of what made the sin of a man lying 'with a male as with a woman' so abominable was the scandal of the noble, privileged, favored male of the species giving up that privilege to take on the role of the less clean, less noble, certainly less privileged female.* Indeed, it is not extraneous to note that during wartime, a not uncommon practice in the ancient Middle East was for the soldiers of a victorious army to anally rape the captured male enemies. Nothing could symbolize the contempt for and domination over the defeated enemy like raping them—that is, to treat them like women. Those so treated would not soon forget their humiliation and shame. *One man using another man as he might use a woman would be not just an act of physical violence but an offense against his very being as a man.* Nothing could be worse. So in this context, these injunctions are not surprising.

“Finally, there is the context of the ‘science’ of conception at that time. Male sperm was thought to contain all things necessary for procreation. Women contributed nothing but a place for the nascent life to incubate. Therefore, the ‘spilling of seed’ (sperm) on the ground was a kind of abortion, the killing of life. This ‘scientific’ understanding led to other proscriptions in the Holiness Code. Male masturbation is condemned. And the so-called sin of Onan was also condemned. Onan was a heterosexual man who withdrew from intercourse with his wife before ejaculation, spilling his seed on the ground instead of depositing it in his wife’s womb. And God strikes him dead.

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“Oddly enough, we have relaxed these ‘rules’ against a man ‘spilling his seed’ through masturbation and birth control, yet we hold on to a man ‘shall not lie with a male as with a woman’ as if it were eternally binding on believers. Such an inconsistency simply does not make sense.

“Given these changes in our modern understandings and contexts, it is no longer appropriate for us to condemn men who have intimate sexual relationships with other men based on this proscription in the Levitical Holiness Code. Either all of these proscriptions must be eliminated as binding on us, or all of them must be adhered to. Biblical literalists cannot have it both ways, picking and choosing which proscriptions will still be enforced as eternally binding and which may be casually tossed aside or explained away” [Italicized emphasis added].

Loyal Opposition, “The Loyal Opposition and Scripture,” Victor Paul Furnish, pp. 36-37: “The time-bound, culture-conditioned character of what the biblical writers presuppose and say about sex is well illustrated by the two passages often cited as the best evidence that Scripture condemns homosexual practices [that is, Levit. 18:22 and 20:13].

“... The code in which they stand [that is, the Holiness Code] is actually a compilation of regulations from various places and times, and of various kinds. Some are ethical imperatives (e.g., ‘love your neighbor as yourself,’ Lev. 19:18), while others are rules concerning ritual purity. In the latter, moral purity is not an issue, but uncleanness and pollution in the literal, physical sense. Thus, a menstruating woman is declared to be temporarily unclean, and along with her any man with whom she may have had sex (Lev. 18:19; 20:18); and the emission of semen is said to render a man temporarily unclean, and along with him any woman with whom he may have had sex (Lev. 15:16-18). Similarly, because pollution was also thought to occur when classes of things are mixed (each being adulterated by the other), the Holiness Code forbids breeding an animal ‘with a different kind,’ sowing a field ‘with two kinds of seeds,’ and wearing any garment that is ‘made of two different materials’ (Lev. 19:19).

“It is against this cultural background that the prohibitions of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 must be understood. *They condemn sexual relationships between males because the passive partner is required—as the Hebrew literally says—to ‘lie the lyings of a woman,’ thereby defiling his maleness and rendering his partner unclean as well.* No moral considerations are involved in this rule; nothing is said

about what may be 'good' or 'just' or 'loving,' and even if one man has been raped by the other, the victim is regarded as no less unclean than his assailant. It should be clear that this Levitical rule can offer the church no help at all for thinking through the moral aspects of homosexuality, or for understanding how to be in ministry with and for homosexual people" [Italicized emphasis added].

Rogers, pp. 71-73: "...The Holiness Code's function was to achieve the 'holy purity' [the Israelites] sought. Its underlying theme was that they must be separate, different from the Egyptians from whom they had escaped and unmixed with the Canaanites into whose land they had now come. How were they to achieve holy purity?

"First, Israel's worship practices had to be different from those of the tribes or nations around them. To be like the Canaanites would make them impure, or 'defiled.'

"Second, they could not mix with any other kind of people or adopt alien customs if they were to remain pure. Practically, this meant no intermarriage with non-Israelites. However, the Israelites generalized this aspect of the code to mean no mixing of any kind.... [see preceding quotation, from Loyal Opposition].

"Third, male gender superiority had to be maintained. We find in Leviticus that actions undermining male gender superiority incur the death penalty. A child who cursed his parents could be put to death, for such an act threatened the social order in a patriarchal society. Adultery was similarly punishable by death, because it was an unlawful use of a woman, who was a man's property, and therefore jeopardized lines of ownership and inheritance. *Engaging in homosexual acts was punishable by death, because a man took a passive role and was penetrated, which was the role assigned to a woman.... By, in effect, mixing genders, he had crossed a cultural boundary, and that could not be tolerated.*

"It is against this background that Nissinen, Bird, and others interpret the statement, 'You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination' The Hebrew word 'toevah,' translated as 'abomination,' refers here to something that makes a person ritually unclean.... Ritual purity was considered necessary to

distinguish the Israelites from their pagan neighbors” [Emphasis added].

Third, the Holiness Code prohibitions are contained in a section of the ancient Hebrew law that is not considered binding on Christians

The UCC’s analysis of the Levitical prohibitions of male homosexuality pointed out that the Holiness Code includes laws that “represent the highest ethic codified in the ancient world,” such as Lev. 19:17-18: “You shall not hate your brother in your heart.... You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge... but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” These “ethical pearls are found scattered among laws about cloven-hoofed beasts and purifying baths” and many other rules that “strike us as being superstitious remnants of primitive religion.” Some of these rules, such as those imposing capital punishment for religious offenses such as cursing your father or mother [Lev. 20:9], adultery [Lev. 20:10], male homosexual acts [Lev. 20:13], being a medium or a wizard [Lev. 20:27] and blaspheming the name of the Lord [Lev. 24:16], seem positively barbaric to modern-day Christians. UCC concluded its analysis as follows:

UCC, pp. 75-76: “In case the point still escapes the person who would use the Holiness Code to enforce selectively the laws that condemn both sexual sinners and those who eat eagles, hawks, vultures, and ostriches (Leviticus 11:13-19), it is that no Christian ethicist today will defend the code *in toto* or interpret it literally. Even the staunchest defenders of Levitical morality ignore whole chapters of the law, thereby using some unadmitted and perhaps unconscious principle of selection. *Those who claim divine authority for certain laws and who call for current ecclesiastical enforcement are obliged, as a matter of simple honesty and fairness, to explicate the principles of divination being used. Why is this particular law binding while many others are not?* Mere inclusion in the Bible obviously fails as a rationale, since other inclusions are readily dismissed.” [Italicized emphasis added].

The biblical historian John Boswell similarly argues that the Holiness Code contains two types of prohibitions, those that prohibit acts that are “intrinsically evil” and those that prohibit acts that are merely “ritually unclean.” Focusing on

the characterization of male same-sex acts as ‘toevah,’ he argues that such acts fall into the second category. **Boswell**, pp. 100-102. See discussion of the term “toevah,” above at pp. 85-87.

For many Christian scholars, those rules of the Holiness Code that are designed to protect against “infringements of ritual purity or monotheistic worship,” including the prohibitions against male same-gender sexual relations, are simply viewed as being archaic, inapplicable to conditions that exist today, and not binding on modern-day Christians:

Rogers, pp. 71-73: “...The Holiness Code’s function was to achieve the ‘holy purity’ [the Israelites] sought. Its underlying theme was that they must be separate, different from the Egyptians from whom they had escaped and unmixed with the Canaanites into whose land they had now come.

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“[Jesus, however, rejected this ancient concept of purity]. Jesus was concerned with purity of heart. In Matthew 15 [which sets forth Jesus’ response to the criticism of his disciples for their failure to follow ritual hand-washing traditions] he said to a crowd, ‘Listen and understand; it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles’ (Matt. 15:10-11). Later he explained to his disciples: ‘What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile’ (Matt. 15:18-20). [See also Mk. 7:14-23 (same principle applied to eating ‘unclean’ foods)].

“When we see Jesus as the fulfillment of the law (Matt. 5:17), we understand that our challenge is not meticulously to maintain culturally conditioned laws, but rather, with Jesus, to love God and love our neighbor (Matt. 22:36-40). *When these texts are taken out of their historical and cultural context and applied to faithful, God-worshipping Christians who are homosexual,*

it does violence to them. They are being condemned for failing to conform to an ancient culturally conditioned code that is not applicable to them or their circumstances” [Emphasis added].

See also Vines, pp. 9-12: “... It’s surprising that so many people continue to believe that these verses in Leviticus somehow form the heart of the theological debate about homosexuality. *They are, in fact, of secondary significance* to the later passage by Paul in Romans 1. *And the reason for that isn’t that their meaning is unclear, but that their context within the Old Testament Law makes them inapplicable to Christians.* Much of the New Testament deals with the issue of the place of the Old Law in the emerging Christian church. As Gentiles were being included for the very first time into what was formerly an exclusively Jewish faith, there arose ferocious debates and divisions among the early Jewish Christians about whether Gentile converts should have to follow the Law, with its more than 600 rules. And in Acts 15, we read how this debate was resolved. In the year 49 AD, early church leaders gathered at what came to be called the Council of Jerusalem, and they decided that the Old Law would not be binding on Gentile believers. [See Lesson 1 above, at pp. 29-32]. The most culturally distinctive aspects of the Old Law were the Israelites’ complex dietary code for keeping kosher and the practice of male circumcision. [See quote from Spong II above at pp. 80-81]. But after the Council of Jerusalem’s ruling, even those central parts of Israelite identity and culture no longer applied to Christians. *Although it’s a common argument today, there is no reason to believe that these two verses from the Old Law in Leviticus [18:22 and 20:13] would somehow have remained applicable to Christians even when other, much more central parts of the Law, did not.*

“In Galatians 6, Paul goes so far as to say that, in Christ, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything. He speaks of the Old Law as a ‘yoke of slavery’ that he warns Christians not to be burdened by. In Colossians 2, Paul writes that, through Christ, God ‘forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to

us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.’ In the Gospels, Jesus describes himself as the fulfillment of the Law, and in Romans 10:4, Paul writes ‘Christ is the end of the law.’ Hebrews 8:13 states that the old covenant is now ‘obsolete,’ because Christ is the basis of the new covenant, freeing Christians from the system of the Old Law, most of which was specific to the ancient Israelites, to their community and their unique worship practices. *Christians have always regarded the book of Leviticus, in particular, as being inapplicable to them. So while it is true that Leviticus prohibits male same-sex relations, it also prohibits a vast array of other behaviors, activities, and foods that Christians have never regarded as being prohibited for them.* For example, ...the eating of pork, shrimp, and lobster..., planting two kinds of seed in the same field, wearing clothing woven of two types of material, and cutting the hair at the sides of one’s head. Christians have never regarded any of these things to be sinful behaviors, because Christ’s death on the cross liberated Christians from what Paul called the ‘yoke of slavery.’ We are not subject to the Old Law.

“But the Old Law does contain some rules that Christians have continued to observe—the Ten Commandments, for example. And so some argue that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13—the prohibitions of male same-sex relations—should be an exception to the rule, and that they should continue to have force for Christians today. There are three main arguments that are made for this position. The first is the verses’ immediate context: Leviticus 18 and 20 also prohibit adultery, incest, and bestiality, all of which continue to be regarded as sinful, and so homosexuality should be as well. But just 3 verses away from the prohibition of male same-sex relations, in 18:19, sexual relations during a woman’s menstrual period are also prohibited, and this too is called an ‘abomination’ But this is not regarded as sinful behavior by Christians; rather, it’s seen as a limited matter of ceremonial cleanliness for the ancient Israelites. And *all of the other categories of prohibitions in these chapters—on adultery, incest, and bestiality—are repeated multiple times throughout the rest of the Old Testament, both within the Law and outside of it: in Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Ezekial. But the*

prohibitions on male same-sex relations only appear in Leviticus, among many dozens of other prohibitions that Christians have never viewed as being applicable to them.

“Well, Leviticus calls it an abomination, and if it was an abomination then, then it certainly can’t be a good thing now. The term ‘abomination’ is applied to a very broad range of things in the Old Law—eating shellfish..., eating rabbit or pork..., sex during a woman’s menstrual period.... The term ‘abomination’ is primarily used in the Old Testament to distinguish practices that are common to foreign nations from those that are distinctly Israelite *The nature of the term ‘abomination’ in the Old Testament is intentionally culturally specific; it defines religious and cultural boundaries between Israel and other nations. But it’s not a statement about what is intrinsically good or bad, right or wrong, and that’s why numerous things that it’s applied to in the Old Testament have long been accepted parts of Christian life and practice.*

“Okay, but the penalty is death—certainly, that indicates that the behavior in question is particularly bad, and that we should still regard it as sinful. But this overlooks the severity of all of the other punishments in the Old Law.... A couple that has sex during the woman’s menstrual period is to be permanently exiled from the community. If a priest’s daughter falls into prostitution, she is to be burned at the stake. Anyone who uses the Lord’s name in vain is not only to be reprimanded but to be stoned. And anyone who disobeys their parents is to be stoned as well. *Even some things that we don’t see as moral issues at all received the death penalty in the Old Testament*—according to Exodus 35:2, working on the Sabbath was a capital offense. And in Ezekial 18, the death penalty is applied to anyone who charges interest on a loan, and this, too, is called an ‘abomination’.... Simply because something received the death penalty in the Old Law doesn’t mean that Christians should view it as sinful; there’s too much variance for that to be a consistent and effective approach. *The default Christian approach for two millennia now has been to view the particular hundreds of rules and prohibitions in the Old Law as having been fulfilled by Christ’s death, and*

there is no good reason why Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 should be exceptions to that rule” [Emphasis added].

B. The Story of Sodom and Gomorrah

The best-known and most-often-cited text relied upon by the opponents of LGBTQ+ inclusion is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, which is found in chapters 18 and 19 of Genesis. That story has been summarized as follows:

Miner & Connoley, pp. 2-3: “Abraham had a nephew named Lot who moved to Sodom. At the time, Sodom was considered a comfortable, modern, sophisticated city, and Lot thought it would be a better place to raise his family than out on the plains with Abraham, who was a nomad. Unfortunately, the city was also full of wickedness, and God told Abraham that it would soon be destroyed. Two angels were sent to assess the situation in Sodom, and when Lot saw them in the town square, he invited them to his house for dinner and lodging. He did not recognize they were angels. He seems, however, to have felt a responsibility to be hospitable to strangers – perhaps because he remembered having been a stranger himself.

“That night, when the city dwellers learned Lot had welcomed two strangers into his house and into their city, all the people gathered at his door. They demanded that Lot deliver the two men to them so they might ‘know them.’ (Genesis 19:5).... Lot pleaded with his neighbors not to do such an evil thing. In a despicable act, he even offered them his virgin daughters instead, but the men persisted. Finally, the angels struck all those outside with blindness and warned Lot and his family they should leave the city because God would soon destroy it for its wickedness. The very next day, fire came down from heaven and destroyed the city and all its inhabitants.”

The opponents of LGBTQ+ inclusion and participation in the Church and in the Synagogue argue that this is a story of God’s punishment of Sodom for the sin of homosexuality and that it shows God’s condemnation of homosexuals. Defenders of the LGBTQ+ community, however, reject this argument for several reasons, including the following:

The interpretation of this story as a condemnation of homosexuality is contradicted by the facts related in Genesis 19:

Miner & Connoley, pp. 3-5: “The text of the story tells us that ‘the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man’ (vs. 4), gathered at Lot’s door and demanded that his guests be brought out to them. This language is important because it makes clear that the group at Lot’s door was comprised of either all the people of the city (men and women) or, at a minimum, all the males of the city, both boys and men. This is a telling fact.

“Today, San Francisco has the reputation for being the ‘gayest’ city in the world. Yet even in San Francisco, gay men constitute far less than half the total male population. If the Scripture text had told us that ‘certain men of Sodom’ or even ‘many men of Sodom’ gathered at the door, we might then surmise that the men at the door could have been motivated by homosexual desire. But the text says ‘both young and old, all the people to the last man’ gathered at the door. *To suggest that every man and boy in Sodom was homosexual is simply not credible....*

“The point is reinforced by another fact recounted in the story. We are told that Lot, in a last-ditch effort to save his guests, offered his virgin daughters to the men at the door. Although Lot’s offer is reprehensible, it does yield another important interpretive clue. Suppose you were hosting a dinner party, when suddenly a group of men that you knew to be homosexual began angrily beating on the door, demanding that you send out a male guest from your house. Would it make any sense to offer them a beautiful woman instead? Of course not! *If the men were motivated by homosexual desire, offering them heterosexual sex instead would be nonsensical. Lot knew the men of Sodom much better than any of today’s fundamentalist preachers do. And it’s obvious he believed the crowd outside his door was predominantly heterosexual. Why else would he offer his daughters?*

“Although it might be simpler to blame what took place in Genesis 19 on homosexuals, the facts indicate that something far more encompassing and

complex was taking place. But what? If the motivation for the attack was not homosexual desire, then what was it?

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“From archaeological records, we know it was ... a common practice in the Near East during ancient times for soldiers to use homosexual rape as a way of humiliating their enemies. [See above at p. 89]. When victorious soldiers wanted to break the spirit of their defeated enemies, they would ‘treat them like women’ by raping them. The practice was not driven by sexual desire, but by brutality and hatred toward the enemy.

“The motivation to sexually abuse those we hate is, sadly, part of the general human experience (even if it is not part of each of our personal experiences). And it is this motivation, not homosexual desire, which stands behind the sin of Sodom. Perhaps the men of that city feared the two angelic strangers were spies. Perhaps the fact that Lot (a recent immigrant) had taken them in served to heighten their suspicion. Whatever caused their panic, a mob mentality took over, and before long the people of Sodom were at Lot’s house clamoring to brutalize the strangers. This is a story about attempted mob violence, not homosexual desire” [Emphasis added].

See also **Rogers**, p. 70: “The Old Testament stories most often cited as opposing homosexuality are (1) God’s judgment on the men of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:1-29 and (2) the parallel story of the rape of the Levite’s concubine in Judges 19:1-30. These texts take us into an ancient Near Eastern world whose values are very different than ours. The central idea in these passages is the sacred obligation of hospitality for travelers (and the ways in which sinful people often violated this sacred obligation). In a desert country, to remain outside at night, exposed to the elements, could mean death.

“In both stories, a host invites traveling men into his house. Later an angry mob of townspeople surround the house and demand that the host turn his guests over to them. Foreigners are clearly not welcome, and the implication is that they may be raped or killed. Daniel Helminiak, professor of psychology at the

State University of West Georgia, points out that in the ancient world homosexual rape was a traditional way for victors to accentuate the subjection of captive enemies and foes. In that culture, the most humiliating experience for a man was to be treated like a woman, and raping a man was the most violent such treatment....

“In each of the stories, the host attempts to placate the threatening gangs by offering women of his household for the mob to abuse instead of his male guests.... In that culture, the hosts felt that it was more important to protect male visitors in their house than to protect women, even their own daughters or common-law wife! The hosts do not seem to think of the attackers as primarily homosexual, or they would not offer women for them to abuse.”

Michaelson, pp. 68-69: “[I]f we were to read the story of Sodom with fresh eyes, it is obvious that homosexual rape is the means, not the ends, of Sodom’s wickedness....

“.... The male Sodomites’ interest in men is incidental: if they were raging homosexuals, Lot would not offer his daughters in return. *Homosexual rape is the way in which they violate hospitality—not the essence of their transgression.* Reading the story of Sodom as being about homosexuality is like reading the story of an ax murderer as being about an ax.

“This is even more clear in the ‘literary echo’ of the Sodom story in Judges 19. There, a Levite is traveling with his concubine, and staying at a house in Gibeah. As in the story of Sodom, the Levite is threatened by a Benjaminite mob that wants to ‘know him.’ His host offers his own daughter, the mob refuses, and finally the Levite hands over his concubine to the mob, who rapes and ‘abuse[s] her’ all night long (Judg. 19:25). This horrible story, which concludes with the Levite dismembering the concubine, is meant to tell of the degradation of Israel prior to the institution of the monarchy. But in mirroring the story of Sodom, it also tells us that *it is not the gender of the angels or the Levite that matters to the mob; it is the use of sexual violence to degrade and humiliate. The Benjaminites are neither ‘gay’ nor ‘straight,’ and neither are the Sodomites. Both are predators,*

humiliators, dehumanizers” [Emphasis added].

Reading Genesis 19 in context, that is, together with Genesis 18, makes clear that the story is about hospitality rather than sexuality:

Day, pp. 56-58: “It is important to the context of the Sodom story to note that the visit to Sodom by the two travelers [in Genesis 19] (an example of how not to treat strangers) is directly preceded [in Genesis 18] by a detailed example of how Hebrews were supposed to treat strangers.

“Abraham encountered God appearing as three men. His actions draw the model for hospitality.

“‘He ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth... ‘Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet and rest yourselves under a tree; I will bring a piece of bread, that you may refresh yourselves; after that you may go on since you have visited your servant.’ And they said, ‘So do as you have said.’ So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, ‘Quickly, prepare three measures of fine flour, knead it, and make bread cakes.’ Abraham also ran to the herd, and took a tender choice calf and gave it to the servant; he hurried to prepare it. And he took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed it before them; and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate.’ (Genesis 18:2, 4-8).

“Why would the Bible go into such detail on the way that Abraham had treated these strangers? Why a description down to the recipe of what they had to eat? It is all there because it is an example of how Hebrew hospitality was supposed to be extended. There is also the blessing for Abraham and Sarah after this meal when God tells them that Sarah will have a child. The story is constructed this way to contrast between the good outcome of Abraham’s treatment of strangers and the bad outcome of the treatment of strangers in Sodom.

“Just so the point is not missed, the distinction is made one more time in pointing out how strangers are and are not to be treated. When the two angels arrive in Sodom, Lot sees them sitting at the gate and goes to meet them. He

bows himself to the ground and invites them to his home to wash their feet and spend the night. It is all described as a rite of hospitality. They were reluctant, at first choosing to symbolically 'abide in the street all night.' Genesis 19:3 says that Lot 'pressed upon them greatly.' They went to his house and were given a feast" [Emphasis added].

And, of course, Lot also was rewarded by God for his hospitality. When the destruction of Sodom comes, Lot and his family are the only ones who are saved as they are led by the two angels out of the city to safety. *In sum, the destruction of Sodom is a story of God's punishment of a city with a long record of wickedness and inhospitality for a singular act of extreme inhospitality toward two strangers who were actually angels sent by God, a story that is preceded by two related stories of acts of generous hospitality (Abraham's and Lot's), both of which were rewarded by God.*

Other biblical writers did not interpret Genesis 19 as a condemnation of homosexuality. This interpretation came along much later in the history of the church.

Miner & Connoley, pp. 3 & 5-6: "*Since the Middle Ages, many Christian theologians have viewed this story as a blanket condemnation of homosexuality. They have perpetuated the idea that Sodom was destroyed for its sexual wickedness and that the proof of this wickedness was the desire of the men of Sodom to have homosexual sex....*

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".... There are about twenty references to the story of Sodom in the Bible, and none of them says homosexuality was the sin of Sodom. One of the most extensive references to Sodom is found in Ezekiel, which says, 'This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them when I saw it.' (Ezekial 16:49-50). It is clear from this passage (and others like it) that the abomination of

Sodom, according to the Old Testament prophets, was that they behaved with callous indifference toward the weak and vulnerable—the poor, orphans, widows, and strangers in their midst. [See Lesson 8 below, A Just God Requires God’s People to Provide Justice....].

“Why then do some Christians interpret this story as condemning all homosexual behavior? We would submit that their interpretation is driven by anti-gay prejudice.... In truth, this story is at most a condemnation of homosexual rape. And, as other Scriptures affirm, it is more generally a condemnation of the mistreatment of those who are most vulnerable, including strangers. It is ironic that the story of Sodom is now used by Christians to justify hatred toward another vulnerable group—gay people” [*Italicized emphasis added*].

See also **Rogers**, p. 71: “The best available scholarship shows that these texts have nothing to do with homosexuality as such. C.-L. Seow, professor of Old Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary, points out that the sin of Sodom is mentioned several times elsewhere in the Bible, *but never in connection with homosexual acts*. In Old Testament references to Sodom, the sins of the city are variously described as greed, injustice, inhospitality, excess wealth, indifference to the poor, and general wickedness. In the New Testament, when Jesus referred to the sin of Sodom, as recorded in Luke 10:12 and Matthew 10:15, he was passing judgment on cities that refused hospitality to his traveling disciples. *A focus on the supposed homosexual aspect of the Sodom story comes only later in nonbiblical literature, influenced by Greek philosophy, and also in the Muslim Qur’an*” [*Emphasis added*]; **Boswell**, pp. 92-93: “The idea that homosexual behavior is condemned in the Old Testament stems from several passages. Probably the best well known, certainly the most influential, is the account of Sodom in Genesis 19. Sodom in fact gave its name to homosexual relations in the Latin language, and throughout the Middle Ages the closest word to ‘homosexual’ in Latin or any vernacular language was ‘sodomita.’ *A purely homosexual interpretation of this story is, however, relatively recent*. None of the many Old Testament passages which refer to Sodom’s wickedness suggests any homosexual

offenses, and the rise of homosexual associations can be traced to social trends and literature of a much later period” [Emphasis added].

Miner & Connoley’s interpretation of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, as stated above, echoes the views of Miguel A. De La Torre in Reading the Bible from the Margins. De La Torre directly links the Genesis account to the biblical themes of justice and caring for the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized members of society. [See Lesson 8 below, A Just God Requires God’s People to Provide Justice....]:

De La Torre, pp. 97-98: “Several gay or lesbian Christians claim that Genesis 19 does not condemn homosexuality. While they acknowledge that in several places throughout the Scriptures Sodom is used as a symbol signifying evil, they insist that in none of these instances does the Bible specifically refer to homosexuality or link it to Sodom. What then was the sin of Sodom? *For Ezekial, Sodom’s sin was its unwillingness, due to its pride and haughtiness, to share its abundance with those who were poor and marginalized.* This haughtiness becomes the root cause of the abomination it does before God. For the prophet Isaiah, the acts that Israel was then committing [during Isaiah’s time] were the same acts that led to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Referring to Israel as Sodom and Gomorrah, the prophet Isaiah says,

Hear the word of Yahweh, O rulers of Sodom, listen to the law of our God, O people of Gomorrah! What use is it to me your many sacrifices? Your palms are full of blood. Wash yourselves, purify yourselves, remove the evil of your doings before my eyes. Cease doing evil. Learn to do good. *Seek justice, reprove the oppressor, judge for the orphan, contend for the widow.* (1:10-17)

“Again the crime of Sodom and Gomorrah is described as a lack of justice done in the name of the orphans and widows. In a patriarchal society, the most vulnerable members are those who are not under the care of a man, specifically the orphan who has lost her or his father and the widow who has lost her husband. Deprived of a male protector, they cease to hold any standing in a

male-centered society; this is why the Bible makes their care the responsibility of all the people. *Caring for the orphan and widow refers to the most marginalized members of the community. The downfall of Sodom, according to Isaiah, was its refusal to bring justice to the disenfranchised.*

“Sodom’s sin, according to several gay and lesbian scholars, was the lack of hospitality shown by the dominant culture to those who resided in the margins. In the biblical world, hospitality meant more than simply being neighborly. Hospitality went beyond the entertainment of friends and family; rather, it was a carefully orchestrated social practice to receive strangers and make them guests. Because strangers lacked legal standing when visiting a community, their survival at times depended on falling under the protection of an established community member who would serve as host. Sodom’s offense was its refusal to recognize these ancient traditions, which brought dishonor upon not only Lot’s guests but also Lot’s household. *The prophets reminded the people of these ancient traditions and warned the people that hospitality was to be extended to the marginalized. Dishonoring the orphan, the widow, the alien, in short those who were marginalized, became the mark of a godless nation*” [Emphasis added].

In Chapter 13 of God vs. Gay?, Michaelson sought to answer the following question: “If homosexuality was indeed of such marginal concern to biblical texts [see quotation from West, above at p. 78], then how did we get to where we are today, a world in which some people believe that an absolute ban on homosexuality must be part of the Ten Commandments?” He gave a brief account of the development of Christian theology on the subject of homosexuality, while referring the reader to the far more detailed history set forth by Father John J. McNeill in his landmark work, The Church and the Homosexual, which was published in 1976. The following are some of the key points made by Father McNeill, beginning with his analysis of how the Sodom story was reinterpreted over the years:

McNeill, pp. 68-69, 71-79: “As we have seen, the sin of Sodom was never interpreted in Old Testament times as being primarily sexual, to say nothing of

involving homosexual practices; rather it is portrayed as a sin of pride and inhospitality. The first references to the sin of Sodom which indicate explicitly that that sin was of a sexual nature occur in the Palestinian apocrypha of the second century before Christ. In the *Book of Jubilee* XVI.5-6 we read:

‘the Lord executed his judgment on Sodom, and Gomorrah and Zeboim, and all the region of the Jordan, and he burned them with fire and brimstone, and destroyed them until this day, even as (lo) I have declared unto thee all their works, that they were wicked and sinners exceedingly, and that they defiled themselves and committed fornication in their flesh and worked uncleanness on the earth....

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“The next step in this development can be traced to the ‘writing of Enoch,’ a lost work written in Hebrew.... In 2 *Enoch* XXXIV.2 among the lawless actions of the Gentiles is clearly indicated that of homosexual practices. Consequently by approximately 50 B.C. the interpreters of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* began to regard the sin of Sodom as *including* homosexual practices. The clear connection that the *Testament of Naphtali* V.1 establishes between the ‘wickedness of Sodom’ and the ‘wickedness of the Gentiles’ is significant. *This lends support to the possibility that the origin of the homosexual interpretation of the Sodom story can be explained by the Jewish reaction to a closer acquaintance with homosexual practices common in the Hellenistic world during the century preceding the Christian era.*

“Another passage from a later stratum of 2 *Enoch* explicitly identifies the sin of Sodom with the pederasty of the Hellenistic society.... However, *the first writings to identify the sin of Sodom with homosexual practices in general—the writings which probably had the most influence on early Western Christian tradition—were those of Philo [a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher who lived in Alexandria], dating from the middle of the first century A.D., and those of Josephus [a Romano-Jewish scholar and historian who was born in Jerusalem],*

from around the year A.D. 96....

“In his work De Abrahamo, Philo reads all the evils of first-century Alexandria back into the story of Sodom in Genesis. Most of the most prevalent myths and prejudices concerning homosexuality find expression here.... Philo probably did not invent these myths but, as Bailey points out, was only expressing in vivid language a conception of Sodom and its offense which had gradually established itself among Jews of the diaspora during the preceding two centuries of their contact with Hellenistic society.

“In his Antiquities Josephus also clearly identifies the sin of Sodom with homosexual practices, and in particular with pederasty:

[Quotation omitted]

This passage represents the first clear use of the word sodomy to describe homosexual practices. In still another passage from Josephus’ Antiquities we read: ‘Now when the Sodomites saw the young men [the angels] to be of beautiful countenance, and this to an extraordinary degree.... they resolved themselves to enjoy these beautiful boys by force and violence.’

“Although there are good grounds to believe that by the end of the first century A.D. the sin of Sodom had become widely identified, among the Jews of the diaspora, with homosexual practices, yet it is remarkable to note that rabbinical writings reflect scarcely anything of this development. The majority of the references to Sodom both in the Talmud and the Midrashim continue to stress the Old Testament themes of pride, arrogance, and inhospitality....

“When we turn to the Fathers of the Christian Church, there is no doubt whatever that they accepted without question that the sin of the Sodomites was their particular and inordinate addiction to homosexual practices, particularly pederasty, and it was for this reason that God punished them.... [citing quotes from Clement of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, and Augustine and an academic study of the attitude of the Church Fathers toward homosexuality].

“A survey of Western Christian tradition concerning homosexual practices would be incomplete without a consideration of the treatment of these practices

in Roman law, especially in the codifications of the Christian emperors Theodosius and Justinian, since those codifications exercised a very strong influence not only upon Western European systems of civil and criminal jurisprudence but also upon ecclesiastical law.

“The *Lex Scantania* was the original Roman law directed against pederasty, but little is known about it. The next legal measure was the emperor Philip’s law (A.D. 249) abolishing male prostitution. [Still later, t]he *Lex Julia de adulteris* (ca. 17 B.C.) was probably extended by an interpretive process to include sexual acts committed with boys, a crime meriting capital punishment. For we read that on 30 December 533 the following law was included among the *Institutes* compiled by Tribonian at the emperor Justinian’s request:

‘In criminal prosecution cases, public prosecutions take place under various statutes including the *Lex Julia de adulteris*,... which punishes with death (*gladio*) not only those who violate marriages of others, but those who commit acts of vile lust with [other] men.’ *Thus Roman law was extended to include homosexual acts of all kinds, including those between consenting adults, and the death penalty was assigned.*

“The first law under the Christian emperors was promulgated on 16 December 342 by Constantius and Constans....

“Fifty years later, on 6 August 390, another law was put forth by Valentinian II, Theodosius, and Arcadius:

‘All persons who have the shameful custom of condemning a man’s body, acting the part of a woman’s, to the sufferance of an alien sex (for they appear not to be different from women) shall expiate a crime of this kind in avenging flames.’

“This law is particularly notable because it prescribed the penalty of burning, which was the most common criminal punishment imposed upon sodomists in the Middle Ages and has persisted at least nominally in some countries until recent times.

“*Bailey was of the opinion that these early Roman laws were never rigidly*

enforced. For by the year 538 Justinian found it necessary to publish the first of his *Novellae* against homosexual acts:

[Quotation omitted]

“The chief motive behind this law is clearly stated. Justinian sees homosexual practices as endangering the state, for they are liable to provoke the vengeance of God in the form of earthquakes, famine, and pestilence. We see here the influence of the homosexual interpretation of the Sodom story....” [Emphasis added; further legal developments over the next 1550 years, culminating with the mass extermination of homosexuals under Hitler, omitted].

The historian John Boswell’s landmark work, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality, was published in 1981. In God vs. Gay?, Michaelson noted Boswell’s analysis of the Church’s changing views on homosexuality and also noted the views of some of Boswell’s critics. In essence, Michaelson weighed in on Boswell’s side, as follows:

Michaelson, p. 104: *“John Boswell controversially claimed that there was ‘no general prejudice against gay people among early Christians’ and that many early Christian figures were involved in relationships we today might label as homosexual. He notes that the Christian emperors taxed, rather than banned, male prostitutes, and that the eventual rules against homosexuality are of Roman, rather than Christian, origin.... Boswell’s work has come under attack, however.... What we can say is that, at the very least, the regulation of homosexuality was far less central a priority in the first millennium of Church history than in the second, and that, in Boswell’s words, ‘even where such authorities explicitly condemned homosexuality, they also categorically rejected the majority of human erotic experience’* [Emphasis added].

According to Michaelson, the turning point in the Church’s attitude toward homosexuality took place in two stages:

Michaelson, pp. 105-106: *“When male homosexuality did eventually become of specific interest to the Church, it was originally because too many priests were engaging in it. The term ‘sodomy’ originated not in the Bible but with*

eleventh-century theologian Peter Damian's attempts to eradicate clerical sin. Sodomy was not a sin of the people; it was misconduct on the part of priests who were meant to be celibate. Indeed, the evidence from the time is remarkable. At least one bishop whose same-sex love affair was well known was accepted within the highest ranks of the Church hierarchy, even as a variety of other sins were zealously prosecuted....

"The tide turned at the end of the twelfth century, probably due to campaigns against Islam (where same-sex eroticism was widespread) and heresy, as well as to a rise in conservatism generally. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw a significant increase in the severity of punishment for homosexual activity. According to Louis Crompton, *'During the 200 years from 1150 to 1350, homosexual behavior appears to have changed, in the eyes of the public, from the personal preference of a prosperous minority, satirized and celebrated in popular verse, to a dangerous, antisocial, and severely sinful aberration.'*

"St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) brought together this new understanding of sodomy with the concept of natural law, [that is,] moral principles discernible from reason. In the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas discusses six sexual offenses, which he categorizes as *luxuria*, a term that (as the modern 'luxury' suggests) previously meant anything from wearing soft clothing to taking hot baths. Five of these are abuses of otherwise acceptable acts of intercourse: fornication, adultery, incest, 'deflowering,' and rape. *The sixth is a category of acts that are 'against nature' (contra naturam) because they cannot bring about conception: masturbation, bestiality, 'unnatural' sexual positions, and same-sex relations. In these codes, homosexual behavior is no worse than masturbation—or, for that matter, lending money at interest, which was also called 'unnatural.'* Yet by the year 1300, homosexual activity was punishable by death" [Emphasis added].

Michaelson further noted that, "[w]ith only a few exceptions, the major Western religions remained hostile to homosexuality for the next seven hundred years." **Michaelson** at p. 106.

LESSON 4 Responses to the Biblical Arguments Against LGBTQ+

Inclusion: Arguments C & D

C. The Characterization of Homosexuality as ‘Unnatural’

BIBLE PASSAGES: Rom. 1:22-32 (particularly vv. 26-27); Wis. 13:1-10, 14:12-14 & 22-30; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:9-11; Acts 9:1-22, 11:25-26 & 22:3; Gal. 1:11-24; 1Cor. 11:13-15; Gen. 2:18-23

I. Introduction: Science vs. Scripture

In his landmark book The Church and the Homosexual, which was written in 1976, Father John J. McNeill wrote the following:

McNeill, p. 107: “A growing body of evidence derived from cultural anthropology, sociology, and psychology indicates that in the learning process whereby humans conform to the sexual-identity images of their culture, a certain percentage, approximately one out of ten, fail to acculturate themselves successfully according to the acceptable heterosexual pattern. *This appears to be a consistent and universal cultural phenomenon, the same in all cultures and in all periods of history.... [S]ince it seems to be a universal phenomenon that a certain percentage of humans do not necessarily conform to the accepted heterosexual pattern, no matter how heavily conformity to that pattern is sanctioned by society and the Church, I see no reason to assume a priori that the human who emerges from that unconscious learning process as a homosexual is somehow alienated from God’s plan or in conflict with nature’s design.* On the contrary, it would seem more reasonable to assume that the homosexual is part of the divine plan and has an intrinsic role to play in human society....” [Emphasis added].

Approximately thirty-five years later, the biblical scholar Jay Michaelson expressed similar views in God vs. Gay? The Religious Case for Equality. In chapter 4 of his book, he argued that “sexual diversity is natural and part of God’s creation.” In so arguing, he relied primarily on scientific evidence establishing the existence of homosexuality in humans throughout the world and throughout the ages, as well as in many species of animals:

Michaelson, pp. 30-33: “Homosexuality is natural. The sentence is simple, honest, and supported by science—and yet, to many religious people it may seem surprising, even blasphemous, at first. Yet sexual diversity is part of the fabric of nature, and if we believe that fabric to have been woven by God, then it is part of the mind of God as well. Same-sex behaviors are found in over one hundred species, from apes to elephants, guppies, to macaques. Put in stark religious terms, sexual diversity is part of God’s plan.

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“Let us begin with human beings. There exists a spectrum of human sexuality—the Kinsey scale is the most famous model—and men and women experience it differently. Most men experience their sexuality as relatively fixed and relatively binary, whereas women tend to experience sexuality as more fluid, and less cut and dried into categories of gay and straight. In studies conducted in the United States in the early 1990s, about 3.1 percent of men and 0.9 percent of women reported solely or mostly homosexual attraction, though presumably these rates are low since some people are reluctant to admit being gay. More women than men report bisexuality.

“In the last two decades, considerable evidence has been amassed for the biological basis of sexual orientation, research summarized in the recent book by Simon LeVay, *Gay, Straight, and the Reason Why*. LeVay’s studies have shown that the structure of the hypothalamus—the region of the brain most responsible for sexual behavior—is different in gay men and straight men, with gay men’s more closely resembling those of women.... The evidence suggests that a combination of genetics, birth order, and the levels of sex hormones circulating during fetal life causes this different brain structure to develop.... Sexuality is a physical characteristic with psychological effects. It’s a function of brain structure, determined by genes and hormones.

“Nor are its effects limited to sexual choice. Secondary physical characteristics that generally distinguish gay people from straight, also

attributable to the quantity of androgens during fetal development, may even include finger length. Indeed, the differences between gay and straight children manifest well before puberty; retrospective studies have shown that children who later turned out to be gay ‘participated less in gender-typical activities and more in gender-atypical activities,’ a result borne out by anecdotal evidence....

“Homosexuality is widely found in other animal species, as set forth in exquisite detail in Bruce Bagemihl’s *Biological Exuberance* [see **Rogers** at p. 82: “Biologist Bruce Bagemihl has documented homosexual relations in 450 different species in the animal world”] and Joan Roughgarden’s *Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People*. Many animals display homosexual behavior, and many have durable preferences for same-sex partners. In Paul Vesey’s study of macaques, for example, female pairs were shown to exist and endure for years. Farmers have known that some rams prefer other rams since time immemorial; we now know that the rate of homosexuality among sheep is about 10 percent, and the rams have the same type of differences in brain structures found among gay men. And the omnisexual behavior of the bonobos, among our closest genetic relatives, have been known for decades.

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“Now, I can sense a certain objection forming: we’re not apes and sheep. No, we aren’t, but remember that this whole inquiry begins from the question of whether homosexuality is natural or not. Opponents of equality can’t have it both ways. If nature matters, here’s the evidence. If it doesn’t, then let’s stop using the word ‘unnatural,’ which also applies to clothing, eyeglasses, and cooking, in connection with sexuality.”

Those who support the contrary viewpoint, that is, that homosexuality is “unnatural” and contrary to God’s will, do not rely on scientific evidence, although some rely on pseudo-science, see below at pp. 141-44. Instead, they cite scriptural passages, including most prominently a brief passage, Rom. 1:26-27, from Paul’s letter to the Romans. As written in the NRSV translation of the Bible and taken in context, that passage reads as follows:

... [22] Claiming to be wise, [those who by their wickedness suppress the truth] became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

[26] For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural [*physin*] intercourse for unnatural [*para physin*], [27] and in the same way also the men, giving up natural [*physin*] intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men [*arsen*] and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

[28] And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. [32] They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.

II. Homosexuality in Ancient Greece

The debate over whether homosexuality is “natural” can be traced back to the days of the ancient Greeks, when there was one basic model of male homosexuality and that model was pederasty. See Lesson 1 above at p. 9. In his landmark work, The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate, Robin Scroggs described his extensive research into the presence of “homosexuality” in the Greco-Roman world. Some excerpts from his study follow:

Scroggs, pp. 17, 18-19, 23-24: "Before beginning the reader needs to be aware of the problems and perspectives of this study.... In the Greco-Roman world most texts were written by upper-class males about subjects which were of interest to them.... What is known about women and the lower classes is filtered through the perspectives and prejudices of this privileged group.

"The study of homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world is a case in point. We know reasonably well the practices and attitudes of upper-class males; we know almost nothing about such practices and attitudes of women and the lower class, except that slaves were often forced to offer sexual services....

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"The class we know about practiced a very specific form of homosexuality. It is named pederasty, literally the 'love of boys.' In almost all instances a pederastic friendship was the relationship between a male adult or older youth, and a boy or younger youth. One partner, almost always the older, assumed the role of the active partner; the other, almost always the younger, that of the passive. In later chapters I will describe the practices of and attitudes toward pederasty that existed in Greco-Roman cultures, including Judaism. First, however, it is crucial to see what kind of societal dynamic lay behind pederasty. What kind of culture was it that engendered, permitted, and even extolled the virtues of pederasty? The single overarching answer to this question is that upper-class public society was in most respects male oriented and male dominated.

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"In sum, despite the important exceptions [women of power, Hellenistic queens, wives and mothers of the Roman emperors, business women, etc.], public culture of these centuries was male oriented, and the apposite *intellectual and, indeed, affective partner to a male was another male*. Wives in general had a much lower educational level than did the men. They were not chosen as wives, by and large, for intellectual or romantic reasons; they were not, therefore, sought out as companions by their husbands. That males would seek out other

males for companionships of various sorts, if there were no taboos in the matter, is not surprising.

“Also crucial to understanding the background of pederasty is the emphasis which Greeks placed upon the ideal of beauty. While we may instinctively think that the Greeks meant beauty of mind, that is a prejudiced view we have inherited from the philosophers. Beauty for the Greek was primarily a physical comeliness.... [A]thletics formed the center of education. While originally this may have stemmed from the need to produce powerful soldiers, by later times the beautiful boy-form had become an end in itself and the ‘classical’ expression of physical beauty. Ancient pinups were much more likely to be of male figures than of female. And it is crucial to realize that it was the adult male who would have been interested in such pinups.

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“Greco-Roman homosexual culture, it should by now be clear, had a background and a set of patterns completely different from those of our own day. The practices of pederasty emerged out of the dominant social matrix of the day. In some quarters pederastic relations were extolled, in almost all quarters condoned. There was no need to be ‘in the closet’ about homosexual preferences. Thus it is important to keep in mind that Greco-Roman pederasty was practiced by a large number of people in part because it was socially acceptable, while by many people actually idealized as a normal course in the process of maturation. In short the culture we are investigating can fairly be said to be bisexual, since many adult pederasts were or would be married and carry on sexual relationships with both sexes” [Emphasis added].

Scroggs also points out, however, that pederasty and homosexuality were not *universally* accepted in Greek society:

Scroggs, pp. 44, 59-60: “Since pederasty was an entrenched part of this culture, we should expect to find many positive attitudes and arguments for it—and this is the case. Yet there were many other people throughout the centuries under

investigation who rejected its validity and mounted equally sharp arguments against it....

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“.... Of all accusations against pederasty the most common is that it is contrary to nature....

“While most of the texts are later rather than earlier, the judgment already seems common by the time of Plato [whose writings date back to the fourth century B.C.E.]” [Emphasis added].

The origin of this belief that same-gender sexual relations are “unnatural” appears to have been popular opinion. By the time of the apostle Paul, several “presuppositions” (stereotypes?) about people who engaged in same-gender sexual relations had apparently become widespread and commonly accepted. See **Loyal Opposition**, “The Loyal Opposition and Scripture,” Victor Paul Furnish, pp. 37-39: “Paul’s comment about people abandoning ‘natural intercourse’ [see above at p. 114] is made with reference to Gentiles specifically, and is but one of several illustrations he offers of how their refusal to acknowledge the one true God (Rom. 1:21) plunges them into every conceivable kind of vice.... Although Paul does not hesitate to describe [the ‘interchange of sex roles’ that was presumed to take place in same-sex intercourse] as ‘unnatural’ and an expression of ‘degrading passions,’ he offers no reason for these judgments, apparently taking it for granted that his readers will agree. Fortunately, there are numerous sources from his day that show us what people did typically pre-suppose about ‘homosexuality,’ and these help us to understand why the apostle’s judgment was so decisively negative. Three common presuppositions deserve special attention.

“First, anyone who engages in intercourse with a partner of the same sex is willfully overriding his or her own ‘natural’ desire for the opposite sex. This presupposition is reflected in Paul’s references to females who ‘exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural’ and males who were ‘abandoning natural intercourse with females’ to have sex with males. To the apostle and his

contemporaries, both Christian and non-Christian, talk of 'sexual orientation' or the complexities involved in the formation of one's 'sexual identity' would have sounded like so much gibberish.

"Second, all homoerotic acts are inherently lustful, an expression of sexual appetites so out of control that intercourse with the opposite sex can no longer satisfy them (Paul: 'degrading passions'). Many moral philosophers in the apostle's day viewed pederasty in this way....

"Third, homoerotic intercourse violates the laws of 'nature' (Paul: 'unnatural'), because those laws (it was supposed) decree that the male is always to assume the dominant active role, and that the female's role is to be submissive and passive. The reasoning was that when two males have sex, the male's 'naturally' dominant role is compromised, and that when two females have sex, the role of the male is usurped...." [Emphasis added].

See also **Edwards**, pp. 70-72, which adds a fourth "presupposition": "By Paul's time moral philosophers had come to believe same-sex practice inevitably involved exploitation of one person by another and was a violation of the law of nature."

III. Analysis of Ancient Presuppositions About Same-Gender Sexual Relations

(a) Anyone who engages in intercourse with a partner of the same sex is willfully overriding his or her own "natural" desire for the opposite sex.

This ancient pre-supposition has already been analyzed in the context of the Holiness Code prohibition of male same-gender sexual relations. Part of that analysis bears repetition:

Robinson, pp. 71-73: "... These holiness and purity codes take as their premise the notion that there is a natural or normal state of things, and because it is 'natural' or 'normal,' it must be God's will. And therefore any deviation is by definition deviant, not normal, unclean, and against God's will. Because women spend only a portion of a month menstruating, their 'normal' state is between menstrual cycles, and therefore they are 'unclean' during menstruation. Because

eyesight is ‘normal,’ blindness is abnormal, and therefore unclean. Because ambulatory movement is ‘normal,’ lameness is abnormal and unclean—which is why lameness was an impediment to being a priest in ancient Israel.

“Similarly, it is ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ for men to desire women, and therefore men who have sexual relations with other men are not ‘normal’ and indeed are acting ‘against their nature.’ ... Because everyone was understood to be ‘heterosexual’ (presumably this word did not even exist at the time, since it only has meaning in contrast to ‘homosexual’), any same-gender activity was unclean and prohibited as acting against one’s own nature. Indeed, it would have been an ‘abomination’ to God and God’s natural order.

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“So in saying that sexual orientation was unknown to the ancient mind, we are trying to imagine a world before there was any understanding of the possibility that some human beings would *naturally* be erotically drawn to a person of the same gender, rather than the opposite gender....”

This “presupposition” has been discredited by the scientific evidence set forth above at pp. 111-13 and the personal testimonies of members of the LGBTQ+ community such as those set forth below at pp. 144-48.

(b) All homoerotic acts are inherently lustful, an expression of sexual appetites so out of control that intercourse with the opposite sex can no longer satisfy them.

In his lecture to his home church, the College Hill United Methodists, Matthew Vines addressed this ancient presupposition, as follows:

Vines, pp. 15-16: “.... *In the ancient world, homosexuality was widely considered, not to be a different sexual orientation or something inherent in a small minority of people, but to be an excess of lust or passion that anyone could be prone to if they let themselves go too much....* The abandonment of heterosexual relations for same-sex lust was frequently compared to gluttony in eating or drinking. Sexuality was seen as a spectrum, with opposite-sex relations being the product of a ‘moderate’ level of desire and same-sex relations the product of an excessive amount of desire. Personal orientation had nothing to do with it. But within this

framework, as I said, same-sex relations were associated with the height of excess and lust, and that is why Paul invokes them in Romans 1. His purpose is to show that the idolaters were given over to unbridled passion, and to depict a scene of sexual chaos and excess that illustrates that. And that is completely consistent with how same-sex relations were most commonly described at the time. But *the only reason that a reference to same-sex behavior helps Paul illustrate general sexual chaos is because the people he is describing first began with opposite-sex relations and then, in a burst of lust, abandoned them, exchanged them for something else.*

“And surely it is significant that Paul here speaks only of lustful, casual behavior. He says nothing about the people in question falling in love, making a lifelong commitment to one another, starting a family together. We would never dream of reading a passage in Scripture about heterosexual lust and promiscuity and then, from that, condemning all of the marriage relationships of straight Christians. *There is an enormous difference between lust and love when it comes to our sexuality, between casual and committed relationships, between promiscuity and monogamy. That difference has always been held to be central to Christian teaching on sexual ethics for straight Christians. Why should that difference not be held to be as central for gay Christians?*” [Emphasis added].

It must also be noted, of course, that there is no scientific evidence to support the ancient belief that “[s]exuality ... [is] a spectrum, with opposite-sex relations being the product of a ‘moderate’ level of desire and same-sex relations the product of an excessive amount of desire.’ Even the most casual observer has to admit that there are homosexuals with only a “moderate” level of desire and heterosexuals with “an excessive amount of desire.”

(c) The laws of ‘nature’ decree that the male is always to assume the dominant active role, and that the female’s role is to be submissive and passive.

In God vs. Gay?, Michaelson responded to this argument, as follows:

Michaelson, pp. 78-82: “The way we read the Bible’s most notorious statement

about homosexuality is a classic example of anachronism. In Romans 1:26-27, Paul uses a Greek word, *paraphysin*, to describe women and men violating gender roles. [See above at p. 114]. That word has been translated as ‘unnatural,’ and taken to mean that heterosexuality is natural and homosexuality is not. But Paul never had biology in mind—he was writing 1,500 years before the scientific revolution, and he was concerned with morality, not science.... What’s more, he isn’t writing about homosexuality as we know it at all: he had no concept of sexual orientation, is actually talking about the proper hierarchy of men and women, and is critiquing lascivious sexuality, not stable relationships.

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“Does Romans 1:26 prohibit lesbianism, as some have suggested? We don’t actually know. There was an awareness of lesbianism in the ancient world, and many Greek and Roman (male) authorities regulated, ridiculed, and even pathologized it, understanding it as women trying to be like men.... However, contemporary Jewish sources did not regard lesbianism as sex at all, because sex was defined, in that male-centered culture, as penetration by a penis.... But if Paul isn’t speaking of women having sexual relations with one another, what does he have in mind?

“The key here is the word *physin*, meaning ‘natural,’ and its opposite, *paraphysin*. *To our twenty-first century eyes, ‘natural’ probably means what happens in nature.... But in fact, Paul never intended this sense of the word at all. Our use of the term ‘nature’ derives from the scientific revolution—it’s anachronistic to project it onto Paul....*

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“That being said, Paul obviously does single out some specific forms of behavior in Romans 1:26-27—and this brings us back to the roles of men and women. *For Paul, as for two millennia of Christian theologians, part of the ‘natural’ order is that men should dominate women....* In the Roman case, the proper hierarchy of gender roles even affected how homosexuality was regulated. As is well known, Roman culture encouraged certain forms of male homosexual

behavior, but only when free, adult men were dominant. Adult free males could penetrate slaves (of any gender), and men could penetrate women. But, as scholar Bernadette Brooten writes, *‘free, adult males ought never be passive, and women should never be active ... [and] should they transgress these boundaries, society deemed their behavior ‘contrary to nature’ (para physin).*

“This, then, is what Paul means by ‘unnatural’; when women are active, and men are passive. This is also why males having sex with males is ‘unnatural’; because it involves a man taking the woman’s role, which is a violation of how things are meant to be. Remember that in Paul’s time, as in many cultures today, the real offense of male homosexuality is not that two men are involved, but that one man is taking on the ‘female’ role in sexual intercourse. In fact, Paul’s language is strikingly similar to that of the Jewish/Hellenistic philosopher Philo, who said that in Sodom (i.e., Rome), ‘they accustomed those who were by nature men to submit to play the part of women.’ Contrary to popular clichés about ancient Rome, this was stigmatized even then..., and the taking of the receptive role relative to a man of inferior rank was actually criminalized.... Here is Broooten again: “‘natural’ intercourse means penetration of a subordinate person by a dominant one.’ That’s what Paul is talking about—in the same words, in the same culture, at the same time. And this helps us understand what Paul means in the otherwise cryptic verse 29: ‘they received in themselves the due penalty for their error.’ The punishment not only fits the crime—the punishment, being penetrated, being ‘made into a woman,’ is the crime.

“Now, in an age of female (vice) presidential [and presidential] candidates, do we still believe that for women to ever rule over men is unnatural? Of course not. Categories like physin are culturally specific, and most of us have already set aside this particular iteration of it. To put it simply, in the worldview of Romans 1:26-27, homosexuality is exactly as unnatural as Sarah Palin [and Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris].

“It is also possible (though not certain) that Paul isn’t condemning homosexuality in general, but has in mind the predominant form of homosexual

behavior practiced in Rome, namely, pederasty. It's striking that Paul uses a particular Greek word, arsen, for his condemnation in verse 27. [See above at p. 114]. Arsen is a generic word for 'male.' The word for 'men,' as in adult men, is aner. Thus Paul is specifically not using the term for men having sexual relations with other men. He is using the term for males having sexual relations with males. Given what we know about Roman sexual mores at the time Paul was writing, this predominantly meant adult men having sex with young adolescent males.... [See above at pp. 115-17]. [S]urely what Paul had in mind was not what the Romans disdained, but what they approved of: pederasty." [Italicized emphasis added].

(d) Same-gender sexual relationships inevitably involve exploitation of one person by another.

It is not surprising that the ancients believed that same-gender sexual relationships in their day involved exploitation of one person by another. But they erred in believing that this connection was "inevitable." As Robbin Scroggs pointed out in his conclusion to his study of the New Testament and homosexuality, "the basic model in today's Christian homosexual community" is "that of caring and mutual relationships between consenting adults," a model that does not involve the exploitation of one person by another. That fact renders biblical judgments about homosexuality irrelevant to the discussion of Church and Synagogue policies toward LGBTQ+ people today. See Lesson 1 above at p. 9. See also Smith, "Since the Bible seems only to condemn same-sex relations, how can some Christians affirm same-sex Marriage or the ordination of openly gay and lesbian Christians? Where is there any support for this approach in the Bible?," Jeffrey S. Siker, pp. 41-42: "... [W]e must be clear about what Scripture condemns and why.... For example, *in Paul's letters, the passing references that condemn same-sex relations (Rom. 1; 1 Cor. 6) are addressed to the context of Paul's day, where same-sex relations were typically and understandably seen as exploitive, especially given that pederasty and slave-prostitution were the primary forms of same-sex relations with which Paul would have been familiar.*

"To condemn all modern-day homosexual relationships on the basis of the

exploitive same-sex relations of Paul's day would be the same as condemning all modern-day heterosexual relationships on the basis of David's adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. Just as there is no blanket condemnation of all heterosexual relations because of some inappropriate heterosexual actions (rape, incest, adultery), so also we may ask if it is correct to issue a blanket condemnation of all same-sex relations because those referred to in Scripture were exploitive and thus inappropriate relations (e.g., rape and pederasty).” [Emphasis added].

In examining Paul's writings relating to same-gender sexual relations, it seems likely that his views were influenced by the same-gender sexual practices in Corinth, a city that was particularly significant to Paul; he founded the church in that city, visited it at least twice (once for a long period of time), and wrote four epistles to that church (one of which has been lost to history). In addition, two of the three anti-LGBTQ+ passages attributed to Paul, see above at p. 77, are connected to Corinth. The passage at 1 Cor. 6:9-10 is found in a letter written by Paul to the church in Corinth, while Rom. 1:26-27 is found in a letter written by Paul from Corinth. The following commentary describing same-gender sexual practices in Corinth is therefore particularly noteworthy:

Day, pp. 107-08: “Corinth was a seaport, a cultural crossroads of its time. The city was on the Isthmus of Corinth, the shortest route from Europe to Asia. This geographic position caused numerous cultures to be represented in Corinth's population. There were all sorts of religions.... High atop the Acrocorinth was the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Here no fewer than a thousand slave girls served as hierodules (sacred slaves) attached to the service of the temple and of the worshippers who utilized their services in orgiastic worship activities.

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“Corinth was well-known for its brothels (both male and female) that lined the walk to the Acrocorinth. ‘Corinthian’ became a Greek slang term for the sexually loose. Just as the temple of Aphrodite was dedicated to female beauty,

so was the temple of Apollo dedicated to male beauty. Here, also, sex was glorified and nude statues of Apollo in various poses of virility ‘fired his male worshippers to physical displays of devotion with the god’s beautiful boys.’

“The same-sex activity that Paul would have encountered during his missionary visits here would have been associated with idolatry, pederasty, or prostitution and sometimes all of the above. Many of the liaisons that were common in Corinth were also adulterous in nature. Many of the men who had young male lovers or who engaged in same-sex activities in the temples had wives and children at home. These sexual practices also frequently involved slavery. Many young boys were castrated to preserve their youthful appearance for the pleasure of their master” [Emphasis added].

IV. Hellenistic Judaism and Ethnic Stereotyping

The other likely influence on Paul’s personal views about same-gender sexual relations was the “ethnic stereotype” of Greco-Roman society that was prevalent in the Hellenistic Jewish society that Paul grew up in and later returned to following his conversion experience on the road to Damascus. This commonly-held belief was most clearly expressed in the Apocryphal book The Wisdom of Solomon. [Keep in mind that Paul was not only a scholar but was himself a Hellenistic Jew, having been born in Tarsus in Cilicia and, following his conversion, having established his base in Antioch (see Acts 11:25-26, 21:37-39 & 22:3)].

In analyzing Paul’s writings on the subject of homosexuality, Professor Victor Paul Furnish of the Perkins School of Theology (Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas) has emphasized the strong connection between Paul’s views and the commonly-held views of other Hellenistic Jews:

Loyal Opposition, “The Loyal Opposition and Scripture,” Victor Paul Furnish, p. 37: “Paul’s comment about people abandoning ‘natural intercourse’ is made with reference to Gentiles specifically, and is but one of several illustrations he offers of how their refusal to acknowledge the one true God (Rom. 1:21) plunges them into every conceivable kind of vice. *This ethnic stereotype prevailed among Jews*

in Paul's day, and is also evident, for example, in the Wisdom of Solomon (late first century B.C.E.), which Paul and the early church regarded as scriptural. There, idolatry is identified as the root of all 'sexual immorality' (Wisd. 14:12), including the 'interchange of sex roles'... that was presumed to take place in same-sex intercourse" [Emphasis added].

See also **Edwards**, pp. 70-74: "The third chapter of his 1979 work, *The Moral Teaching of Paul*, contains Furnish's discussion of homosexuality....

"After a brief treatment of Greek pederasty in the works of Plato, Seneca, Plutarch, and Dio Chrysostom, in which predominantly negative reports on pederasty are emphasized, Furnish turns to the prohibitions of homosexual acts in the Holiness Code (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13) and Philo's discussion of Sodom in his work *On Abraham*. Three comments conclude this survey:

1. The moral writings, both biblical and extrabiblical, which inform Paul's judgments in the first century A.D., have no understanding of same-sex orientation comparable to that provided in modern psychology and sociology.
2. Seneca, Dio Chrysostom, and Philo associate homosexual practice with insatiable lust and gross luxury.
3. By Paul's time moral philosophers had come to believe same-sex practice inevitably involved exploitation of one person by another and was a violation of the law of nature.

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"Furnish proceeds next to the more important passage, Romans 1:26-27.... Again, this disapproving statement expresses the same attitude found in Seneca, Philo, and others that same-sex acts arise from insatiable lust and that such acts are 'unnatural.'

"In the section Romans 1:18-3:20 the need of all (gentile and Jew) for the grace of God is underlined. Verses 1:18-32 denounce gentile unrighteousness along lines found in Hellenistic Judaism, especially the Book of Wisdom, which

repudiates gentile religions as ‘foolish idolatries.’ God sends on the idolaters (Wisdom 11-12) punishments suited to the deeds. This is like the statement (Romans 1:18) that ‘the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness’ or the ‘dishonorable passions’ of Roman 1:26-27 to which God gives them up. Even a list of vices to match Romans 1:29-31 is found at Wisdom 14:25-26..... All these vices derive directly from idolatry (Wisdom 14:27).

“The kinship of Paul’s ideas in Romans 1:18-32, the Book of Wisdom, and traditional Jewish reasoning about gentile idolatry producing moral, especially sexual, depravity is clear. What Paul says about homosexual acts could have been written by Plutarch or Dio Chrysostom if abstracted from its setting in Romans 1:18-32.

“After establishing thus Paul’s condemnation of homosexual practices (a marginal concern found only in the two passages from Paul, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and Romans 1:26f.) [Furnish, like other biblical scholars, ‘denies the Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy’], Furnish turns to the contemporary application of these teachings. [The second of his] four emphases can be summarized as follows:

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2. Paul, like Hellenistic Judaism, counted homosexual practice a gentile vice, linked to pagan idolatry, a deliberate choice rooted in gross sexual appetite. These attitudes are, however, outmoded on the basis of current sexology.... The ‘unnatural’ premise also collapses when, for example, in 1 Corinthians 11:14-15 Paul finds long hair unnatural for men. As a matter of fact, the only ‘natural’ thing is to let one’s hair grow as long as it will” [Emphasis added].

Like Professor Furnish, Robbin Scroggs studied Paul’s writings extensively in the context of other preceding and contemporaneous writings. See Lesson 1 above, at pp. 8-9. And like Professor Furnish, Scroggs concluded that *Paul’s views on same-gender sexual relations are virtually indistinguishable from the views expressed in earlier writings, particularly from the era of Hellenistic Judaism.* Key excerpts from his lengthy analysis follow:

Scroggs, pp. 99-100: *"It can thus be seen that the use by Paul of para physin in Rom. 1:26-27 is the most common stereotype of Greco-Roman attitudes. For those who opposed pederasty, that which seemed most abhorrent about it was that it violated the natural order of creation, however creation was understood.*

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"In comparison with the abundance of materials about pederasty in Greco-Roman literature, the New Testament is virtually silent. In my judgment it cannot be said that the early church was nearly as interested in the moral issues pertaining to the practices as was Greco-Roman society as a whole. For the churches which produced the Gospels, homosexuality was obviously not an issue at all; there is not a single statement about it in any of these writings. The Book of Acts certainly and the Revelation of John most probably do not mention it. Only in the epistolary literature does the issue explicitly emerge, and at that only three times.

"Paul refers twice to it, and in a writing identified by scholars as composed later than Paul, although in his name, it is mentioned once. [See Scroggs at p. 66 n.1: 'I follow commonly accepted scholarly judgment that 1 and 2 Timothy, along with Titus, were written sometime after Paul's life, perhaps toward the beginning of the second century C.E.']. In two of these three, homosexuality is mentioned only in passing. Only in one (Rom. 1:26-27) is the topic integrated into the larger discussion which the author is pursuing. Furthermore, in all three of these passages the material is expressed in very traditional terms, that of Greco-Roman and/or Hellenistic Jewish cultures. **Thus not only is the New Testament church uninterested in the topic, it has nothing new to say about it....**" [Emphasis added].

In reaching their conclusions, both of these scholars emphasized the similarities between Paul's views on same-gender sexual relations as set forth in Romans and the earlier writing from the Hellenistic Jewish Book of Wisdom. Indeed, the similarity between these two passages is so obvious that it seems

highly likely that the Book of Wisdom was at least one source, if not the primary source, of Paul's own views. The following comparison vividly illustrates this point:

COMPARISON OF WISDOM OF SOLOMON (CHS. 13 & 14) WITH ROMANS (CH. 1)
WISDOM OF SOLOMON

13: 1 – 10 – “For all people who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know the one who exists, nor did they recognize the artisan while paying heed to his works; but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water, or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world. If through delight in the beauty of these things people assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them. And if people were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is the one who formed them. *For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.... But miserable, with their hopes set on dead things, are those who give the name ‘gods’ to the works of human hands, gold and silver fashioned with skill, and likenesses of animals, or a useless stone, the work of an ancient hand*” [Emphasis added].

ROMANS

1:18—23 – “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.* Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. *So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles*” [Emphasis added].

WISDOM OF SOLOMON

14:12—14—*“For the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication, and the invention of them was the corruption of life; for they did not exist from the beginning, nor will they last forever. For through human vanity they entered the world, and therefore their speedy end has been planned”* [Emphasis added].

14:22—30—*“Then it was not enough for them to err about the knowledge of God, but though living in great strife due to ignorance, they call such great evils peace. For whether they kill children in their initiations, or celebrate secret mysteries, or hold frenzied revels with strange customs, they no longer keep either their lives or their marriages pure, but they either treacherously kill one another, or grieve one another by adultery, and all is a raging riot of blood and murder, theft and deceit, corruption, faithlessness, tumult, perjury, confusion over what is good, forgetfulness of favors, defiling of souls, sexual perversion, disorder in marriages, adultery, and debauchery. For the worship of idols not to be named is the beginning and cause and end of every evil. For their worshipers either rave in exultation, or prophesy lies, or live unrighteously, or readily commit perjury; for because they trust in lifeless idols they swear wicked oaths and expect to suffer no harm. But just penalties will overtake them on two counts: because they thought wrongly about God in devoting themselves to idols, and because in deceit they swore unrighteously through contempt for holiness”* [Emphasis added].

ROMANS

1:24—32--*“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*

“For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own

persons the due penalty for their error.

“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God’s decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them” [Emphasis added].

V. The Epistles of Paul

(a) Background. The three New Testament biblical passages that are used as justification for the condemnation and exclusion of LGBTQ+ people [Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; and 1 Timothy 1:9-11; see above at p. 77] are all found in letters that are attributed to Paul, although Paul’s authorship of 1 Timothy is disputed by many, if not most, biblical scholars. See above at pp. 127-28. In looking at Paul’s statements in context, the first point that must be made is that these statements are made in *letters*. There is no claim here, as there is with respect to the Holiness Code, that Paul’s words were directly received by him from God [or, for that matter, from the resurrected Jesus]:

Day, pp. 101-03: “It is important to remember that Paul did not sit down one day and say, ‘I think that I’ll write some things that would be nice to have in the Bible.’ He was a minister and a respected leader in the early church. *He wrote letters to the early Christian churches to share news, give advice and instruction, greet his sisters and brothers and encourage the churches in the faith....*

“In looking at the writings of Paul we must see them in light of this fact. *They respond to specific requests for information and discuss specific problems in specific churches.*

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“Paul did not write generic form letters addressed ‘to whom it may

concern.’ *It was not his intention to write messages eternally valid for all situations....* These are messages addressed to specific circumstances; out of them eternal truths can be discerned. *These, however, must be viewed in the light of the time at which the letters were written and the circumstances they addressed.*

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“It is fascinating when looking at Paul’s writings to notice that Paul specifies that certain statements are ‘from the Lord’ and others are simply his own opinion. [1 Corinth. 7:10 & 25 quoted as examples].... [A]pparently when he was speaking on an important matter and wanted to emphasize his direction ‘from the Lord,’ he specified that. *Paul makes no claim to having had a ‘direction from the Lord’ about homosexuals.*

“As we examine the New Testament proof texts which are purported to deal with homosexuality, it is important to keep in mind the fact that these letters were written at a time when the homosexual lifestyle as we know it today simply did not exist. *Paul was addressing things within the scope of his experience. He never claims to be addressing anything else*” [Emphasis added].

The absence of any claim by Paul that he had a “direction from the Lord” about homosexuals or homosexuality is of great significance because the whole basis of his asserted authority to preach the gospel to the Gentile world was his claim that he had been commissioned to do so by the *risen* Christ:

Tabor, pp. 261-62: “Around the year A.D. 36 Paul had a ‘conversion’ experience in which he claimed to have ‘seen’ the risen Jesus. [See Acts 9:1-22]. *He said he had received both a revelation and a commission—that Jesus was the heavenly exalted ‘Christ’ and that he, Paul, was to preach the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus to the Gentile world.* He began to see himself as the Thirteenth Apostle, last but not least, and he referred to himself as the ‘Apostle to the Gentiles.’ [See Rom. 1:1-6; 1 Cor. 15:3-10]. Just as Jesus had chosen his Council of Twelve to preside over the people of Israel, Paul claimed to be given authority over the non-Jewish or Gentile world to prepare them for a ‘Second Coming’ of Jesus as

Messiah, this time from heaven.

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“... *There is no evidence that [Paul] had ever met or heard Jesus.* If he was witness to the events surrounding Jesus’ crucifixion at Passover in A.D. 30 he never mentioned it. *His connection to Jesus was based on his own visionary experiences in which he claimed to have ‘seen’ Jesus several years after his crucifixion.* Paul believed that his ‘calling’ had been foreordained: *‘He set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace ... that I might preach him among the Gentiles’* (Galatians 1:15-16). He also claimed to hear a disembodied ‘voice’ that he identified as ‘words’ of Jesus. In fact *he took pride in his claim that unlike James and the rest of the Twelve, who had known Jesus ‘according to the flesh,’ he had received his authority and commission directly from the heavenly Christ and needed no earthly human approval or authorization.*’ [Galatians 1:11-12 (NRSV): ‘For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ’]....”

There are two primary sources of information about Paul and both of them are found in the Bible: Luke’s account in the book of Acts and Paul’s own autobiographical statements in his various Epistles. *Both accounts support the view that Paul acted almost totally independently from the original Christian church in Jerusalem, which was headed by Jesus’ brother James and supported by members of the original Twelve Disciples, including most notably Peter (Cephas) and John.* As a result, two different branches of Christianity developed during the first century following Jesus’ death, a Jewish Christian church headquartered in Jerusalem that included many members who had personally interacted with Jesus during his lifetime and a Gentile Christian church headquartered in Antioch and headed by Paul.

In sum, the New Testament clearly establishes that the sole source of Paul’s

authority as the apostle to the Gentiles was the revelations he received from the risen Christ, and that his authority was not in any way based on the teachings of Christ, which were only rarely and briefly referred to in Paul's epistles, or on training or other knowledge received from those apostles who had traveled and worked with Christ during his lifetime. Furthermore, neither the book of Acts nor Paul's own epistles give any indication that Paul ever received any kind of revelation from the risen Christ concerning homosexuality or same-gender sexual relations. The question therefore becomes "What then were the sources of Paul's views on same-gender sexual relations?" As indicated above, the most likely answers are (a) the anti-gay views of some of Paul's contemporaries and predecessors in the fields of religion, philosophy and history, including most prominently the views expressed in the Hellenistic Jewish book of Wisdom, and (b) his exposure to the world of same-gender sexual activities in the cities he traveled through, activities associated with various combinations of pederasty, idolatry, slavery, prostitution, and adultery. Indeed, upon re-reading the passage from Romans, which is quoted above at p. 114, it becomes clear that it does not go beyond a recitation of all of the ancient "presuppositions" and "ethnic stereotypes" that have been discussed above at pp. 118-25 & 125-28. As correctly noted by Robbin Scroggs, Paul "has nothing new to say about [same-gender sexual relations and the people who engage in them]."

(b) Paul's Discussion of Same-Gender Sexual Relations in Romans. In his lecture to the College Hill United Methodists, Matthew Vines analyzed Paul's discourse in the first chapter of Romans, as follows:

Vines, pp. 13-17: "How we understand this passage [at Rom. 1:26-27] hinges in large part on how we understand the meaning of the terms 'natural' and 'unnatural.' It's commonly assumed by those who hold to the traditional interpretation that these terms refer back to Genesis 1 and 2, and are intended to define heterosexuality as God's natural design and homosexuality as an unnatural distortion of that design. [See discussion of the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, below, at pp. 148-54]. But once again, closer examination does not support that

interpretation. In order to understand what Paul meant by the use of these terms, we have to consider two things. First, we have to look at the broader context of the passage in order to see how the concept of nature functions within it. And secondly, we need to see how Paul himself uses these terms in his other letters and how they were commonly and widely applied to sexual behavior in particular in the ancient world.

“First, the passage’s context. In 1:18-32, [see above at p. 114, quoting verses 22-32], Paul is making a larger argument about idolatry, and that argument has a very precise logic to it. *The reason, he says in verses 18-20, that the idolaters’ actions are blameworthy is because they knew God. They started with the knowledge of God, but they chose to reject him.* Paul writes, “What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the beginning of the world, God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.’ The idolaters are without excuse because they started with the truth, but they rejected it. *Paul’s subsequent statements about sexual behavior follow this same pattern.* The women, he says ‘exchanged’ natural relations for unnatural ones. And the men ‘abandoned’ relations with women and committed shameful acts with other men. *Both the men and the women started with heterosexuality—they were naturally disposed to it just as they were naturally disposed to the knowledge of God—but they rejected their original, natural inclinations for those that were unnatural; for them, same-sex behavior.... But in order for this analogy to have any force, in order for it to make sense within this argument, the people he is describing must naturally begin with heterosexual relations and then abandon them.* And that is exactly how he describes it.

“But that is not what we are talking about. Gay people have a natural, permanent orientation toward those of the same sex; it’s not something that they choose, and it’s not something that they can change. They aren’t abandoning or rejecting heterosexuality—that’s never been an option for them to begin with.

And if applied to gay people, Paul's argument here should actually work in the other direction: If the point of this passage is to rebuke those who have spurned their true nature, ... then just as those who are naturally heterosexual should not be with those of the same sex, so, too, those who have a natural orientation toward the same sex should not be with those of the opposite sex.... *We have different natures when it comes to sexual orientation.*

"... [B]efore we leave this passage, we also need to consider how Paul himself uses these terms in his other letters and how the terms 'natural' and 'unnatural' were commonly applied to sexual behavior in his day.

"One of Paul's most significant references to 'nature' outside of Romans 1 comes in 1 Corinthians 11. There, in verses 13-15, he writes:

"Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?' *This is actually the most similar passage in the New Testament to Romans 1:26-27, because not only does Paul refer to 'nature' here, he also speaks of the concept of 'disgrace,' which is the same term that is translated as 'shameful' in Romans 1.* But the way that we interpret these terms in 1 Corinthians is very different than how the traditional interpretation wants to read them in Romans 1. [See above, Romans passage traditionally interpreted as referring to Gen. 1 & 2]. *One of the most common meanings of the Greek word for 'nature' is custom, and that is how Christians widely interpret this passage in 1 Corinthians today....* So how we read Paul here in 1 Corinthians is basically this: 'Do not the customs of our society dictate that it is considered shameful for a man to have long hair, but honorable for a woman?' This reading aligns with ancient Mediterranean attitudes about gender and hair length, and it makes much more sense than the idea that natural biological processes would lead men to have short hair. By 'nature,' it would grow long.

"But again, this passage about hair length in 1 Corinthians is the most similar one in Paul's writing to the passage about sexual behavior in Romans. *So if*

we understand Paul's reference to 'nature' and 'disgrace' in 1 Corinthians as being about custom, why do we not do the same in Romans 1? And in fact, unlike the traditional interpretation, that approach would be consistent with how the terms 'natural' and 'unnatural' were actually used in regard to sexual behavior by the ancient Greeks and Romans. In these patriarchal societies, in which women were viewed as inferior to men, the main distinction that they made when discussing sexual behavior was not orientation, but rather, active versus passive roles. The Greeks and Romans, along with other societies of biblical times, believed that a man's natural, customary role was to be active in sexual relations, whereas a woman's was to be passive. When either of these roles [was] inverted—when a man was passive or a woman was active—they labeled that behavior shameful and 'unnatural' in the sense of violating customary gender roles. That is why they commonly called same-sex unions 'unnatural.' But just like Greek and Roman attitudes about appropriate hair length, their views about gender roles are specific to those patriarchal cultures.... [Paul] uses the term 'nature' in Romans 1 just as he does in 1 Corinthians 11. So if we're going to be consistent as well as historically accurate in our biblical interpretations, then we need to acknowledge for Romans what we already do for 1 Corinthians 11: the term 'nature' here refers to social custom, not to the biological order, and it is a culturally specific term" [Emphasis added].

VI.Christian Dogma: from Stoicism to the Natural Law Doctrine

The dominant viewpoint among *all* Christians prior to the seventeenth century, see below at pp. 140-41, was the belief that procreation is the *only* legitimate justification for engaging in sexual relations. The theological foundation underlying that viewpoint was the Catholic Church's doctrine of "natural law": **McNeill**, pp. 89-97: "One important aspect of Western Christian tradition remains to be examined, namely, the influence of Stoicism, especially its interpretation of the natural law as regards sexual ethics. Underlying the attitude of the early Church to homosexual practices ... was ... the belief that they were specially condemned by God in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Nevertheless,

such practices were generally denounced mainly on the grounds that they were in themselves 'contrary to nature.'

"The first such reference to nature...occurred in Paul's Epistle to the Romans. [See above].... Michael Spanneut, an authority on the influence of Stoicism [a Greek pagan philosophy] on the Church Fathers, maintains that the moral writings of nearly all of the Fathers of the Church in the first two centuries of the Christian era 'were dominated by the popular Stoicism of the milieu in which that Christian generation lived.'

"Stoic philosophy was primarily a moralism.... The fundamental Stoic axiom was to 'live according to nature.' *Life according to nature was understood as submission to the divinely appointed order of the world. Nature itself was identified, however, not with instinct but with reason....* God, in Stoic philosophy, was understood as reason, or *logos*, diffused through the cosmos.... The law of nature was identified with the biological laws governing the physical universe....

"The principal virtue of the wise man was understood as ataraxy, or apathy—a life of indifference. In practice Stoic ethics was largely a fight against the passions or affections. Those passions—pleasure, sorrow, desire, and fear—were considered irrational and, consequentially, unnatural. All forms of passion, even pity and love, were to be eliminated as irrational....

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"Along with stress on mind and reason went a dualistic depreciation of the body, both as the seat of the irrational passions and as the contingent element in man.... Death is to be welcomed as the release of the mind from the chains of the body.

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"Consequently, when the Stoics turn to sexual conduct it should come as no surprise that no consideration whatsoever is given to interpersonal love. Rather, stress is placed on the rational end of sexual activity as this end can be read in the biological laws of nature[,] which are one with the will of God. Accordingly, the

only rational motive for undertaking sexual intercourse is procreation....

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“In order to understand the attitude of the Fathers of the Church toward homosexual activity, we must place it within the context of their attitudes on women and on sexuality in general. The early Fathers of the Church tended to accept Platonic and Stoic body-soul dualism. As Eric Brunner notes: *‘Through Platonic-Hellenic mysticism the idea penetrated into the early Church that the sexual element as such is somehow low and unworthy of man ... an idea which ... is in absolute opposition to the biblical idea of creation.’*.... There is a tendency to identify the male principle with the soul and the female principle with the body. Woman is naturally subject to man because in man the direction of reason is greater. This went hand in hand with a sexual interpretation of original sin, with Eve symbolizing all women as the evil protagonist.

“In fact, Saint Augustine went so far as to identify all sexual attraction and pleasure with sin....

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“Thomas Aquinas was the only great scholastic theologian to discuss the subject of homosexual practices in any detail....

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“.... The Stoic influence is evident in the fact that Aquinas deals with the subject of homosexuality in the course of his treatise on the cardinal virtue of temperance. He identifies the vice contrary to this virtue as lust, whose essence is ‘to exceed the order and mode of reason where venereal acts are concerned.’ Any act which is not consistent with the proper end of venereal acts, namely the generation and education of children, necessarily pertains to the vice of lust. The lustful man desires not human generation but venereal pleasure, and it should be noted that this pleasure can be experienced by indulging in acts which do not result in human procreation. It is precisely this which is sought in the sin against

nature.

“Thus the first grounds for Thomas’s condemnation of homosexual practices is his belief that they necessarily represent an inordinate selfish seeking of venereal pleasure; and ... Thomas believed that all such pleasure is the result of sin. What we should note with interest is that there is no mention in this passage of a third possible motive for venereal acts, whether heterosexual or homosexual, besides either lust or procreation—namely, the possibility that they might be an expression of genuine interpersonal love. There is no reason to assume that Aquinas had any more awareness than had the Church Fathers of the homosexual condition. Rather, it is almost certain that in his reference to homosexual practices he is assuming that these are merely sexual indulgences undertaken from a motive of lust by otherwise heterosexual persons....

*“... [T]he most fundamental objection Aquinas had to homosexual practices was identical to that of the Stoics: they cannot serve the exclusive divine purpose governing the use of all human sexuality, the end of procreation. [See **Michaelson**, p. 106: Aquinas categorized “same-sex relations” along with masturbation, bestiality, and “‘unnatural’ sexual positions” involving a male and a female, as “against nature” [*contra naturam*], because none of these activities can bring about conception]. It would seem that Aquinas, like his Stoic predecessors, never even considered the possibility that human sexual behavior, even in a heterosexual context, never mind a homosexual one, could be morally justified as an expression of human love” [Emphasis added].*

The Catholic Church’s traditional reliance on “natural law” principles, including the assertion that procreation is the sole justification for sexual relations, has been strongly disputed by several scholars and theologians, beginning with some seventeenth-century Protestants:

Nelson, p. 107: “A significant development took place in the history of Christian sexuality in seventeenth-century Protestantism. Prior to that time it had been assumed by the teachers of the church that procreation was either the primary or the only legitimate purpose of genital sexuality. *During the seventeenth century*

the (much-maligned) Puritans together with some Quakers and Anglicans began to articulate their conviction that the purpose of sexuality was not fundamentally procreation but that of relationship, companionship, and love. [See below at pp. 148-51]. If in marriage children were born, that was to be seen as an added blessing. But the purpose of marriage was not primarily to beget children. It was to form a bonding of companionship and love” [Emphasis added].

More recently, in Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality, Jack Rogers, Professor of Theology Emeritus at San Francisco Theological Seminary and Moderator of the 213th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), challenged the reliance of opponents of LGBTQ equality and inclusion on “natural law” principles, as follows:

Rogers, pp. 80-83: “One argument made by conservative interpreters is that we can be guided by a nonbiblical standard, natural law. *Natural law is composed of those unquestioned assumptions that most people in the culture accept.* Ralph McInerny at the University of Notre Dame defines natural law ‘as the claim that there are certain judgments we have already made and could not help making.’ The problem is that this could also be a good definition for prejudice.

“The unreflective appeal to nature is exemplified by a remark of fundamentalist minister Jerry Falwell. On *Meet the Press* following the November 2004 presidential election, Falwell, pushing his priorities for President Bush’s second term, said, ‘I think it’s unthinkable that we’re debating what a family is, a man married to a woman. They’ve got that right in the barnyard.’ In his colorful manner of speaking, Falwell appealed to what, to him, was obvious in nature—animals have sexual relations, male with female. That model of nature is an often-used appeal to natural law.

“As it turns out, however, not all animals are heterosexual. Biologist Bruce Bagemihl has documented homosexual relations in 450 different species in the animal world. Same-sex behavior includes not only copulation, but courtship and parental activities. I am not arguing here that we should base our understanding of sex on animal behavior, but, rather, pointing out that those who do, citing

male-female relations as universal in nature, are in error.

“... [T]heologians often appeal to natural law in an attempt to argue divine sanction for their cultural assumptions. A classic example of the misuse of natural law in theology is Robert Gagnon’s The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics. Gagnon is a professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. His book is acclaimed by some opponents of gay and lesbian equality as the definitive biblical word on homosexuality.

“The irony is that Gagnon doesn’t seem to need the Bible because, he argues, everything the Bible says about homosexuality comes initially from the observation of nature.... [B]ehind all of the ancient sources, including biblical sources, according to Gagnon, is ‘the simple recognition of a ‘fittedness’ of the sex organs, male to female.’.... He goes on to say that the Old Testament Holiness Code was responding to the conviction that same-sex intercourse was fundamentally incompatible with the creation of men and women as anatomically complementary sexual beings.’....

“According to Gagnon, pagans, as well as Jews and Christians, find ‘the material creation around human beings and bodily design of humans themselves, guiding us into the truth about the nature of God and the nature of human sexuality respectively.’ [Contra Michaelson at p. 33: “... [P]ardon me for being graphic, but it happens that there is a high concentration of nerve endings in the anus and prostate, which can be stimulated only by massage or sexual activity.... And women’s bodies are even more wired for pleasure and delight.... *It’s fine to say that the human body is not designed for nonprocreative sexual pleasure—except that it is.*” (Emphasis added)].

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“Relying on his inaccurate assumptions about what is ‘natural,’ Gagnon claims, ‘Certainly no one is born a homosexual.’ Clearly there is no biblical warrant for this statement. In fact, Jesus, immediately after his teaching on divorce and his recommendation of marriage, states that some people are born

eunuchs (Matt. 19:10-12).... [I]n our contemporary context those who are eunuchs from their mother's wombs might well include homosexuals, because they simply lack sexual desire for people of the opposite sex. [See further discussion of this biblical passage in Lesson 7, below, at pp. 230-33 & 246-47].

"There is also no scientific warrant for Gagnon's claim. In a comprehensive review of the literature on the subject of sexual orientation, David G. Myers, professor of psychology at Hope College, observes that based on all the available evidence, *most psychologists 'view sexual orientation as neither willfully chosen nor willfully changed.'*

"Having asserted that no one is homosexual by nature, Gagnon claims that all people who are homosexual have willfully chosen that behavior and therefore can successfully change their sexual identity. Once again there is no biblical or scientific warrant for that position. When all of the studies and the testimony have been sifted, it is apparent that *when people claim that lesbian and gay people can change, they are almost always referring to behavior and not orientation*. In fact, when you probe behind the assertions, Gagnon acknowledges that 'therapists define *success as management of unwanted desires, not complete elimination.*'

"By acknowledging that 'reparative' or 'conversion' therapy is addressing only behavior rather than orientation, opponents of homosexuality are actually admitting that, in fact, sexual orientation is a part of someone's nature and may be just as God-given as heterosexuality. David Myers, in his review of the scientific literature on sexual orientation, concludes, 'Sexual orientation is like handedness: Most people are one way, some are the other. A very few are truly ambidexterous. *Regardless, the way one is endures*'" [Emphasis added].

Perhaps the most fundamental flaw in the doctrine of natural law, however, is the belief that underlies it, that is, the belief that we can determine God's will by looking at the way things are:

Smith, "What does Genesis 1-3 teach about sexuality, and how should we live in response?" Patrick D. Miller, pp. 12-13: ".... *The history of the church and of the*

larger society gives us good reason to pause for reflection before assuming that we know the moral meaning of God's created order. Church and society both have appealed to scriptural accounts of a created order to fix norms for roles and relationships. We have read scripture as declaring that God created a world in which women should be subordinate to men, men should cut their hair and women should not, women should not speak in church, subjects should obey their kings, and slaves should submit to their masters and obey them with the same fear and trembling with which they obey Christ.

"The church is still in the process of repenting of its collusion with these systems that claimed to be grounded in God's created order. And we are right to do so. The church has heard in the gospel and in the prophetic and liberating words of both Old Testament and New Testament a counter word that does not fix people in roles and relationships and does not let cultural and social mores become final definitions of who and what we are in the church and kingdom. In this counter word we have heard what the scriptures teach" [Emphasis added].

VII. The Claim that Homosexuality is Natural

In Lesson 1, above, at pp. 18-20, an article was quoted that described the origins of both the concept of sexual orientation and the term "homosexuality." Excerpts from that article included the following: "On August 29, 1867, a forty-two-year-old lawyer named Karl Heinrich Ulrichs went before the Sixth Congress of German Jurists, in Munich, to urge the repeal of laws forbidding sex between men.... He told the assembly that people with a 'sexual nature opposed to common custom' were being persecuted for impulses that 'nature, mysteriously governing and creating, had implanted in them.'....

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".... [The physician Magnus] Hirschfeld, who was born in 1868, a year after Ulrich's speech in Munich, began his radical activities in 1896, publishing a pamphlet titled 'Sappho and Socrates,' which told of the suicide of a gay man who felt coerced into marriage. The next year, Hirschfeld launched the [Scientific-Humanitarian]

Committee, [the first gay rights organization], and soon after reprinted Ulrich's writings. Building on Ulrich's insight that same-sex desire was a congenital trait, Hirschfeld developed a minutely variegated conception of human sexuality, with a spectrum of 'sexual intermediaries' appearing between the poles of the purely male and the purely female."

In essence, Uhlrichs became the first gay man to "come out" and assert that his sexual orientation (homosexuality) was "natural" to him. Approximately thirty years later, Hirschfeld became the first scientist to present scientific evidence in support of the claims of Uhlrichs and others that same-gender sexual relations were "natural" to them. What made both of these events so incredibly momentous was the context within which they occurred. As indicated by the history set forth in this lesson, beginning sometime during the decline and fall of the Roman empire, a clear consensus developed and prevailed throughout the entire Western world that homosexuality is "unnatural."

Ever since Uhlrichs challenged this consensus belief by making his courageous "coming out" speech in 1867, countless other members of the LGBTQ+ community have followed his example and asserted their claims that their particular sexual orientation or gender identity was "natural" to them. Some examples of such arguments follow:

Bawer, pp. 144-45: "'I think you'll all agree with me,' said Senator Strom Thurmond to a panel of gay military officers at the Senate Armed Services Committee hearings on gays in the military, 'that homosexuality is not the normal lifestyle.'

"Homosexuality, say many heterosexuals, is abnormal, unnatural. Yes, it is—for them. Just as heterosexuality is unnatural for homosexuals.

"To a heterosexual man, being with a woman feels natural. And the idea of being with a man feels very unnatural. It's the opposite with a gay man. To a gay man, being with another man feels natural. And to him it is. It's his nature. If a gay man feels pressured to marry [a woman] by a society or his family or himself, the feeling that he has about such a marriage is comparable to the way a

heterosexual man would feel if he were forced to sleep with another man. In either case, a man would be doing something that felt unnatural to him” [Written in 1994; italicized emphasis added].

See also **Take Back the Word**, “Love Your Mother: A Lesbian Womanist Reading of Scripture,” Irene S. Travis, p. 37: “The biblical injunction ‘Thou shall not lie with a man, as thou liest with a woman’ (Lev. 18:22) only works for lesbians! Obviously the Holiness Code in the book of Leviticus was not intended for a female audience. Either women’s relationships with women did not matter or [they] remained unnoticed. The only seeming reference to lesbianism [in the Bible] is in the book of Romans. It tells of women giving up the natural use of their bodies and turning lustfully to other women. It speaks of women exchanging their attractions to men for women, a truly subversive act that Paul understands as a result of idolatry. Much has been written recently on just what that might mean, so we won’t dwell on it here. *Suffice it to say the majority of mature lesbians do not abandon God, reject their ‘natural attraction’ to men, and rush out in a frenzy to use and abuse other females. If they were naturally attracted to men, they would not be lesbians in the first place.* By definition, lesbians are innately bonded to other women, both physically and emotionally. Being with males has proven to be a poor substitute. The vast majority of lesbians have excellent nonsexual relationships with men. They just don’t want to marry them. It is patently unfair to all parties concerned to foist the seemingly heterosexual lifestyle upon those born gay” [Written in 2000; emphasis added].

The historian John Boswell, who was openly gay during his lifetime, emphasized the importance of considering the disputed passage in chapter 1 of Romans, see above at p. 114, in context and concluded that, when it is read in this manner, the language in question does *not* amount to a blanket condemnation of homosexuality:

Boswell, pp. 108-09: “... [I]t should be recognized that the point of the passage is not to stigmatize sexual behavior of any sort but to condemn the Gentiles for their general infidelity. There was a time, Paul implies, when monotheism was

offered to or known by the Romans, but they rejected it (vv. 19-23). The reference to homosexuality is simply a mundane analogy to this theological sin; it is patently not the crux of this argument. Once the point has been made, the subject of homosexuality is quickly dropped and the major argument resumed (vv.28 ff.).

“What is even more important, the persons Paul condemns are manifestly not homosexual; what he derogates are homosexual acts committed by apparently heterosexual persons. The whole point of Romans 1, in fact, is to stigmatize persons who have rejected their calling, gotten off the true path they were once on. It would completely undermine the thrust of the argument if the persons in question were not ‘naturally’ inclined to the opposite sex in the same way they were ‘naturally’ inclined to monotheism” [Italicized emphasis added].

In God vs. Gay?, Michaelson supported Boswell’s analysis of the passage in Romans, as follows:

Michaelson, pp. 82-83: “John Boswell and other scholars propose an alternative reading of physin that is important to note as well. Boswell claims that, for Paul, one can only speak of ‘natural’ in terms of ‘natural for.’ It is natural for cows to eat grass, for example, but not for humans to do so. Likewise, *what Paul is condemning is same-sex behavior (chiefly pederasty) engaged in by presumptively heterosexual people, for whom it is not natural.* The principle Boswell relies upon is Aquinas’s: ‘Because of the diverse condition of humans, it happens that some acts are virtuous to some people, as appropriate and suitable to them, while the same acts are immoral for others, as inappropriate to them.’ *Paul does not discuss people for whom homosexuality is natural; to them, his condemnation simply does not apply....*

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“The key term in Romans 1:26-27, for Boswell’s reading and my own is paradidomi—meaning ‘gave them over.’ This is the same term used in Matthew 17:22 (and elsewhere) to describe Christ being given over to the Romans. *Gay people are not ‘given over’ to homosexuality as a consequence of something else;*

they're just gay. Let me speak from personal experience. Like many gay people, my experience is that I was born this way. I am right-handed. I have hazel eyes. I am gay. All of these traits seem, in my experience, to be equally inherent in who I am. Nor was I given over to homosexuality because of something that happened to me. I was not abused as a child. I was not 'recruited' into the 'gay lifestyle.' You'll search my biography in vain for any causes that gave me over to homosexuality" [Written in 2011; italicized emphasis added].

And ever since the end of the nineteenth century, when Magnus Hirschfield first presented scientific evidence to support the view that homosexuality is "natural," other scientists have been following his lead. The scientific evidence that currently supports this position has been summarized above, at pp. 111-13.

VIII. Genesis 1 & 2 ("God Created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve")

In more recent years, most notably in the context of the battle over marriage equality in the United States, Christian opponents of LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Church have tended to rely less on Paul's epistles as scriptural support for their position and to rely more on the Creation accounts in chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis:

Michaelson, pp. 4-5: "'It's Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.'

"We've all heard the cliché, and we all know its meaning: that male and female are at the heart of God's plan for the world, that heterosexuality is the only natural sexuality. No matter what a few other verses may or may not say, many people point to this irreducible fact of nature as proof that only procreative, 'natural' heterosexuality can be part of God's plan."

Michaelson responded to this argument as follows:

Michaelson, pp. 5-6: "... [T]he story of Adam and Eve isn't as simple as it sounds.

"The pairing of Adam and Eve, after all, was the solution to a problem. In the detailed version of the Creation story, they don't just appear on the stage; human coupling is the result of Divine dissatisfaction. God creates the human being, but then has to tinker with the original plan because of the first flaw God finds with all of God's creation. What is that problem?

“Loneliness. ‘It is not good for the human being to be alone,’ God says in Genesis 2:18. In context, this is a shocking pronouncement. Six times God has remarked how good everything is: light, heaven and earth, stars, plants, animals – all of these are ‘good.’ The entirety of creation is ‘very good.’ *Yet suddenly something is not good. Suddenly, God realizes there is something within the world as we find it that is insufficient, something all of us experience in our own lives and strive to transcend: the existential condition of being alone.*

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“Notice, too, that Eve is not the first solution God attempts to the problem of Adam’s loneliness. God first presents Adam with every animal in the world, but none suffices. [Gen. 2:19-20]. *Only human companionship solves the existential problem of aloneness.... Eve is not created, in this narrative, to make children with Adam: this story is about loneliness and love, not procreation and progeny. Indeed, Eve’s femininity is not even essential for her to be an ezer kenegdo—a ‘help-meet,’ someone able to be with Adam on equal terms and be a companion to him....*

“The story of Adam and Eve has been used as a weapon against gay people ... for centuries, but *I read it as validating the importance of human love and companionship in all its forms. If one has the experience of love..., then what is read in Genesis becomes inscribed in the heart: that human relationship is the bridge across existential loneliness.* For most people, this love is experienced in a relationship between a man and a woman.... [But] for about 5 percent of people..., this love is found in a relationship between two men, or between two women.

“I am part of that 5 percent. During my teens and twenties, as I struggled with my sexuality, I had relationships with women, and, as much as I was able, fell in love. But something was always off, even though at the time I couldn’t quite identify it.... *It took me ten years of wrestling, cajoling, self-hating, and self-judging—and finally a serious car accident in 2001, which shook up my body*

and soul—to finally admit the truth: if I wanted true love, the kind that the Song of Songs sings about, my Eve would have to be a Steve” [Emphasis added].

In making this argument, Michaelson echoes the views expressed many years earlier by Father John J. McNeil in The Church and the Homosexual: McNeill, pp. 60-61: “There are two accounts in Genesis of the creation of human sexuality. The first account [in terms of its relative location within the Bible], a version dated around 550-500 B.C., is from the Priestly tradition: ‘So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.’ [Gen. 1:27]. This account clearly indicates that the divine purpose in creating sexual differentiation was procreation. Consequently, the first covenant between God and humanity was a procreative covenant. ‘And God blessed them and said to them: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.’ [Gen. 1:28].

“However, according to scholars the second account [which immediately follows the first account], attributed to the Yahwist author, is much more ancient, dated 950 B.C. *In this account God’s purpose in creating sexual differentiation is not associated with procreation; rather the purpose was companionship and a cure for loneliness.* ‘Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’ ’[Gen. 2:18]. *Thus mutual love and fulfillment is equally a biblical norm for human sexuality.* Many moralists seem to ignore the significance of the Yahwist’s account of creation and assume that procreation is the only biblical norm” [Emphasis added].

See also Nelson, pp. 105-106: “Martin Buber, the great Jewish philosopher and theologian, used the striking phrase, ‘In the beginning is the relation.’ He did not say ‘in the beginning is God,’ nor ‘in the beginning is being itself.’ Rather, relationship is the stuff that constitutes the meaning of everything, even in the beginning. *Physically, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, and culturally we are literally fated to be social selves. We find our own authenticity, our own power, our own capacity for creativity and love when we are most fully in touch with others.*

“To experience relationship as the essence of selfhood does not mean that we must marry (though for some it will mean that). It does not mean that all must be heterosexual (though the majority will probably be that). It does not mean that one must have genital relationships (though the majority perhaps will have them). *Relationship as the essence of selfhood simply and profoundly means that we are most fully ourselves when we are most deeply related to others, both to God and to the creaturely neighbor*” [Emphasis added].

In his book Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality, Professor Jack Rogers challenges the reliance of opponents of LGBTQ+ equality and inclusion on the biblical creation accounts as support for their position:

Rogers, pp. 85-86: “Many who would like to use Romans 1 to oppose equal rights for people who are homosexual ground their position in the creation accounts in Genesis 1-2. The argument goes something like this: homosexual relations are against nature, because they are contrary to the pattern placed within creation. What is that pattern? According to some..., it is monogamous, heterosexual, marriage. *However, Genesis 1-2 contains no reference to homosexuality or marriage.* These chapters were not written to answer the questions that are now being put to them.

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“Indeed, [Professor Victor] Furnish asserts that *Genesis 2:23-25 ‘neither commands nor presumes a ‘monogamous’ relationship between man and woman and ... it offers no comment on ‘marriage’ as such.’* [Gen. 2:22-25 (NRSV) states: “And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.’ Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.”]. Moreover, Old Testament heroes of the faith certainly did *not* model monogamy, but rather followed the patterns of their culture, with multiple wives,

concubines, and slaves as sexual partners. The Bible not only approves, but appears to mandate such behavior. However, as Furnish notes, the prescription to ‘be fruitful and multiply’ cannot mean that everyone must marry and reproduce, for the creation stories ‘take no account whatever of the physically or mentally impaired, the celibate, the impotent—or of those who in modern times have come to be described as ‘homosexual.’

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“I think that the contemporary model of Christian marriage is a good one for heterosexual people: one man and one woman should marry for life and, if they choose, bear and care for children. *This model is not found in Genesis, however. Moreover, it took Western society many centuries to come to it, and even so, half of the heterosexual people in American society do not follow it.* On the other hand, many Christian gay and lesbian people have committed themselves to one lifelong partner. Many care for children.... They seem to have gotten the point of the contemporary Christian model of marriage and are living it out” [Emphasis added].

See also **Robinson**, pp. 112-13: “Some people would have you believe that marriage began with Adam and Eve. But in the account in Genesis where Adam and Eve become one flesh (presumably through their mutual commitment and sexual intimacy), there is no mention of an ‘institution’ of marriage nor any liturgy, vows, promises, or other ritual used to solemnize their relationship. This prehistorical account can only serve as a backdrop to the *meaning (not the ‘institution’)* of marriage that developed over time.

“The fact of the matter is, marriage has not been consistent or unchanging over time. Indeed, even in biblical times, we see a constant evolution in the practice of marriage. *One man and one woman, united in marriage for life, mutually exclusive and ‘faithful’ sexually, and joined because of their love for each other, is a relatively modern notion of marriage. Such was not the case in ancient times*” [Italicized emphasis added].

Interestingly, in Frequently Asked Questions About Sexuality, the Bible, & the Church, Patrick D. Miller, who, like Jack Rogers, was a Presbyterian minister and a theology professor (Princeton Theological Seminary) at the time he wrote his book, looked at essentially the same question addressed by Rogers, in light of the same biblical passages and reached the same conclusion, although the route he took to get there differed:

Smith, “What does Genesis 1-3 teach about sexuality, and how should we live in response?,” Patrick D. Miller, pp. 10-15: “The first three chapters of Genesis do not directly address the church’s questions about sexual relations between persons of the same sex. But the creation narratives do say much about God’s hopes and purposes for the world. And they do begin to suggest the shape of faithful human responses to God’s great, generative act of love in creation—especially when read as part of the whole canon of Scripture. In particular, they describe the centrality of relationships between men and women in the created order. These crucial chapters of Scripture therefore offer important indirect guidance for questions about same-sex relations. But what do they teach?

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“Genesis 1-3 gives no direct, plain-sense teaching about contemporary same-sex relationships. But how might the church understand its indirect teaching...?

“The Genesis stories picture an ideal of enduring companionship of man and woman—one that features sexual relationship for procreation—as central to the human story....

“Of course, for many human beings that particular ideal is not their experience. They may be single and so do not know the man-woman relationship as one of enduring and intimate companionship. They may be childless and so do not know the procreative fruit of the relationship that God intends. They may be homosexual and so do not know the experience of existing in sexual relationship

with a companion of opposite gender. *Yet all of these persons, whose numbers are legion, are truly members of the human community God has made and of the community of faith. As persons who in their varied ways and relationships live out lives of service to God, lives of faithfulness, love, and justice, caring for one another, their place in the community of faith and my judgment of them are not determined by their conformity to the kind of relationship given central place in Genesis*” [Emphasis added].

D.The Condemnation of *Malakoi* and *Arsenokoitai*

BIBLE PASSAGES: 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:9-11

I. 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy

In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Paul sets forth a list of “wrongdoers” who “will not inherit the kingdom of God.” A similar list is set forth in 1 Timothy 1:8-12. As translated in the NRSV, these two passages read as follows:

1 Cor. 6:9-10: “Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, [*‘malakoi,’ translated as*] *male prostitutes*, [*‘arsenokoitai,’ translated as*] *sodomites*, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.”

1 Tim. 1:8-12: “Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately. This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, [*‘arsenokoitai,’ translated as*] *sodomites*, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.”

Those who are opposed to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in the Christian church cite these two passages as further support for their exclusion. Gay Christians and their supporters respond that these passages have been misinterpreted. Resolution of this dispute turns on the meaning of two Greek words, “*malakoi*” (or *malakos* in the singular), which is used in the Corinthians passage, and “*arsenokoitai*” (or *arsenokoites* in the singular), which is used in

both passages. The NRSV translation of the Bible (1989) translates “malakoi” as “male prostitutes” and “arsenokoitai” as “sodomites.” See above.

Other translations of these two Greek terms, in other translations of the Bible, include the following (listed in chronological order):

King James Version (1611), Webster’s Bible Translation (1833), American Standard Version (1960) “effeminate” and “abusers of themselves with mankind”

Young’s Literal Translation (1862) “effeminate” and “sodomites”

English Revised Version (1881) “effeminate” and “abusers of themselves with men”

Darby Bible Translation (1890) those who “make women of themselves” or “abuse themselves with men”

Berean Study Bible (1936) “men who submit to or perform homosexual acts”

Revised Standard Version (1952) both terms together = “homosexuals”

New American Standard Bible (1960) and Berean Literal Bible (2016)
 “effeminate” and “homosexuals”

Jerusalem Bible (1966) “catamites” (passive) and “sodomites” (active)
 [in the context of sexual intercourse between males]

Good News for Modern Man (1966) both terms together = “homosexual perverts”

New International Version (1978) “male prostitutes” and “homosexual offenders”

New Living Translation (1996)	“male prostitutes” and “[those who] practice homosexuality”
World English Bible (2000) and International Standard Version (2011)	“male prostitutes” and “homosexuals”
English Standard Translation (2001)	both terms together = “men who practice homosexuality”
NET Bible (2005)	“passive homosexual partners” and “practicing homosexuals”
Christian Standard Bible (2017)	both terms together = “males who have sex with males”

Notes about biblical translations

It appears that the first translation of the Bible to refer explicitly to “homosexuals” or “homosexuality” was the Berean Study Bible, which was published in 1936. Prior to that, the original translation of “malakoi” was “effeminate” (more recent translations have frequently translated the term as “male prostitutes”), while the original translation of “arsenokoitai” related to men who “abuse themselves,” an apparent reference to masturbation. [John Boswell, David Day and Bishop Eugene Robinson have all pointed out that the early Church for many years interpreted the term “malakos” (the singular form of “malakoi”) as a reference to masturbation and only later gave it a connotation of homosexuality. **Boswell**, p. 107; **Day**, pp. 112-13, **Robinson**, p. 89.

Ever since 1936, however, the vast majority of biblical translations of 1 Cor. 6:9-10 and 1 Tim. 1:8-12 have included the terms “homosexuals,” “homosexuality” or “sodomites.” Yet, as we have already pointed out in Lessons 1 and 3, above, whatever the terms “malakoi” and “arsenokoitai” may mean, they

clearly do **not** mean either “homosexuals” or “sodomites.” Neither the word “homosexual” nor the concept of sexual orientation was known to the biblical writers. The biblical writers believed that **all** people were naturally attracted to people of the opposite sex and that anyone who engaged in same-gender sexual activities was acting contrary to his or her own “nature.” The word “homosexual” and the concept of differing sexual orientations originated in Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century C.E. [See Lesson 1 above, at pp. 18-19]. As for the term “sodomites,” none of the ancient manuscripts containing the biblical texts ever used that term, not even as a reference to the people who lived in Sodom. [See below at p. 160]. The terms “sodomy” and “sodomite” originated in **nonbiblical** writings that were written **after** Paul had already composed his first letter to the Corinthians. [See Lesson 3 above at pp. 103-07 & 109-10].

Analysis of the Scriptural Passages

Although there are some variations in their analysis, those who take positions favorable to the LGBTQ+ community all seem to make the same basic arguments, which are most clearly and concisely set forth in the following source: **Robinson**, pp. 88-90: “In the letter to the Corinthians, amid the list of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God, Paul uses two Greek words: malakoi and arsenokoitai. The first is a common Greek word meaning ‘soft,’ and elsewhere in Scripture it is used to describe a garment. Nowhere else in Scripture is it used to describe a person. The early Church seems to have understood it as a person with a ‘soft’ or weak morality. Later, it would come to denote (and be translated as) those who engage in masturbation, or ‘those who abuse themselves.’ In our time, with masturbation having been more popularly accepted, this word has often been used to denote homosexuals. *All we actually, factually, know about the word is that it means ‘soft.’*”

“The Greek word arsenokoitai is an even greater mystery. It is found nowhere else in Scripture [only in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy, see above]—nor is there any record of it being used in any other contemporaneous text. *We have nothing, neither internal to the Scriptures, nor external to them, to give us*

guidance as to its meaning.

“When such a mysterious word appears in an ancient text, the translator must do something with it. Even with commonly understood words, a translator has choices to make about which English word best communicates the word’s meaning. In the case of a completely unknown word like arsenokoitai, the danger of mistranslation is heightened. *Many translators [for example, the Jerusalem Bible, see above] have chosen to take the two words together, understanding the Greek word for ‘soft’ as applying to the receptive partner in male-to-male anal intercourse [that is, ‘catamites’], and have taken the arsenokoitai to mean the active partner [that is, ‘sodomites’]. This is speculation at best.*

“Others have speculated that this receptive/active relationship applies to a practice (that would have been known to Paul) in which an older man took a teenage boy ‘under his wing,’ taught him the ways of the world, and used him sexually. If this were its true meaning, we would all condemn such a practice as child abuse! No one is arguing for acceptance of such a practice.

“The same pairing of words is used in Paul’s First Letter to Timothy, with no further light being shed on its meaning. [NOTE: Bishop Robinson’s assertion is incorrect here—only the term arsenokoitai appears in the First Timothy passage; the term malakoi does not]. *Whatever its meaning, there is no reason to believe that homosexual men or women, as we now understand them, are the targets of Paul’s condemnations.*

“Yet we can understand the prejudice and bigotry that have resulted from the ambitious, if erroneous, translations of these words: depending on the translation, the words ‘pervert,’ ‘sodomite,’ and even ‘homosexual’ have been used. *If an unsuspecting believer picks up his Bible and reads the word ‘homosexual’ in one of these passages, the reader assumes that Paul meant what we mean by that word, and the condemnation of homosexuals seems unequivocally clear. **The fact is, we can only speculate about what Paul meant in his use of these words.** What we do know is that when the meaning of a word or passage is unclear, the translator’s own prejudices are apt to play a part in the*

words used to translate the unknowable meaning of the Greek. Do we really want to base our condemnation of an entire group of people on a shaky translation of an unknowable Greek word? A reasonable person, not to mention a compassionate Christian, would not” [Bold and italicized emphasis added].

See also **Rogers**, pp. 73-75: “Opponents of equal rights for people who are homosexual also cite a pair of New Testament texts—1 Corinthians 6:9-11, and 1 Timothy 1:3-13—as informing us about homosexuality. What makes these two passages distinct is that, in their original Greek, they contain two words, arsenokoites and malakos, that some scholars argue refer to male homosexual activity. As a result, a disproportionate amount of scholarly attention has been given to these texts and these two words. But to give attention to these two words is to embark on a journey of linguistic technicality. *Brian Blount, professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary, notes that the meaning of these words is not at all clear, and their reference to homosexuality as such has been challenged.* Martti Nissinen observes that both words appear in lists of vices that seem to reflect general concerns of Hellenistic Jews about the deplorable state of Greek society.

“...*Because the words occur in lists with no context, it is difficult to know exactly what they mean.* Compounding the situation, Nissinen notes that Paul, in the list he cites, is using arsenokoites for the first time ever either in Greek or Jewish literature, thus making it very difficult to interpret.

“...Dale Martin disagrees with those who read the two words, arsen (male) and koites (bed), as one and thereby create a new term for men who have sex with men. Martin objects that “this approach is linguistically invalid,’ using as an illustration that the English word ‘understand’ has nothing to do with either standing or being under.... *Martin concludes, after analyzing Greek writings both secular and Christian, that arsenokoites probably refers to ‘some kind of economic exploitation, probably by sexual means: rape or sex by economic coercion, prostitution, pimping, or something of the sort.’* He further asserts that no one should be allowed to get away with claiming that ‘of course’ the term refers to

‘men who have sex with other men.’

“The term malakos is somewhat easier to understand because it is a common word. It literally means soft and often connotes effeminacy, which in that culture was treated as a moral failing. Nissinen observes that, in the patriarchal culture of the time, lack of self-control and yielding to pleasures were both considered signs of effeminacy....

“In 1 Timothy 1:10, which many scholars date later than Paul’s work, arsenokoites appears in a list of vices. The NRSV translates it with the ambiguous word ‘sodomites.’ *Victor Furnish notes that the word ‘sodomite’ is not used in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, not even to mean ‘a resident of Sodom.’ It was introduced in English in a half dozen Old Testament passages in the King James Version of the Bible in 1611.* Nor does the word appear in the Greek text of the New Testament. [See also Michaelson, p. 105, quoted above in Lesson 3 at pp. 109-10: “When male homosexuality did eventually become of specific interest to the Church, it was originally because too many priests were engaging in it. The term ‘sodomy’ originated not in the Bible but with eleventh-century theologian Peter Damian’s attempts to eradicate clerical sin. Sodomy was not a sin of the people; it was misconduct on the part of priests who were meant to be celibate.”]. In 1 Timothy 1:10, ‘the fact that arsenokoitai [the plural of arsenokoites, which the NRSV translates as ‘sodomites’] is followed by slave traders, a group who exploited others, adds weight to Martin’s evidence for arsenokoitai as sexual exploiters of some sort, since the vices in the list were often grouped according to their similarity to other vices in the list.

“Nissinen argues, ‘The modern concept of ‘homosexuality’ should by no means be read into Paul’s text, nor can we assume that Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 6:9 ‘condemn all homosexual relations’ in all times and places and ways. The meanings of the words are too vague to justify this claim, and Paul’s words should not be used for generalizations that go beyond his experience and world. [See above, at p. 132]” [Italicized emphasis added].

Compare Vines, pp. 17-19: “In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Paul warns against those who

will not inherit the kingdom of God. And then he lists 10 different types of people who will not inherit the kingdom. Because the dispute here is about translation, I'll start with the King James Version of this passage, which was published more than 400 years ago and so predates this modern controversy. It reads:

'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.' [Emphasis added by Vines].

Our key words for the discussion here are the words translated as 'effeminate' and 'abusers of themselves with mankind.' *These somewhat ambiguous translations in the King James are consistent with how these words were actually translated into English for hundreds of years; some kind of immorality or abuse, but specifically what kind was never stated. This changed halfway through the last century, when some Bible translators began connecting these terms directly to homosexuality. The first occurrence of this shift came in 1946, when a translation of the Bible was published that simply stated that 'homosexuals' will not inherit the kingdom of God. Several decades later, after the distinction between sexual orientation and sexual behavior came to be more widely understood, this was changed to say that only 'practicing homosexuals' will not inherit the kingdom. But these terms and concepts are completely alien to the biblical world.... And so translations of these words that suggest that Paul was using these distinctly modern concepts and categories are highly suspect. But today, there are many translations of the Bible—though certainly not all of them—that link these terms in some way to homosexuality, rendering them variously as 'males who practice homosexuality,' 'men who have sex with men,' or 'male prostitutes.' What is the basis for this shift in translation?*

"The word translated as 'abusers of themselves with mankind' in the King James is a compound word. In the Greek it is 'arsenokoites,' 'arsen' meaning 'male,' and 'koites' meaning 'bed,' generally with a sexual connotation. And so *the*

*argument is that we can determine the meaning of this term from its etymology: male plus bed in the plural form must, then, refer to men who sleep with other men. But there are several problems with this approach. First, simply looking at the word's component parts doesn't necessarily tell us what it means. There are many English words where this approach would fail: for example, the words 'understand,' 'butterfly,' 'honeymoon.' The component parts here—'honey' and 'moon'—really don't tell us anything about what that word actually means. In order to understand what a word means, you have to consider how it is used in context. The problem with the word 'abusers of themselves with mankind'—arsenokoites—is that it was used extremely rarely in ancient Greek. In fact, Paul's use of it in 1 Corinthians is considered to be its first recorded use anywhere. And after Paul, the few places that it appears tend to be in lists of general vices, which are not the most helpful of contexts. Fortunately, however, many of these lists are grouped by category, and *this Greek word consistently appears among sins that are of a primarily economic nature rather than those that are primarily sexual. This and some other contextual data indicate that the term referred to some kind of economic exploitation, likely through sexual means. This may have involved forms of same-sex behavior, but coercive and exploitative forms.* There is no contextual support for linking this term to loving, faithful relationships.*

“The other debated word in this passage, translated as ‘effeminate’ in the King James, is ‘malakos’ in the Greek. This was a very common word in ancient Greek, and it literally means ‘soft.’ It was used as an insult in a wide variety of contexts—to refer to those who were considered weak-willed, cowardly, or lazy. And all of these failings were particularly associated with women in ancient times; hence, the rendering ‘effeminate.’ In a specifically sexual context, the word was used to describe general licentiousness and debauchery, but this wasn't limited to any particular kind of relationship. *Men who took the passive role in sexual relations were sometimes labeled [malakos], which is the basis on which some modern translators connect it to homosexuality. But so many people were labeled*

this term for so many different things—most of them not even sexual in nature, and most of the sexual ones about men in relationships with women—that there is no valid basis for picking out one possible [meaning] out of dozens and saying that that must have been what Paul had in mind. It would be more faithful to the text to return to the ambiguity that prevailed for more than 1,900 years of translation. The notion that Paul is singling out gay people here and saying that they will not inherit the kingdom of God simply doesn't hold up under scrutiny.

“In the final passage, 1 Timothy 1:10, the first word—‘abusers of themselves with mankind’ [arsenokoites]*—reappears in a list of people Paul says the law was written against. Here, the translation is ‘them that defile themselves with mankind.’ The translation issues and debates here are the same as those from 1 Corinthians. Again, the strongest inference that can be drawn from other uses of this term is that it referred to economic exploitation through sexual coercion—possibly involving same-sex activity, but a very different kind than what we are discussing [that is, loving, faithful relationships]” [Emphasis added].*

In his analysis, Michaelson notes that the passage at 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 occurs in the context of Paul's condemnation of believers who take their disputes with other believers to the pagan courts for resolution rather than seeking resolution within the Christian community:

Michaelson, p. 89: “Really, what is Paul writing about in these verses? He's critiquing an entire society and ‘shaming’ Christians for continuing to associate with it. Paul specifically mentions ‘idolaters’ in between pornos (sexually immoral), and moichos (adulterers), malakoi, and arsenokoitai. Is this just an accident? Surely not. Surely *what Paul is talking about here is an entire ‘pagan’ culture in which idolatry and lasciviousness went hand-in-hand.* Paul was painting with a broad brush a society of depravity. People sinned sexually in every possible configuration: adultery, general immorality, general looseness of morals, and some kind of cultic homosexuality or prostitution as well. Just as in Romans, where these transgressions were the signs of a society that had turned away from God, here they are listed as signs of a society whose judges are not to be trusted

and whose values are not to be emulated.

“Certainly, in this litany of lusts, we do not see anything resembling stable, sanctified same-sex relationships. Here the situation is similar to that of the Sodom story. Whoever Paul is describing, they are lust-filled, immoral people who have turned their backs on God. Now, is that true of lesbians and gay men today? Not all of them. Therefore, they can’t possibly accord with these obscure Greek terms....” [Emphasis added].

Miner and Connoley’s lengthy analysis of the issue, **Miner & Connoley** at pp. 16-22, is very similar to Rogers’. See above. Like Rogers, they conclude (at pp. 20-21) that “arsenokoitai refers to instances when one male uses his superior power or position to take sexual advantage of another....[I]t is best understood as a reference to men who force themselves sexually on others.” Unlike Rogers, they conclude (at p. 18) that, “Because here Paul uses malakoi in a list of sexual sins, it is possible to infer that he may have been referring specifically to male prostitutes, rather than soft men in general.” Contrast **Boswell**, pp. 106-07 (noting the wide variety of possible meanings of the term malakoi, including “sick,” “liquid,” “cowardly,” “refined,” “weak willed,” “delicate,” “gentle,” “debauched,” “licentious,” “loose,” “wanting in self-control,” “unrestrained,” and “wanton”; also noting that “[t]he word is never used in Greek to designate gay people as a group or even in reference to homosexual acts generally, and it often occurs in writings contemporary with the Pauline epistles in reference to heterosexual persons or activity”).

In his analysis of 1 Cor. 6:9-10, Robin Scroggs argues that the term malakos referred to a particular subcategory of pederasty, which he characterizes as “the effeminate call-boy” (“Among several words used to slander such persons was malakos, a Greek adjective literally meaning ‘soft’ but metaphorically, ‘effeminate.’ It is this word which appears in a list of vices Paul gives in 1 Cor. 6:9-10”). Scroggs describes these youths as follows:

Scroggs, pp. 100-01: “*There is a final category of person involved in pederastic practices to which we must pay careful attention[--the effeminate call boy]. This is*

so because it may have been of particular influence on New Testament attitudes toward homosexuality.... [I]t was certainly a category that was widely excoriated by Greco-Roman culture itself. In fact, if this culture was united in judgment about any aspect of homosexuality, it was its universal negative assessment of the effeminate call-boy. I coin this term to compensate for the failure of the ancients to come up with one of their own (for them these people were simply prostitutes, pornoi). By 'call-boy' I mean they were free (i.e., nonslave) youths, or adults, who sold themselves to individuals for purposes of providing sexual gratification. With 'effeminate' I use the most common description of such persons in the texts themselves.

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"When such youths decided the practice was attractive and remunerative enough, they could essentially make their living this way, often by getting taken into someone's house as a 'mistress' for varying periods of time. As they grew older, many of them gave added emphasis to the charge of effeminacy by trying to prolong their youthfulness and at times by imitating the toilette of women. Coiffured and perfumed hair, rouged face, careful removal of body hair, and feminine clothes are often part of the descriptions of such prostitutes.

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"Thus such persons were seen as effeminate, having lost their masculinity and having adopted the practices of women, allowing themselves to be used as women....

"CONCLUSION

"I have been able to give only a superficial overview of the basic kinds of pederastic practices Paul and other early Christians would have heard about. That Paul would have actually known people who participated in such relationships is hardly likely. What he 'knew' probably originated rather from the rumor mills of the day, particularly perhaps from Jewish suspicions about Gentile activities. Since rumors are often larger than life, it may well be that what Paul 'knew' were

stories and claims of the more sensationalist sort.... [Nevertheless,] *it is not hard to imagine that Paul's basic attitude toward pederasty could have been seriously influenced by passing a few coiffured and perfumed call-boys in the marketplace*" [Italicized emphasis added].

Scroggs further concludes that arsenokoites is a related term:

Scroggs, pp. 106-108: "Malakos. This word has been sufficiently examined above and there a twofold conclusion was drawn. First, the word, literally meaning soft and by extension 'effeminate,' in no way ever assumed a technical status referring to pederastic relations or persons. Second, by association, however, the word occurs in several texts *pointing in pejorative ways* to the 'call-boy,' the youth who consciously imitated feminine styles and ways and who walked the thin line between passive homosexual activity for pleasure and that for pay. Used in association with another more explicit term or within a context of pederasty, it would clearly point to such a person and always in a negative way. That is, in sexual contexts it is never a neutral term.

"Malakos would, thus, carry a weight in a catalog of vices which terms more neutral in the vocabulary of sexuality would not. Furthermore, it would refer to a specific dimension of pederasty which, as we have seen, neither proponent nor opponent of pederasty ever defended. It is not pederasty as such which is pointed to by malakos but only a specific and detested form of it.

"Arsenokoites. While malakos is ambiguous to a greater or lesser extent, the word arsenokoites has always seemed more straightforwardly to express a homosexual act....

"Nevertheless, the term is strange. As far as I have been able to determine, its earliest extant occurrence is in 1 Cor. 6:10. Apparently, then, *it has no recoverable history prior to Paul's use of it*....

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"....If the word has no prehistory in Greek literature—and I am certain that it does not appear in the Greek pagan discussions of pederasty we have analyzed

in previous chapters—then its origin and meaning may be sought in another language. That is, the word may be a translation of a foreign term or phrase.

“I have argued above that in early rabbinic legal discussions, the term most often used to describe male homosexuality is mishkav zakur, ‘lying with a male.’ Arsenekoites can then be seen as a literal translation of the Hebrew phrase.... Thus the word arsenekoites originated in Hellenistic Jewish circles as an attempt to translate the rabbinic quasi-legal term into understandable Greek, perhaps with the deliberate intention of avoiding contact with the usual Greek terminology.

“.... [S]ince in rabbinic discussion the mishkav zakur is the active, not the passive partner, it would function the same way in its Greek version, denoting the adult, who took the active role in the sexual encounter. But to what kind of role and what kind of relationship does it point?

“In and of itself the word does not help answer that question, but seen in relationship to malakos, the issue becomes clarified. If the malakos points to the effeminate call-boy, then the arsenekoites in this context must be the active partner who keeps the malakos as a ‘mistress’ or who hires him on occasion to satisfy his sexual desires.... A very specific dimension of pederasty is being denounced with these two terms. Seen in this way, the list shares the disapproval of this form of pederasty in agreement with the entire literature of the Greco-Roman world on this topic” [Emphasis added].

Another comprehensive analysis of the issue, by Professor Robert L. Brawley, of the McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, was included in the collection of essays in Frequently Asked Questions About Sexuality, the Bible, and the Church:

Smith, “What does 1 Corinthians 6:9 teach about sexuality, and how should we live in response?” Robert L. Brawley, pp. 35-38: “In 1 Cor. 6:9-10, Paul gives a long list of ‘wrongdoers [who] will not inherit the kingdom of God.’ Presbyterian New Testament scholars Paul Achtemeier and Marion Soards, whom I hold in high esteem, think that when 1 Cor. 6:9 uses the Greek terms malakoi and

arsenokoitai, Paul clearly is talking about same-sex erotic behavior among males and excluding such people from being heirs of God's kingdom. Thus, in the contemporary debate about the ordination of non-celibate gays and lesbians, they use this text to limit the issue to 'homoerotic practice' aside from any other criteria that make people hold interpersonal relationships dear.

"But is it really so clear that 1 Cor. 6:9 is about 'homoerotic practice' and is it really so clear who is excluded from being heirs of God's kingdom? *I suggest that there is actually a lack of clarity. The lack of clarity shows up in several ways. One is in the variety of translations. Another is the difficulty we have in making direct correlations between biblical texts and the way we construe reality today. Most importantly, however, the argument about clarity does not adequately consider the context in 1 Corinthians 6, and this context is eye-opening with respect to how Paul deals with sexual behavior among the Corinthians.*

"Translations. Though malakoi literally means soft, it is often used in Greek to describe effeminate men, and many interpreters suggest that this identifies receptive partners in same-sex erotic behavior among males. One would be hard-pressed to deduce anything about a receptive partner from the King James translation which simply says 'effeminate' or from Luther's translation quite literally as 'weakling.' The Revised Standard Version combines the two terms malakoi and arsenokoitai into one translation as 'sexual perverts,' a questionable move in translating, which the New Revised Standard Version tries to 'correct' by reverting to two terms. With respect to malakoi the NRSV translation is 'male prostitutes.' *When the translation tradition moves between the extremes of 'weakling' and 'male prostitutes,' this indicates lack of clarity in our understanding of the term. Simply the variety in translations is one indication that the church has no sustained tradition of clarity about the meaning of malakoi in 1 Cor. 6:9.*

"The problem of clarity is perhaps even more difficult with arsenokoitai. 1 Cor. 6:9 is the first place we know of in all of Greek literature in which this term is used. Paul apparently coined it. So how does one know what a word means the first time it ever appears? Granted, we know some things from the formation of

the word. It is compounded from a term for ‘bed’ and a term for ‘male’ with an agency ending—implicitly one who beds a male. Again, a quick review of translations shows the uncertainty in the meaning. The King James Version has ‘abusers of themselves with mankind’; Luther has an equivalent of ‘violate of boys,’ perhaps implying pederasty; and the NRSV introduces ‘sodomites,’ an astonishing innovation in the translation tradition.

“Correlation. A further difficulty is attempting to correlate the biblical text with the way we interpret reality.... [I]t *is not at all clear how we should correlate malakoi and arsenokoitai with realities of our time.* Do the words refer to men who engage in promiscuous sex with men? Do the words refer to women at all? Can they be stretched to include men and women in same-sex relationships marked by mutuality and covenant fidelity in sickness and health, in joy and in sorrow—relationships that Paul could scarcely imagine? *The church faces uncertainty not only in translating malakoi and arsenokoitai but also in knowing how to correlate these terms with sexual behavior today.*

“Context. The context is eye-opening. 1 Cor. 6:9-10 lists categories of human beings who are excluded from being heirs of God’s kingdom. But in 6:11 Paul says that even though some of the Corinthians used to belong to these categories, they no longer do: ‘And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.’ At first glance it appears obvious that when the Corinthians became believers, they changed their behavior. But as true as this may be, Paul spends the rest of the chapter dealing with the sexual behavior of some heterosexual males in the Corinthian Christian community. Even after being washed, sanctified, and justified, some of the Corinthian believers were still engaging in sexual intercourse with prostitutes.

“The remainder of the chapter is Paul’s attempt to deal with their behavior....

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“In sum, when Paul is faced with sexual behavior from some believers in the Corinthian congregation which does not fit with his own expectations, he does not fit these Corinthian believers into the categories of 6:9-10, which would exclude them from being heirs of God’s kingdom. On the contrary, his way of dealing with their behavior is to remind them of their relationship with Christ, with the Holy Spirit, and with God with the expectation that they would live out their sexuality as members of a community that lives in dependence on the grace of God.

“1 Corinthians 6 distinguishes two groups of people—those who are excluded as heirs of God’s kingdom in 6:9-10 and those who in the community of believers stand in a relationship with Christ, with the Holy Spirit, and with God (6:12-20). Surprisingly, some Corinthians whose sexual behavior does not fit Paul’s expectations are still included in the second category.

“The analogy to our own struggles about sexuality is strong. Even if this text suggested that all same-sex erotic activity were sinful—and it is by no means clear that it does—it still would not offer grounds for a categorical exclusion of non-celibate gay and lesbian Christians from the ministries of the church. As with all Christians, gay and lesbian Christians live their lives as part of a community in relation to Christ, to the Spirit, and to God. All of our lives, including our sexual lives, are caught up in and transformed by this relationship. 1 Corinthians 6 reminds us of this good news. It reminds us of the importance of sexual ethics. It calls us to glorify God in our bodies. But it offers no support to our attempts to exclude from ministry those whom God has bought with a price and joined to the body of Christ” [Italicized emphasis added].

All of the theories presented above seem eminently reasonable. The problem is that there is simply no way of determining which, if any, of the suggested translations actually reflects the meaning that Paul and his disciple [the author of 1 Timothy] intended when they wrote these disputed passages. In sum, the bottom line is that these two unknown and unknowable Greek words, one of which was apparently invented by Paul, the other of which has numerous meanings but no clear meaning as a reference to a category of

people, cannot provide the basis for a policy of excluding LGBTQ+ persons from Judeo-Christian religious communities.

PART THREE – THE AFFIRMATIVE CASE FOR LGBTQ+ INCLUSION

INTRODUCTION TO PART THREE

After separately analyzing each of the seven biblical passages that refer to sexual activity between members of the same sex, see above at pp. 77-78, Episcopalian Bishop Gene Robinson reached the following conclusions:

Robinson, p. 91: “Whatever one makes of these seven passages in Scripture, it seems clear that they must not be used in the service of condemning homosexuality as we know it today. Simply stated, the Bible does not speak to the questions we are asking today about men and women who are affectionally oriented toward people of the same gender. Taken in their own contexts, these texts speak to situations and from understandings different from our own.

“Let me be clear. I am not asserting that the Bible speaks affirmatively of same-gender intimate, sexual relationships. All seven of these passages are negative. They simply are not addressing the questions we are asking in light of modern understandings of psychosexual relationships.

“There is, however, much in Scripture about compassion for one’s fellow human beings, a call for empathy and justice for the marginalized, and a standard of honesty, mutuality, and love in all relationships. In the end, God believes in love. Therefore, I would argue that Scripture gives us great and lasting guidance for the conduct of our relationships, whether they be with strangers, friends, or lifelong partners. But the Bible simply does not offer the wholesale condemnation of the loving relationships of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people we are told it does.”

Bishop Robinson’s analysis, as stated above, is clearly echoed in the following passage from the introduction to biblical scholar Jay Michaelson’s God vs. Gay? The Religious Case for Equality:

Michaelson, Introduction at p.xiv: “While there are half a dozen verses that may say something about some forms of same-sex behavior, what they have to say is ambiguous, limited, and widely misunderstood. Meanwhile, there are hundreds of *other* verses that teach us about the importance of love, justice, and sacred relationships. I know it may sound unusual or even heretical to say so, but *after substantial research (both within my Jewish tradition and, as a scholar of religion and an interfaith religious activist, in multiple Christian ones as well), years of soul-searching, and years of working with religious gay people, I sincerely believe that our shared religious values call upon us to support the equality, dignity, and full inclusion of sexual and gender minorities—that is, of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people*” [Emphasis added].

Part Three of this course sets forth an affirmative case for the inclusion and full participation of LGBTQ+ people in Judeo-Christian religious communities (“the Church” and “the Synagogue”). This affirmative case is based on five “shared religious values [or beliefs that] call upon us to support the equality, dignity, and full inclusion of sexual and gender minorities,” as Michaelson characterizes them: (1) God is a loving God who cannot be reconciled with “the tyranny of the closet”; (2) the commandments governing how Christians and Jews should treat others require us to treat members of the LGBTQ+ community with empathy, compassion, and reciprocity; (3) honesty and integrity are sacred; “coming out is a religious act” and a key to learning to love oneself; (4) the actions and teachings of Jesus demonstrated his commitment to welcoming “the stranger” and protecting the marginalized; they support a policy of LGBTQ+ inclusion; and (5) a just God requires God’s people to provide justice, including fairness and equality, for the LGBTQ+ “strangers” who dwell among us.

As indicated by this statement of “shared religious values,” central to these arguments is an understanding of (a) the psychological and sociological concepts of “living in the closet” and “coming out of the closet,” that is, the decisions of LGBTQ+ individuals to either conceal or reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity, and (b) the characterization of LGBTQ+ people as “strangers” in our

midst or “marginalized” people within the meaning of biblical teachings on these subjects. We began this course with a lengthy history of the birth of the gay liberation movement in the United States, a history that focused on the forces and conditions that kept almost all LGBTQ+ people firmly locked in their “closets” for decades but eventually caused many of them to rise up in rebellion and to break out. That history will hopefully provide a valuable perspective on the issues that will be discussed in this Part Three.

**LESSON 5--FIVE FUNDAMENTAL BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES THAT
SUPPORT A POLICY OF LGBTQ INCLUSION (Nos. 1 & 2)**

**No.1 God is a Loving God Who Cannot Be Reconciled with
“the Tyranny of the Closet”**

BIBLE PASSAGES: Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:7-21; Song of Solomon (Song of Songs); Gen. 2:15-3:24 (the story of Adam & Eve)

I. God is a Loving God

At the outset of chapter 2 of God vs. Gay?, Jay Michaelson cites a number of scriptural passages as well as other sources for the fundamental biblical principle that God is a loving God. Indeed, it is arguable that this is *the most fundamental principle* that runs throughout the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament are filled with scriptural passages and biblical stories that support this claim, including the following:

Ex. 34:6-7—“The LORD passed before [Moses], and proclaimed: ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression, yet by no means clearing the guilty....”

Ps. 86:4-5 & 7—“Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.... In the day of my trouble I call on you, for you will answer me.”

Ps. 107:1--“O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.” [See also **Psalms 136** with its repeated refrain, in each of its 26

verses: “for his steadfast love endures forever.”]

Hos. 11:1-4—“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me.... Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.”

Jn. 3:16-17—“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Rom. 5:5-8—“...God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person.... But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”

1 Jn. 3:1—“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.”

1 Jn. 4:9-10—“God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

1 Jn. 4:16b & 19—“.... God is love, and those who abide in love, abide in God, and God abides in them.... We love because he first loved us.”

In Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture, the Episcopalian Bishop John Shelby Spong reflected upon the significance of this basic principle, that God is a loving God, and its impact on the central issue before us, that is, the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in the Church and the Synagogue:

Spong I, pp. 237-39: “The experience of Jesus was an experience of love. This love

was a powerful life-affirming reality. *It was love that broke every human barrier and that swept over every human prejudice. It was love that would not be confined by the Jewish limits in which it was born.* It embraced the Syro-Phoenician woman and the Samaritan. It was love that put human life before religious rules. (The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath). It was love that transcended the religious definitions of what was thought to be clean and unclean. Not only gentiles, but lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors, and thieves were transformed with the power of that love.

“No barriers could be erected around that love of God that was seen in the life of Jesus.... *Such love called for openness, for the death of prejudice, for the radical insecurity of a fully accessible humanity, for the end of human isolation....*

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“We cannot ... escape the power of the fact that Jesus means love—divine, penetrating, opening, life-giving ecstatic love. *Such love is the very essence of what we mean by God. God is love. Jesus is love. God was in Christ.... That is where holiness is met. The God who is love cannot be approached in worship except through the experience of living out that unconditional quality of love.* That is why the church must be broken open and freed of its noninclusive prejudices. That is why slavery, segregation, sexism, bigotry, and homophobia tear at the very soul of the church.

“*A church that calls itself the body of Christ cannot reject or oppress or define pejoratively one who is the recipient of the overwhelming love of God.* To do so is to deny Christ. It is to play church....” [Emphasis added].

II. The Value of Human Love

Scripture also teaches us that there is a strong and unbreakable link between God’s love of humankind and human love, that is, the love of one person for another. This link is eloquently described in chapter 4 of John’s first epistle as follows:

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know

God for God is love.... In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

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“God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.... We love because he first loved us. Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this; those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.”

(1 Jn. 4:7-8, 10-12, 16b & 19-21).

In his book God Believes in Love: Straight Talk About Gay Marriage, which was published in 2012, the Episcopalian Bishop Gene Robinson interprets this passage from John’s first epistle as meaning that one can come to know God through the loving of another human being. Specifically, Bishop Robinson writes: **Robinson**, pp. 187-88 & 190: “God is all about love. Whatever is at the center of the universe, whatever gives meaning to creaturely existence, whatever we mean by ‘God,’ it is all about love. *There is no more fundamental belief among people of faith.*

“Many adjectives are used in the holy texts of major religions to describe God—what God is like, as experienced by human beings, what God is apt to favor, what God abhors. In Christianity, God is defined quite simply in the New Testament’s First Letter of John: ‘[L]ove is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love’ (4:7b-8).

“God is elusive because of His boundlessness. No religion can claim to know all there is to know about God. Each religion, and each practitioner of religion, can

only claim to know a part of God. But this is a startling claim that the First Letter of John makes, that to know love is to know God. *I take this to mean that there is something about loving another human being that participates in the reality that is God.* For those who desire to know the nature of God, indeed to ‘know’ God, this is very significant because it plots a pathway to the Divine Mystery. It beckons to those who want to experience the divine: *‘If you want to know God, you will find God in the loving of another person.’*

“It is in marriage that this love for another person, one who is not your own blood, reaches its deepest and fullest expression. It is in marriage, at least in its ideal form, that the love for another person reaches its pinnacle, in which the love, care, and regard for another equal and occasionally exceed the love of one’s self.

“... Christian theology maintains that in loving another human being, a love that at times becomes selfless, we have a window into the kind of love God has for us, which is infinitely selfless. In those moments in which I care more deeply for the welfare, happiness, and joy of my spouse than for my own, I get a glimpse of the infinitely selfless love God has for me and all humankind. Indeed, it is the way we come to ‘know’ God.

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“And here is the salient point related to our conversation about gay marriage. *All of this applies to couples of the same gender. Nothing in the foregoing discussion is any less true for two people of the same gender than for two people of the opposite gender.* The context provided by a relationship that is mutually committed and mutually trustworthy is as important to a homosexual couple as to their heterosexual counterpart” [Emphasis added].

Bishop Robinson then goes on to emphasize the important role of sexual intimacy in this process of coming to know God through the loving of another person. And he again argues that these principles are just as true for same-gender couples as they are for opposite-gender couples:

Robinson, pp. 191-92: “Most of us know the difference between having sex and making love. Perhaps most of us have experienced both. There is no doubt that the two experiences are radically different. Having sex with someone is scratching a biological and physiological itch.... But the level of fulfillment only goes so far.

“In contrast, the experience of making love is apt to be more fulfilling and joyful because of the synchronicity of saying with my body what my heart is feeling. The integration of body and spirit is what makes sex great! The experience of integration and wholeness is profound, and the sexual intimacy itself builds up and deepens the relationship. *To desire another human being and to be desired by that other human being is a metaphor for God’s desire to be in relationship with us. To connect with someone on that deep level is often described by people as a spiritual experience, and so it is. To connect with an ‘other’ in such a way as to forget the ‘otherness’ and to experience ‘oneness’ is a profoundly spiritual matter. It too is a metaphor for the connectedness of all the creation to the Creator.*

“Again, there is nothing in this discussion of sexual intimacy that is limited to heterosexual people. Nothing about vulnerability, trustworthiness, and lovemaking is any different for same-gender couples.... *There is simply nothing relevant about sexual orientation in the desire we feel to be one with another human being. Why, then, would we seek to withhold from gay and lesbian people our acceptance of and support for this very human and profoundly spiritual experience?*” [Emphasis added].

At p. 16 of God vs. Gay?, Michaelson similarly writes about the value of human love as a reflection of God’s love: “Love is more than the solution to the conundrum of aloneness. [See Lesson 4 above, at pp. 148-50]. Throughout the Bible, it is celebrated as the consummate human activity and a gateway to holiness.... As Cardinal Basil Hume wrote, ‘every experience of love gives us yet another glimpse of the meaning of love in God himself. Human love is the instrument we can use to explore the mystery of love which God is.’ When we speak of human dignity, or ‘the transcendent nature of the human person...;

when we speak of human beings created ... in the image of God; when we say these things, we point to our capacities for thought, creativity, and intimacy, and toward our capacities for love. Sexuality is not simply lust. It is an expression of what makes us most human.”

In the context of this discussion, Michaelson analyzed the meaning and significance of The Song of Songs, also known as The Song of Solomon, which he saw as an illustration of “the human love that echoes the love of God.” *Ibid.* at pp. 16-17. Other commentators have also reflected on the meaning and significance of this often-overlooked book of the Bible:

Nelson, pp. 6-8: “The historical roots of sexual alienation are not difficult to find. They emerged as two intertwining dualisms. Spiritual dualism (spirit over body, mind over matter) emerged with power in late Hellenistic Greece and made a lasting impact upon the Christian church. Championed by the Neoplatonists, this dualism viewed the immortal spirit as a temporary prisoner in a mortal, corruptible body. The good life and, indeed, salvation itself required escape from flesh into spirit. Sexist or patriarchal dualism (man over woman) is the twin of spiritualism. While Old Testament life was not strongly marked by spiritualism, patriarchal dualism abounded, and it too found a home in the emerging Christian community. It involved the systematic subordination of women in inter-personal relations, in institutions, in thought forms, and in religious life. But the two dualisms became inextricably intertwined as men assumed to themselves superiority in spirit and reason while identifying women with body, earthiness, irrationality, and instability. [See also, above at pp. 121-22 & 138-40].

“So we Christians today live between the times. Or perhaps we live between the gardens. One garden is the Erotic Garden, that depicted in The Song of Songs. This much-misinterpreted piece of scripture is a biblical love poem celebrating the joys of erotic love between a woman and a man. Even though through much of Christian history it was allegorized into a symbol of purely spiritual life purged of any carnal reality, the Canticles is a sexual story.

“But it is sexuality beyond the fall. In this garden there is no bodily shame.

This garden and its inhabitants are thoroughly sensual. The woman and the man delight not only in each other's embodiedness but also in the sensuous delights surrounding them—trees, fruits, flowers, fountains of living water. In this garden there is no sexist dualism, no hint of patriarchy, no dominance or submission. The woman is fully the equal of the man. Independent, she works, takes initiatives, and has an identity of her own apart from her lover. The two alternate in inaugurating their meetings. Each exults in the body and beauty of the other, and together they embrace their sexuality without the guilt of exploitation.

"The Garden of Eden depicted in the Yahwist creation story, Genesis 2-3, is different. Here the results of the fall into sexual dualism are evident. There is shame in nakedness. The whole material world participates in the fall. Work itself is cursed and childbirth marked with alienating pain. The writer of this garden story seems to depict the woman as derivative of the man.

"In all this there is something of a literary irony. The Garden of Eden, which is mythic, seems to give the more realistic portrayal of the human sexual story, whereas the real historical tale of two lovers, the Canticles, seems to border on sexual myth. Nevertheless, one might ask, which is 'realistic,' our alienation or our possibility?"

Edman, pp. 66-69: *"The human species has a long history of ambivalence about the value both of bodies and of desire. By 'ambivalence,' what I mean is that it is possible to trace through many cultures, philosophies, and theologies a near demonization of flesh and of desire. And sometimes that demonization isn't just 'near.' Sometimes it is explicit and deadly. It's not hard at all to see disparagement of bodies and fear of desire undergirding sexual violence the world over—against women, against people of color, against children, against queer people.*

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"Contemporary Christianity has expended so much wattage in disparagement of bodies and of desire that most people probably take it as a given that this disparagement of flesh, of wanting, is a bright thread in the history

of the tradition. But Christianity has always celebrated desire for God, even fierce desire of that electrically charged (yes, I'm going to say it) erotic variety....

"From its inception, Christianity has drawn on the relationship between a bride and her bridegroom as a metaphor to represent communion with God. This notion of God as bridegroom did not begin with Christianity; it existed in Judaism, and it appears throughout Hebrew scripture. What Christianity did was suggest that when we human beings come together in Christian community—aka the church—we become the bride. Paul fancied himself a proud father who had promised his churches in marriage 'to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.' [2 Corinth. 11:2].

".... The ancients drew on the metaphor of bride and bridegroom to point to something specific: sexual consummation. Paul expected his churches to remain 'chaste' until Jesus returned. The Gnostic Gospel of Philip uses the image of the bridal chamber to illustrate human redemption—our reconciliation to God.

"This is not an obscure motif in the tradition. That's what the Song of Songs is trying to do: tell us about God by simultaneously sexualizing spirituality and spiritualizing sexuality. Not denying either, but using both to convey something about the other.

"Sex as metaphor for communion with God makes a lot of sense. Imagine what it would really be like to encounter God. Not from a distance, but up close. Such a spiritual union would have to be mind-blowingly intense.... [I]f you are talking about physically interacting with God, what human experience would possibly approach it except sexual union?" [Emphasis added].

III.A Loving God Can't be Reconciled with the Closet

The conclusion that Michaelson draws based on his central premises as stated above (that God is a loving God and that human love is a reflection of God's love, an expression of what makes us most human, and a gateway to holiness) is the following:

Michaelson, p. 18: *"And I have learned this: If God loves us, then God could never want the closet [for us]. I know in my heart that this God could not wish for*

human beings to lie, to repress their emotional selves, and to distort that aspect of the soul which leads to the highest of human satisfactions into a dark force of evil and objectification. *It is inconceivable to me; the contradiction is too great. There is no reconciling a loving God and the tyranny of the closet.* Whatever seven verses in Old and New Testament mean, they cannot possibly mean this. It is unthinkable, obscene” [Emphasis added].

In his book, Michaelson does not attempt to define the term “the tyranny of the closet.” Instead, he seeks to paint a picture of what he means by describing his own personal struggles in trying to reconcile his sexuality with his religious beliefs. In the Introduction to his book, Michaelson reveals that one of his reasons for writing it is to share these personal experiences, in the hope that others might be spared “the hell I lived through” while going through this same struggle:

Michaelson, pp. xiv, 3, and xiv-xv: “Admittedly, this book is for me, too. Before I came out, I was certain that being openly gay would spell the end of my religious life. I was an Orthodox-practicing Jew, and my religion gave meaning and shape to my life. But I repressed my sexuality, acting out occasionally, but regretting it afterwards, and I tried, for years, to change. *Eventually, after ten years in the closet—an all-too-cozy metaphor for lying to yourself and others, and hating yourself for doing so—I had had enough.* [Compare **Bawer** at pp. 236-37, quoted below at p. 185]. The pain, isolation, loneliness, and shame had grown so great—the futile relationships with women, the arguments with God, the hatred of myself for being unable to change—that I was ready to forsake my religion for the sake of my happiness.

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“Imagine lying to everyone you know, all the time. Imagine feeling that your soul is distorted, evil, and broken. And imagine believing that, because of something you cannot change, God hates you. What would you do?

“If you’re like me, you’d do everything you could to change this awful part of yourself. You’d hide from everyone, constructing ever more elaborate masks

that concealed (you would hope) the dark truth inside. And when all else failed you'd consider ending your life.

"Where do these feelings come from? Whose fault is it that 40 percent of gay teenagers consider suicide—four times as many as straight kids? Are they all just confused—or is it possible that they're hearing ... the message of 'God versus Gay' all too clearly? [See quotes below at pp. 185-86 from **Dykstra** and **Robinson**].

"I was one of those statistics myself. Now I am married [to Paul Dakin, in New York, in 2011, according to the internet], successful, happy, and active in my religious community. But before I came out, I was as miserable and suicidal as the kids on the TV news. I just wasn't as courageous. If I had been, maybe I wouldn't be here today.

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"[Before I came out, I was certain that being openly gay would spell the end of my religious life]. But what I found was a shock: coming out was the doorway to true love, faith, and joy. My relationship to God and to my religious community grew stronger than ever before. My spiritual path began to unfold, my prayer life began to awaken, and my love for other human beings slowly unfurled itself and expanded. 'God versus Gay' had very personal consequences for me, and *I have written this book both to save other people from the hell I lived through and to clarify and crystallize what I have learned over the years....*" [Italicized emphasis added].

He later continued this discussion in the text of his book by quoting from a speech he had given a decade prior to publishing it:

Michaelson, pp. 19-21: "....For many years, knowing that I was gay and believing there was something fundamentally wrong with that ... made me want to die. Nothing less. I tried in my own impotent ways to kill myself. I failed. I experienced, for about ten years, a self-loathing that I hope none of you ever know, a wish to disappear and destroy myself that was too intense for tears and which cut me off from everyone I knew....

"My community excluded me without even knowing it was doing so. I didn't come out until a couple of years ago, so my rabbi had no idea that by telling me being gay was a sin—and I don't remember if he said being gay, or having gay sex, but I know what I heard—he was cutting me off from the community.... Hearing these words just pushed me further into the closet, because I loved God, and here were God's representatives telling me ... that God hated this. *It wasn't only self-hatred; it was intense fear also. For years, I was horrified that my secret might be found out ... and that everything would be ruined.*

"What I learned from my rabbis and teachers was that something was essentially evil about myself. I would try to deny the compulsion I felt, or suppress it, but I knew it was there: evil, inside of me, impossible to eradicate. Imagine that: Something fundamental about yourself is evil.... This is what I learned in Sunday school.

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"And I was told by my rabbis that sexual orientation was a lifestyle choice. That if I wanted to, I could be straight, or at least celibate. This I knew was false, because if I could have done anything—anything to stop being gay, I would have. I hated being gay.... And I tried everything. Abstinence, negative reinforcement, fantasizing about women. I was even in a loving relationship with a woman for over a year, trying all the while to be straight. I tried immersing myself in ... the love of God only, focused only on Torah and learning, sublimating my sexual tension, ... and I was miserable.

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"You cannot change your sexual orientation. You cannot. I tried. You cannot

"The worst is what it did to my ahavat hashem [the love of God]. Why would God make me this way? How could I be so evil? I couldn't make sense of it. One thing I know ... from ten years of what I have lived: it is impossible to love God in denial. You hate yourself, you hate God for doing this to you, and you see

the world as fundamentally, irreparably broken” [Emphasis added].

In A Place at the Table, Bruce Bawer’s study of the lives of gay American men in the early 1990s, the author pointed out that “the closet” is a virtually universal experience for all gay people, at least for some portion of their lives: **Bawer**, pp. 236-37: “*Most homosexuals, who in society as it is currently constituted face the choice of either seeming defiant or being deceitful, spend some time—if only when they are young and first aware of their sexual orientation—hiding their homosexuality from others.* Out of necessity, they become experts at keeping secrets, at deceiving loved ones, at talking around the truth about themselves, at communicating subtly with other homosexuals by means of the briefest of glances on a crowded sidewalk. They are likely to feel guilty about lying and to feel resentful toward both their loved ones and society at large, whose attitudes toward homosexuality may make them feel that they have no easy alternative but to lie.... *One comes to be very good at repression, suppression, deception....*”

“There is no psychologically easy or socially tidy way of making a break with this kind of silence. Some do so dramatically, and begin telling everyone that they meet that they’re gay. Some move out of the closet step by tiny step, telling some people but not others. Some don’t tell anyone and spend their lives lying to everybody, perhaps even to themselves....” [Emphasis added].

For still others, it must be added, including in particular for far too many gay and lesbian teenagers, the fear and shame associated with the realization that they are gay are so overwhelming that they can’t even take the initial step of accepting themselves for who they are, let alone sharing that truth with others—for them suicide becomes their way of escaping what Michaelson calls “the tyranny of the closet.” In Set Them Free: The Other Side of Exodus, which was published in 2002, Laurel A. Dykstra described the full scope of this tragedy, including the problems encountered by those teenagers who dare to “out” themselves or who are “outed” by others:

Dykstra, pp. 73-74: “Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth attempt

suicide at two to three times the rate of their straight peers, and they account for 30 percent of completed teen suicides. Queer youth are much more likely than their heterosexual peers to be forced into homelessness as a result of rejection by their families, abuse and harassment at school, or a combination of the two. Forty to 50 percent of street youth cite the attitude of others toward their sexual orientation as a reason for their homelessness. While services for street kids are inadequate everywhere, the few shelters that exist are rarely safe places for queer youth. Gay and transgender males have a particularly difficult time, and prostitution is often the only employment available to them. The streets are violent and dangerous for anybody, but these most vulnerable kids are particularly targeted for assault, rape, and even murder. Male-to-female transgender sex workers are especially vulnerable to violence, and crimes against them are seldom investigated seriously. The disregard for their lives by law enforcement reflects the disregard for them in the culture at large.”

See also Robinson, pp. 166-67: “... While home is supposed to be the one place ‘they have to take you in,’ the fact is that huge numbers of teenagers are thrown out of their heterosexually-parented families when it is revealed (or discovered) that they are gay.

“This is no small problem, caused by heterosexual parents who believe what they have been told, either by the culture or by their religion, that homosexuality is wrong and perverse. Nicholas Ray edited a 2006 report showing that 20 to 40% of homeless youth identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. This study, *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth: An Epidemic of Homelessness*, sponsored by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute and the National Coalition for the Homeless, reviewed the data showing that 26 percent of teens who come out to their parent(s) are thrown out of their homes. They wind up living with a relative or friend, or living on the streets of our cities. And like heterosexual homeless teens, they often resort to selling their bodies in sex work just to survive.”

Other commentators have also described what it means to live “in the

closet.” In Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible, which was published in 2000, Rev. Dr. Mona West drew an analogy between “queer” people who live in the closet and the Hebrew people during their captivity in Egypt. [NOTE: Rev. Elizabeth Edman, who self-identifies as ‘queer,’ describes the term ‘queer’ as ‘something of an umbrella term ... [that is broader and more inclusive than the earlier term ‘LGBT’ and that is] shot through with a deep awareness of our queer connection, while it simultaneously shakes up our comprehension of who we are and how we are distinct from one another.’ **Edman**, p. 158. See also **Bronski**, p. 232 (noting the increased usage of the term “queer” as a description of “people with a wide range of sexual identities who were working in coalition” and “as a declaration of difference and strength” during the era of ACT UP activism—“We’re here. We’re queer. Get used to it”)]. Dr. West drew her analogy between closeted queer people and the Hebrew people in captivity as follows: **Take Back the Word**, “Outsiders, Aliens, and Boundary Crossers: a Queer Reading of the Hebrew Exodus,” Mona West, p. 74: “Joretta Marshall defines closet as ‘a descriptive word that corresponds to the dynamic of hiding a part of one’s self-identity or choosing carefully to be open and out.’ In gay and lesbian experience, closets isolate, enslave, and eventually kill us physically as well as spiritually. Because the Exodus is the crucial event in the formation of the identity of Israel, it is appropriate to draw the parallel that to stay in Egypt would be to stay in the closet. In their encounters with Moses at the very beginning of the story and throughout their experiences in the wilderness, the Israelites were constantly faced with the decision to accept Yahweh’s offer of liberation, which meant coming into their full identity as the people God intended them to be. Walter Bruegemann claims, ‘It is important that this people now formed in covenant was not originally an ethnic community. They were in fact ‘no-people.’ Yahweh evoked and convened a community of people that did not exist until that hour. They are, until then, only Hebrews, *habiru*, socially marginal masses without status or identity.’

“Queers are aliens and outsiders in a hostile environment. Because of sexual

orientation, queers are excluded from the rites and sacraments of the church. As ‘openly practicing, self-avowed homosexuals,’ queers are refused ordination, denied participation in the eucharist, and often excluded from the worshipping community. The church or the state does not sanction queer unions. [NOTE: keep in mind that this was written in or before 2000; the situation has changed dramatically since then “queer unions” are now, for the most part, sanctioned by “the state,” and, to a much lesser extent, by “the church”]. *Queers are made outsiders and kept outsiders by the dominant culture through demonization as sexual outlaws.* Much as in biblical times, rules of religion, purity, access to goods and land, and access to God are formulated and regulated by those in power. Those who do not conform pose a threat to the dominant culture. They are alienated, kept on the outside, considered an abomination. Queers are the twentieth-century equivalent to the *habiru* of the ancient Near East: the strangers, the boundary crossers, the ones who cross over in order to survive.

“‘Silence equals death’ is a powerful adage in the queer community. It speaks of the necessity to be made known in a culture that denies queer existence. Unlike race and gender, sexual orientation is not visibly identifiable. Queers can ‘pass’ as members of the dominant culture since it is assumed by the dominant culture that everyone is heterosexual. Many queers choose to pass in this culture, to keep their sexual orientation hidden—closeted—for fear of rejection by family and friends, job loss, and physical violence. This closeted experience produces death, not only death to the existence of a queer community but also death to the individual. Maintaining a dual identity kills many. Queers die through the crushing of their spirits and the splintering of their wholeness. Queers die through addictions and often at their own hands when the only way out of the closet is suicide” [Emphasis added].

One of the earliest books on the subject of the Bible and homosexuality to be written from a perspective sympathetic to the LGBTQ+ community was a book titled The Church and the Homosexual, which was written by a Catholic priest, Father John McNeill, and first published in 1976. Included in this book was a

discussion of a phenomenon that has come to be known as “internalized homophobia.” Father McNeill pointed out that many of the characteristics of homosexuals that were believed to be the result of their sexual orientation were in fact the result of hostile attitudes toward them on the part of society and the Church, attitudes that the victims of this prejudice eventually internalized and that came to shape their conception of their own self-worth. This internalized homophobia is a core element of what Michaelson calls “the tyranny of the closet”:

McNeill, pp. 156-157, 163-164: “....More frequently than not, persons with a problem concerning their homosexuality have introjected the attitude of society toward themselves. They suffer great mental anguish and a profound sense of alienation, often believing themselves to be outcasts not only from human society but from divine love as well.... Whether they carefully conceal their homosexual condition or express it openly, people with a homosexual orientation tend to accept their homosexuality as their deepest self-identity image, the most important single fact about themselves. And because they tend to accept their image from the attitudes of the people around them, persons who believe themselves to be homosexuals frequently have a negative self-image which leads to self-hatred and self-destruction.

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“.... [T]he many problems average homosexuals encounter ... make a positive adjustment to such a life extremely difficult. Among these difficulties can be enumerated: the agonies of remorse and self-torture over what typical homosexuals feel to be their immoral desires, whether these arise from conscious identity with the condemnation of Church and society or from neurotic conflicts within themselves; their openness to blackmail and other forms of intimidation; their status of being outside the normal protection of the law; their necessity continually to conceal what they frequently believe to be their true identity from public view, with the added threat that accidental revelation could result in loss of

their job, expulsion from school, dishonorable discharge from the military service, loss of future security and job opportunities, loss of friends and the respect of family dependents. Still other problems involve their propensity to sexual promiscuity divorced from a complete and healthy interpersonal relationship; and the resulting tendency for sexual desires indulged in, but never fully satisfied, to occupy a disproportionate place in their life. Above all else, there is the very real threat of ultimate loneliness to one to whom all the normal structures of society—marriage, children, dependents, etc.—are closed. *It should be noted, however, that all these negative aspects of homosexuality are not due to homosexuality as such, but are the results of both society's and the Church's attitude to the homosexual*" [Emphasis added].

IV. The Church and the Synagogue Should Adopt LGBTQ+-Inclusive Policies That Encourage LGBTQ+ People to Escape the Tyranny of the Closet

The turning-point in Jay Michaelson's spiritual journey was his decision to "come out of the closet," a decision that opened him up to the possibility of entering into a loving relationship with his loving God. See above at p. 183. He argues for the adoption of LGBTQ+-inclusive policies in the Church and the Synagogue that would enable others to follow this same path:

Michaelson, pp. 21-22: "I am different now from how I was years ago; I no longer wish to be anything other than who I am, and am grateful that I have been able to find love, both human and Divine, precisely by accepting, rather than rejecting, the traits of my personality and soul. Yet as I work with people still struggling with their sexuality, I am struck by how similar their stories are to mine. So many people believe that to come out, to accept one's sexuality and be open about it with others, would be the end of their religious lives—just as I once believed. They cannot conceive, as I could not, that *coming out is the beginning of the authentic life, not the end of it*. Once I was honest with myself, I could be honest with God. Once I started loving myself, I could start loving God. And once I

allowed my heart to open, it opened in all directions.

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“.... And of this there is no doubt: openness to love is openness to God. Living in the closet, repressing my desire to love, I felt alienated from God, desperate to obey Divine command but powerless to do so.... When I finally gave up, came out, and quit trying to be someone I was not, the fear, pain, and anxiety vanished—and was replaced by a consciousness of love that allowed me to grow spiritually.

“I know that many people think God’s love is expressed precisely by curbing our sexual desires and eradicating all sin. But homosexuality is not a sin; it is an inclination of the heart that can tilt toward holiness or perdition, health or depredation. And so, *if we value opening to love, expressing love, and being in relation with a God who is said to love, we must want people to be able to be honest, intimate, and loving according to the characteristics of their souls*” [Emphasis added].

**No. 2--The Commandments Governing How Christians and Jews
Should Treat Others Require Us to Treat Members of the LGBTQ+
Community with Empathy, Compassion and Reciprocity**

BIBLE PASSAGES: Mt. 22:34-40 (the two greatest commandments); Lk. 6:31 (the golden rule); Jn. 15:12 (Jesus commands his disciples to “love one another as I have loved you”); Mt. 12:1-8 & Mk. 2:23-28 (Jesus defends his disciples after they are chastised for plucking ears of grain on the Sabbath); Mt. 25:31-46 (the last judgment)

In Chapter 3 of God vs. Gay?, Michaelson discusses three concepts of undisputed primary importance in the Bible: love, compassion, and empathy. The chapter is titled “Love your neighbor as yourself,” which all Christians will immediately recognize as being the mandate from God [see Lev. 19:18] that Jesus characterized as “the second greatest commandment.” Mt. 22:39. The chapter is subtitled “Love demands authentic compassion for others.” Michaelson links

these two concepts together, along with the related concept of empathy, and applies them all to the issue of how the Church and the Synagogue should treat LGBTQ+ people, as follows:

Michaelson, pp. 24, 25-26, 24-25, 26-27, 29: “In nearly every religious tradition, God’s love is the beginning, rather than the end, of one’s religious work. To be authentically religious does not mean that God loves us, and that is the end of the matter. Rather, if God loves us, we are commanded to love one another:

‘We love because God first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. Whoever loves God must also love his brother.’ (1 John 4:19-20).

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‘The whole of the Law is summarized in a single commandment: love your neighbor as yourself.’ (Gal. 5:14).

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“This is how you can ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’ ‘As yourself’—not as you would like to love the other person, but as you yourself would like to be loved. *The authentically religious person must engage in a form of sympathetic reasoning. As a necessary corrective to the egoistic impulse toward selfishness, religious teachings demand an imaginary exercise in being someone else.* What would I want if I were standing in this person’s shoes? Can I understand this person’s life not merely according to my values, but in such a way as to examine my values in light of their experience? Can I open my heart to the possibility that love may require something greater than what I can presently understand? *In this way, Western religious traditions cultivate compassion—literally, ‘feeling with.’*

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“.... When injustice takes place, it is an act of love to shout in protest. And when a population is vilified, subjugated, and despised; when the members of

that group are mischaracterized and slandered; when selective teachings of religious faith are used as cudgels—then the mandate to love compels us to learn more, engage more, and finally to stand up for those who have been wronged.

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“Compassion rejects the imposition of my preconceptions onto other people, and invites a willingness to reexamine those preconceptions in light of what the other reveals to me. Perhaps this is why God is described in Exodus 34:6-7 as being ‘compassionate, gracious, patient, and abundant in loving-kindness and truth.’ Compassion depends upon patience and loving-kindness; it is the opposite of a snap judgment, the antithesis of generalization. As applied to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people, the enterprise of compassion requires each of us to imagine ourselves in a subjectivity that may be quite different from our own.... But *this is what is asked: to rise above one’s own preferences, with patience and loving-kindness, to truly see from the perspective of the other.*

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“Unless we are willing to be open to the truth of another person’s experience, we cannot progress past the childlike opinion that what is right for us is right for everyone. This is how I understand the admonition to ‘judge not, lest ye be judged’ (Matt. 7:1). If we sit in judgment of another, our compassion is incomplete. *Jesus physically reached out and touched a leper to heal him* (Mark 1:41). *Did this compassion come from an abstract principle? From conventional wisdom? Or was it precisely the rising above assumptions and judgments, to the higher ground of empathy?*

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“.... The Golden Rule demands reciprocity and compassion, and basic equality. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you [Luke 6:31]: give them the same privileges, civilly and religiously, that you would want for yourself.

These are core religious principles, found over and over again in the Bible and in thousands of years of religious teaching” [Italicized emphasis added].

These “core religious principles,” which are embodied in Judeo-Christian teachings ranging from the Mosaic Law (e.g., Lev. 19:18: “[Y]ou shall love your neighbor as yourself”) to Christ’s final words to his disciples (e.g., Jn. 15:12: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you”), provide strong support for Michaelson’s argument that the Church and the Synagogue should adopt policies of inclusion of LGBTQ+ people.

In his book, God Believes in Love: Straight Talk About Gay Marriage, Bishop Robinson examines what empathy would look like if one sought to apply the Golden Rule to gay men and lesbians:

Robinson, pp. 39-41: “What would a serious consideration of ‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ look like? A quick, passing contemplation is not enough. Serious consideration would have one wondering what it would be like to grow up suspecting, even ‘knowing,’ that the God of all creation thinks I’m an ‘abomination.’ Imagine beginning the self-alienation at an early age: ‘There’s something about me, integral to me, that I can never, ever share with anyone—and especially not those who love me, because it will certainly mean losing their love.’ Imagine pretending from adolescence onward that I am interested in and attracted to people I’m not interested in or attracted to—and at the same time stripping from my outward actions and words any indication of who I am interested in and attracted to. What does it do to a child to learn at a quite early age to filter absolutely everything I say—in the split second before I say it—to rid it of every indication of what is really going on with me? To learn as an adult to never mention to my co-workers what I did over the weekend and who I did it with? To deflect all attempts by my well-meaning friends to set me up with someone of the opposite sex? To completely compartmentalize my life into ‘respectable’ parts versus the unspeakable parts? To feel less than in every possible way? And to live in constant fear that the real me will be discovered and everything I have worked for and hoped for will go down in shameful flames?

“That is what it would mean to walk in a gay man’s or lesbian’s shoes—to sit with and contemplate what that kind of life would be. And then, of course, it gets worse. You imagine that given this hidden life, you meet someone and begin the tender, complicated, and exciting process of falling in love. You can’t tell anyone—or just a few people who know about your secret. You can’t share it with your parents, your siblings, your straight friends. You are happier than you’ve ever been in your whole life, and you have to keep it a secret....

“Given the burdens borne by gay and lesbian people, it’s a wonder any of us survived to tell the tale. And I find it hard to believe that anyone who has seriously stopped long enough to contemplate such an existence would continue to want to deprive gay and lesbian people of the respect, companionship and integrity we deserve. At its most basic, a religious commitment to ‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ suggests that our views toward homosexuality and same-gender marriage have to change.

“Still, as a straight person, you might say, ‘This just isn’t my fight.’ No, it isn’t. Unless you care about the kind of society we have. Unless you want the society of which you are a part to be a just one. Unless you believe that a free society, not to mention a godly religion, should fight injustice wherever it is found. Unless your religion tells you—as our entire Judeo-Christian heritage does [see below, starting at p. 247]—that any society will be judged by the way it treats its most vulnerable. Unless you care about our children. Unless fairness matters to you. Unless violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people concerns you. Unless ‘liberty and justice for all’ is something you believe applies to all our citizens” [Italicized emphasis added].

At p. 28 of God vs. Gay?, Michaelson points out that, “[i]n the Christian context, Jesus often chose compassion for people over literal rules.... Indeed, so wide is the gulf between Christ’s compassion and anti-gay legalism that one evangelical writer has asked, ‘When was it that we started resembling the Pharisees more than the one we call ‘Lord’?’” The following commentaries further explored the role of compassion in the ministry of Jesus:

Living the Questions, sec. 8, pp. 3-4: “Jesus repeatedly shattered the rules of ritual purity and cultural expectations of separation from ‘the other.’ The stories of Jesus healing people in Matthew 9 are a perfect example of Jesus’ willingness to break down the walls separating people: the paralyzed man, the blind and mute man—all people who the ‘righteous’ would have labeled as sinners and thus deserving of their fate. Some of the others to whom Jesus showed compassion were:

“A tax collector who was cheating the people:

He was a ‘traitor,’ hated by fellow Jews for helping the occupying forces of Rome bleed the country dry and line his own pockets.

“The woman with the hemorrhage:

Ritual cleanliness laws conspired to exclude women from religious life. Some women would never be ritually ‘clean.’ By even *touching* the woman with the flow of blood (or being touched by her), Jesus was made ‘unclean’—but his response was one of love.

“The synagogue leader:

A respected leader with a sick daughter who came to see this radical rabbi only after he had exhausted every other avenue to save his daughter. Despite his daughter’s having died, Jesus was gracious and went with him, healing her.”

Perhaps the clearest example of Jesus choosing compassion for others over compliance with legal requirements is the story related at both Matt. 12:1-8 and Mk. 2:23-28:

Miner & Connoley, pp. 64-66: “In the twelfth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is accused of allowing his disciples to break one of the Ten Commandments. Jesus’ response gives ... insight into his approach to scriptural rules.

“The chapter begins by telling us, ‘Jesus went through the grain-fields on the Sabbath.’ (Matthew 12:1). While walking in a field, the disciples became

hungry and began plucking heads of grain and eating them. Some Pharisees were also in the field, and recognized that picking grain is forbidden by the Old Testament rule against doing work on the Sabbath. They came to Jesus and said, 'Look, your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.' (Matthew 12:2)

"Remember, the Sabbath rule is one of the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:8-10 clearly states that no work of any kind is to be done on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:3 says even lighting a fire to keep one's house warm is forbidden on the Sabbath. To emphasize how important this rule is, Numbers 15:32-36 tells of a man who was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath. When the people of Israel asked what they should do with the man, Moses told them to stone him to death. And in case someone were to wonder whether picking grain was considered work, Exodus 34:21 specifies, 'even in plowing time and in harvest time, you shall rest' on the Sabbath. The disciples of Jesus were clearly acting unlawfully, and if Jesus were a legalist, he would have thought, 'The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it.' And he would have told his disciples to stop picking grain. But that's not how Jesus responded.

"Instead, after making several preliminary points, Jesus went right to the heart of the matter. He said to the Pharisees, 'If you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.' (12:7).

"Jesus accused the Pharisees of condemning the guiltless, even though his disciples had clearly broken a biblical rule! His response seems improper to those of us from legalistic Christian backgrounds. So we ask, what was the basis for Jesus' position? The answer can be found in the quotation from Hosea 6:6, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'

"Hosea was one of the Old Testament prophets who chastised God's people at a time when they were meticulously following the law, but ignoring the human suffering around them. Amos, who prophesied around the same time as Hosea, talked about how people of the time were attending places of worship, offering sacrifices, and then going home to cheat the poor and foster injustice. Jesus

accused the Pharisees of doing the same thing: *They were more concerned with rule keeping than with human hunger. Jesus' point is clear: Human need is more important than rules—even rules found in the Bible.*

“The point is reinforced in the Gospel of Mark’s version of this same story. There, Jesus tells the Pharisees, ‘The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath.’ (Mark 2:27). To legalists, this is a shocking statement—a loophole big enough to drive a bus through. Jesus seems to be saying that biblical rules are intended to benefit people and should not be applied when they would have the opposite effect. By so doing, Jesus imposes upon his followers the obligation to evaluate the impact of biblical rules, rather than mindlessly applying them without regard to human need or suffering....

“The record we have of Jesus’ life illustrates that Jesus always chose compassion for people over strict adherence to biblical rules. When a person came to Jesus with a sickness, Jesus ignored the rules against work on the Sabbath and healed the person. And he became angry with those who argued that, out of deference to the Sabbath rule, he should delay the healing for one day. (Luke 13:10-17). Once, when a woman was caught in adultery, Jesus ignored the biblical rule that stated she must be stoned, forgave her, and prompted her to learn from her mistakes. (John 8:1-11).... Over and over again, Jesus chose people over the rules—compassion over legalism. And he was constantly criticized for it by religious conservatives who believed biblical rules should remain rigid. (Luke 6:7; 11:53-54)” [Emphasis added].

See also Matt. 25:31-46 (story of the last judgment: all people are judged by the Son of Man from his throne of glory based on their treatment of “the least of these who are members of my family” [not on their compliance with the legal rules]; did the person being judged give the hungry something to eat, give the thirsty something to drink, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and the prisoner?; if so, he or she inherits the kingdom prepared for him/her from the foundation of the world; if not, he or she is sent into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels).

LESSON 6 --FIVE FUNDAMENTAL BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES THAT SUPPORT A POLICY OF LGBTQ+ INCLUSION (No. 3)

No. 3--Honesty and Integrity are Sacred; “Coming Out is a Religious Act” and a Key to Learning to Love Oneself

BIBLE PASSAGES: Ex. 20:16; Lev. 19:11-13,15; Gen. 37:1-35, 42:1-47:12 & 50:12-21 (Joseph “comes out” to his family and the Egyptian people); Jn. 11:1-44 (Lazarus “comes out” of the grave); Ex. 3:1-6:13, 7:14-24, 12:1-50, 13:17-14:31, 16:1-3 (the Hebrew nation “comes out” of Egypt); Gen. 25:19-34 & 27: 1-45 (Rebekah & Jacob); Ex. chapters 1 & 2 (the role of “trickery” in saving the life of the young Moses)

I. Introduction

Chapter 5 of God vs. Gay focuses on “coming out,” taking the position, at pp. 42-43, that “[r]eligious people should support equality for LGBTQ[+] people because more openness leads to more honesty, more holiness, and more authentic spirituality.” In the author’s view, “[h]omosexuality is not a lifestyle, but the closet is a death-style.... To suppose that such a life is what God wants of us is to be gravely mistaken either about the closet, or God, or both.” **Michaelson** at p. 42. These views find support in the following passage written by Bishop Spong: **Spong I**, pp. 241-42: “.... [T]he experience of Jesus was an experience of *Being*. It was the Greek world that self-consciously used the philosophical concepts of ontology, or being, to talk about God. Yet its echoes are found ... in the ancient Hebraic name for God, recorded in the book of Exodus. YHWH was a word that derived its meaning and its power from the verb ‘to be.’ God and being were somehow bound up together in every human language and in every religious system. When Paul Tillich used the phrase ‘the ground of all Being’ as his favorite name for God, he was in fact reflecting the religious sensitivities of the ages.

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“...How did Jesus reflect this ground of being, which caused people to see in this life the very Being of God? *The Biblical record reveals a Jesus who had the*

courage to be himself. It is the portrait of one who did not need flattery. He could endure the ultimate abuse of having his life taken from him, but his ‘being’ remained intact. His being did not seem to waver, regardless of the external circumstances. *Somehow in a unique way Jesus was what God created him to be. In Jesus the full meaning of creation seemed to break forth. He both lived out the meaning of the Ground of Being in his own life and through his love gave to others the capacity to enter their own being at deeper and deeper levels.* He still does this, for the Christpower we meet in Jesus is an eternal presence of the Holy God.

“.... *The call of Christ* is an eternal call to the affirmation of that which is. In the words of the popular commercial, it is *a call to be all that one can be.* “*To have the courage to be oneself, to claim the ability to define oneself, to live one’s life in freedom and with power is the essence of the human experience.* ‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly,’ said the Christ of the Fourth Gospel (John 10:10).... Jesus touched the very depth of being, and *the Christ experience is nothing less than our call to be who we are, inside the love of God. I worship this God when I claim my own being and live it out courageously and in the process call others to have the courage to be themselves*” [Emphasis added].

In *A Place at the Table*, Bruce Bawer’s self-described “reflection on the theme of homosexuality,” which was published in 1994, the author discussed a reported incident of an Eagle Scout, James Dale, who was expelled from the Boy Scouts of America after coming out:

Bawer, pp. 67-68: “The choice facing that Boy Scout was the same choice that faces countless seminarians and ministers, cadets and soldiers, nuclear physicists and sales clerks, men and women and boys and girls in all walks of life who discover themselves to be gay: lie and be safe, or tell the truth and face the consequences. For generations of homosexuals to whom the truth would mean certain ruin, the choice was to lie. For increasing numbers of homosexuals today, when the consequences of honesty are somewhat less severe, the choice is to tell the truth. This is, indeed, the real question at the heart of the current conflict

over homosexuality: not whether gays should be allowed to be gay—for one has no choice over that matter—but whether gays should be allowed to be honest. Should gays live openly or in the closet? *Time and again, fervent opponents of gay rights make it clear that what they desire is a return to the closet—a time when it was necessary to lie about one’s sexual orientation and when the prevalent ideas about homosexuality were nothing but lies.*

“Yet more and more people—gay and straight alike—realize that the perpetuation of the closet is harmful not only to homosexuals but to society at large. It harms the woman who marries a secretly gay man and one day, perhaps after twenty years of marriage, finds him in bed with another man. It harms the children of such unions. It harms straight Americans, male and female, adult and child, who learn to hate and fear where there is no reason to hate and fear. It harms parents who turn out to have a gay child, and, as a result, experience years of needless anguish and guilt. And most of all it harms the young people who, discovering themselves to be gay, are benefitted more than anything else by understanding parents and by an acquaintance with responsible, emotionally balanced gay adults with whom they can identify” [Emphasis added].

Later, toward the end of his book, Bawer further reflected on the importance of “coming out” in the following passage:

Bawer, pp. 234-35: “To recognize the truth about your sexual orientation is one thing; to share the news with your friends, family, and co-workers—to ‘come out’—is quite another. First, it should be said that the term ‘coming out’ poses certain difficulties. For one thing, it reduces a complex psychological and social process to a simple cut-and-dried one-time ritual. For another, it implies that the proper way to deal socially with the discovery of one’s homosexuality is to tell everybody in one’s life about it, in so many words and as soon as possible. And finally, it implies a moral judgment of those who choose to keep their homosexuality to themselves or to tell only selected friends. Such individuals are described as being ‘closeted,’ a word that implies deception and shame; by contrast, those who have told everyone about their homosexuality are referred to

as being ‘out,’ a word that implies candor, self-knowledge, self-assurance. If until very recently these associations appeared to be decidedly unfair to closeted gays, *the phenomenal escalation of the public debate over homosexuality in recent months has made more and more gays realize that the best way to correct the misunderstanding of the subject—and to counter the heinous, large-scale disinformation campaigns by anti-gay crusaders—is to come out now*. These rapid changes have also made them increasingly (and, I think, properly) impatient with comfortable, privileged, seemingly well-adjusted gays who continue to refuse to challenge the prejudices of their straight friends and colleagues.

“Like the gay subculture itself, the existence of such a phenomenon as ‘coming out’ is characteristic of a society in transition. Two or three generations ago there was no such thing as coming out; virtually all homosexuals felt obliged to remain more or less closeted in order to survive. Nor would there be such a thing as coming out in a society where sexual orientation was a matter of indifference, taken no more seriously than the difference between left- and right-handedness; in such a society every gay person would be ‘out.’ It is only because homosexuality is still considered a problem that there is such a thing as coming out” [Italicized emphasis added]

Nevertheless, while strongly agreeing with Michaelson on the importance of “coming out,” Bawer also argues for tolerance and empathy toward many of those who have not come out:

Bawer, pp. 235-36: “In recent years the issue of ‘out’-or-‘in’ has gained increasing urgency.... There is even a National Coming Out Day every October—a manifestation of the subculture’s failure to recognize that coming out is not a one-day event but an ongoing process, and that it should begin not when some subculture-designed calendar says it should but when the individual in question is psychologically, socially, and financially prepared to face the consequences....

“....Indeed, the subculture’s tendency to paint the issue in simplistic, black-and-white terms is at once ignorant, dishonest, and brutal. It ignores the differences that exist among the millions of men and boys [and women and girls]

who happen to be gay—differences in personal temperament, in the nature of their relationships with family and friends, in their cultural backgrounds and social circumstances and professional contingencies and financial problems, and in their understanding of the meaning of homosexuality.

“And those differences are vast. Some realize they’re gay at six, some at sixty. Some can’t keep it to themselves for a moment; some can’t ever bring themselves to speak of it to a living soul. Some are by nature more private and less confrontational than others. Some have grown up in families where people are polite to one another but don’t speak about personal matters, some in families where all subjects are discussed frankly and maturely, and some in families where almost everything is an occasion for explosive arguments, threats and imprecations. Some have reason to believe that their parents would never be able to understand and accept their homosexuality, and some have reason to believe the opposite. Some know that their parents are already aware of their homosexuality and are willing to turn a blind eye to it, but would angrily resist any attempt at discussion. Some simply can’t bring themselves to come out to their parents because they feel their parents are too weighted down by other things—illness, divorce, financial troubles—to make a coming-out scene seem anything but a rude imposition. Some work among people whom they can count on to be tolerant of their sexual orientation, and others work in places where they know their coming out would result in ostracism and harassment, if not termination. Some gay people have it in them to let insults roll off their backs, while others want desperately to be loved and accepted. Keeping one’s sexual orientation a secret imposes one kind of pressure; making it public imposes another kind; and some are simply designed to endure one of these kinds of pressure much more capably than the other.”

II. “Coming Out” Is a Religious Act

Michaelson subtitled chapter 5 of God vs. Gay with the claim, quoted above, that “coming out” is a religious act. At page 46, he states that “[f]or me, the quintessential ‘coming out’ story in the Bible is that of Joseph and his

brothers.” That story is related at Genesis 37:1-35, 42:1-47:12, and 50:12-21. The biblical story, of course, has nothing to do with sexual orientation. Nevertheless, there are several clear parallels between Joseph’s life story and the “coming out” stories of many LGBTQ+ persons, similarities that support Michaelson’s characterization of this biblical story as “the quintessential ‘coming out’ story in the Bible.”

The stage was set for the story of Joseph and his brothers by the biblical story that immediately preceded it, that is, the story of Joseph’s father Jacob, who was later renamed Israel; of Jacob’s two wives and two concubines; and of their twelve sons, who became the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Bishop Spong summarizes Jacob’s story in The Sins of Scripture, as follows:

Spong II, pp. 255-257: “.... In the different wives of Jacob... [the Jewish nation] found the sources of their divisions.

“Jacob had two wives, the story said, Leah and Rachel, who were sisters and so their sons were both half brothers and first cousins. There were other sons of Jacob—not children of these two sisters, but of their servants. They were thus the children of concubines, racially mixed, and their descendants were destined to live on the fringes of the Jewish nation. *The ultimate division and rivalry would, however, be between the two legitimate lines, a rivalry that would always threaten the unity of the Jewish nation....*

“.... As the Jacob story is developed, we are told that Jacob agreed to work for seven years for a man named Laban in order to secure as his wife Laban’s beautiful young daughter Rachel (Gen. 29:1-20). However, Jacob was tricked by Laban, for the veiled daughter to whom Joseph was eventually married turned out to be not his beloved Rachel at all, but her older sister, Leah, who was described in less than flattering terms. Her eyes were weak, said the text (Gen. 29:17), or perhaps cowlike, seeming to pop out of her face. When Jacob in the cool light of dawn discovered this deception, he was irate. Laban justified this chicanery by saying it was inappropriate for the younger daughter to be married before the older daughter. In a world where multiple wives were not a problem,

the situation was rectified by giving Rachel to Jacob to be wife number two and Jacob agreed to work for Laban seven additional years. As this story developed the unattractive and unloved wife Leah became the mother of Judah, who was to be the dominant patriarch of the Southern Kingdom. King David was a descendant of Judah. The holy city of Jerusalem with its temple was in the land of Judah. But Rachel became the mother of Joseph, who was destined to be the dominant patriarch of the Northern Kingdom. Since Rachel, according to this story, was the favorite wife of Jacob/Israel, it followed that Joseph would be portrayed as his favorite son, the one upon whom Jacob/Israel lavished his affection (Gen. 37-50)."

According to the book of Genesis, the twelve sons of Jacob were born in the following order. The first four sons (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah) were the children of Jacob and the unloved wife, Leah. The next four sons (Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher) were the children of Jacob and his two concubines (Bilhah, the servant of Rachel, and Zilpah, the servant of Leah). The next two sons (Issachar and Zebulun) were the fifth and sixth sons of Jacob and Leah. And finally, the last two sons (Joseph and Benjamin) were the children of Jacob and Rachel, the beloved wife who had been barren up until the time of Joseph's birth. Rachel died, however, in childbirth when Jacob's twelfth and last son, Benjamin, was born (Gen. 35:16-20).

The story of the twelve sons of Jacob is related and analyzed by Daniel W. Augsburger, a professor of pastoral counseling at Fuller Theological Seminary, in his treatise Hate-Work: Working Through the Pain and Pleasures of Hate, as follows:

Augsburger, pp. 195-99: "The Jacob-Joseph story, comprising almost one-half of Genesis, is one of the earliest psychological epics of family rivalry, domination, hatred, trickery, and alienation; it also contains surprising turns toward forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation. Greed, guile, deceit, and malice run in the family of Jacob. Hate smolders between the six unblessed sons of the unloved wife, Leah, and the two blessed youngest sons born to Jacob's first and only love, Rachel. The family is frozen in malice....

“Joseph, his father’s favorite, acts with unbounded arrogance and astounding naivete, flaunting his favored status without prudence or shame, and the competition turns rivalry to hostility. ‘When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all of his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him’ (Gen. 37:4 RSV). Without considering the consequences, Joseph tells of his recurring dreams of superiority—pictures ten older brothers bowing down to him in servitude—the scandalous cultural reversal of elder serving younger. ‘So they hated him yet more for his dreams and for his words’ (37:8 RSV).

“Sent as Jacob’s emissary, Joseph encounters his older brothers at a distant sheep camp, far from patriarchal protection. They seize him and plot his death, but irony wins over violence. The one who boasted of being their lord is instead sold as a slave to a caravan of traders, who carry him to be sold on the market in Egypt. ‘We’ll see what comes of his dreams,’ his brothers sneer (37:20)....

[In his alternative account, see above, Bishop Spong adds the following details to this story: “It was for this favored son [Joseph] that the coat of many colors was made. Because Joseph basked in this status, it was said that he excited jealousy among his brothers (who were the sons of Leah and of the concubines) by dreaming of the day when all his brothers would bow down before him and serve him. Finally this family tension reached the place where the brothers decided to kill Joseph. They captured him, threw him into a pit and planned to leave him there to die. Their plan was to kill an animal and sprinkle the blood of that animal on Joseph’s ostentatious coat of many colors, so that their father would think that his son had been destroyed by a wild beast. At that moment, however, according to this story, some traders in a caravan headed for Egypt came by and Leah’s son, Judah, suggested that they not kill Joseph but instead sell him into slavery, which they did, gaining for him the price of twenty pieces of silver....”].

“As a slave, Joseph quickly wins his master Potiphar’s trust, becomes the household administrator, and catches the mistress’s wandering eye. When her sexual overture is rebuffed, she falsely accuses Joseph of approaching her, and he

is imprisoned in the king's Round Tower where he repeats his rise to responsibility.... Twenty-two years have passed. Joseph, at thirty-nine, is now administrator of Pharaoh's Nile river food reserves, while the whole Middle East is in famine.

"One day, overseeing the distribution of grain, Joseph sees ten foreigners appear in line. He recognizes his brothers instantly; they see nothing but an Egyptian official. His treatment of them becomes exacting, interrogation follows, then strategic testing with harsh imprisonment of one of them as an example. Now the brothers experience their powerlessness.... Speaking in their native Aramaic/Hebrew, which they assume he cannot understand, they say to each other, 'No doubt we deserve to be punished because of our brother, whose suffering we saw; for when he pleaded with us we refused to listen. That is why these sufferings have come upon us' (42:21).

"Joseph, hearing his mother tongue, understanding their fears, turns away in tears, but then intensifies his trickery to induce in them the terror he once knew. He keeps one of them as a hostage In the Round Tower, sends the others homeward, and the emotional captives return to their father. Only if they bring his father's blessed youngest, the boy who is Joseph's full brother, can they return, reclaim their hostage, and receive more food. The hard rule of lex talionis, an eye for an eye—retributive justice (to each what one has coming in payback)—is being worked out in a family where the practice of blood revenge is obligatory (42:37).

".... [Following the brothers' return to Egypt, accompanied by their youngest brother as demanded, Joseph in] turns ... taunts, twists the options, tests, and retests his former tormentors. Fritsch notes 'the feeling of unbridled, ruthless power in the actions of Joseph as he lords it over his cowering, fearful brethren, and plays with them as a cat plays with a mouse. They are at his mercy, and he can do anything he wants to with them' (Fritsch 1955, 28). He invites them to an exclusive feast; observes seating rituals according to age that reveal he knows the family secrets; then, in a master stroke, entraps the youngest—the

only innocent one, his beloved little brother, Benjamin, into slavery. In the final showdown, when all are before the bar of justice, Judah, the clan leader and the mastermind of Joseph's slavery in Egypt, offers himself as slave if only the boy can go back to the father who dotes on him above all else.

"At last, when all ten join Judah in offering their freedom in exchange for that of their little half brother, Joseph reveals himself [that is, 'comes out'] in a flood of emotions.

Joseph could no longer control his feelings in front of his attendants, and he called out, 'Let everyone leave my presence.' So there was nobody present when Joseph *made himself known* to his brothers, 'I am Joseph; can my father be still alive?' His brothers were so dumbfounded at finding themselves face to face with Joseph that they could not answer. (45:1-3)
[Emphasis added]

Then Joseph redefines the moral impasse that separates them:

'I am your brother Joseph whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be distressed or take it amiss that you sold me into slavery here; it was God who sent me ahead of you to save men's lives.' (45:4-5)

"He then assumes his role as clan leader in the position of feudal sovereign over the extended family, relocates the clan, allocates land, and guarantees food and support. The dream has come true.

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"It is no surprise that following Jacob's burial the brothers re-approach Joseph, suspecting that the time has come for settling the old grudge. At last the one with absolute power will exact retributive justice....

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"Joseph's response, tearful and empathic, is clear. He says: (1) 'Do not be afraid,' offering comfort and reassurance. Then asks: (2) 'Am I in the place of God?' as he at last surrenders his youthful dreams of his brothers' bowing down to him, and marks the beginning of the Hebrew tradition that God alone can forgive evil. He is clear in naming their crime: (3) 'You meant evil ... but God

meant ... good' ([ch. 50] v. 20 RSV). The Genesis epic opened with the tree of temptation offering 'the knowledge of good and evil,' now it ends with someone who demonstrates it. He concludes with the promise: (4) 'Do not be afraid. I will provide for you,' pledging his continuing good will (50:21).

"Joseph, 'perhaps the only true saint in the Tanakh,' reveals in this faithful kindness his trust in a God who is kind; as Miles notes, 'God is kind, as Joseph is kind' (Miles 1995, 80-81)...."

The parallels between Joseph's life story and the lives of many LGBTQ+ people begin in his youth. Joseph grows up as an alien or outsider, a "stranger" in his own home. With the death of his mother Rachel during the birth of his younger brother Benjamin, Joseph is left with only his doting father and baby brother to provide him with affection and support during his formative years. All of the remaining members of his large extended family, that is, his ten older brothers and their various mothers, are openly hostile toward him, a hostility that turns into outright hatred as his father's favoritism toward Joseph becomes more obvious and Joseph begins to share with his brothers his own dreams of superiority and domination. This isolation and alienation from his family is the first characteristic that Joseph has in common with many modern-day LGBTQ+ children. See **Michaelson**, pp. 49-50: "... [T]here is something unique about gays and lesbians [that distinguishes them from other marginalized peoples]: that the stranger may be within one's own family. Remember, few gay people grow up with gay parents, so many gay people know what it is like to be strangers even within their own homes." See also **Take Back the Word**, "Outsiders, Aliens, and Boundary Crossers: a Queer Reading of the Hebrew Exodus," Mona West, p. 74: "Queers are aliens and outsiders in a hostile environment."

This tension within the clearly dysfunctional family grows to the point where the teen-aged Joseph is literally thrown away by his family. Indeed, he is initially thrown into a pit and left to die but later removed from the pit and sold to a caravan of slave-traders heading to Egypt. This rejection by his family and banishment from the family home is yet another characteristic that Joseph shared

with far too many modern-day LGBTQ+ youth. See **Robinson**, pp. 166-67: "... While home is supposed to be the one place 'they have to take you in,' the fact is that huge numbers of teenagers are thrown out of their heterosexually-parented families when it is revealed (or discovered) that they are gay"; **Dykstra**, p. 73: "Queer youth are much more likely than their heterosexual peers to be forced into homelessness as a result of rejection by their families, abuse and harassment at school, or a combination of the two."

The biblical account does not discuss the psychological impact of these events on Joseph. Yet much can be inferred about that impact from the Bible's narrative of Joseph's reunion with his ten older brothers in Egypt. As pointed out by Professor Augsburg, Joseph's treatment of his brothers during their initial encounter becomes "exacting, interrogation follows, then strategic testing with harsh imprisonment of one of them as an example." As a result, the brothers "experience their powerlessness." Later, Joseph "intensifies his trickery to induce in [his brothers] the terror he once knew." And, on their return visit, "he lords it over his cowering, fearful brethren, and plays with them as a cat plays with a mouse." He clearly revels in "the feeling of unbridled ruthless power" he is able to exert over them. All of this strongly suggests that Joseph has been deeply damaged by his childhood isolation and alienation and his violent and forceful eviction from his family home. These experiences have left him angered, embittered and vengeful.

Fortunately, the story does not end here. Joseph undergoes a transformative process that begins when he "comes out," that is, when he "made himself known to his brothers" (Gen. 45:1), by revealing that he was not in fact the person they had thought he was, an Egyptian serving in a high position in Pharaoh's court, but rather the brother they had assumed they would never see again after selling him into slavery. And he also courageously comes out to the Egyptians, revealing himself as the son and brother of Hebrew shepherds, a category of people looked down upon with great disdain by the Egyptians. See Gen. 46:33-34 (Joseph informed his family that they were required to "settle in

the land of Goshen, because all shepherds are abhorrent to the Egyptians”). For the first time since being sold into slavery, he no longer lives two lives but instead becomes a wholly integrated person. See **Michaelson**, pp. 46-47: “.... Genesis 45:1 uses a new word to describe what happens next: *v’hitvadah yoseph et echav*—and Joseph ‘made himself known’ to his brothers. This is a unique word, not found anywhere else in biblical text: *v’hitadah*. It’s in the reflexive form, since it’s something Joseph does to himself. He discloses himself, he reveals himself. He finally tells the truth about who he is. This is Joseph’s coming-out story. He tells the truth, to himself, his brothers, and, not least, the Egyptians whom he governs.... Life is going to be different [for Joseph], for his family, and for his native and adopted nations, from now on.”

After “coming out,” Joseph undergoes a process that is thankfully familiar to at least some LGBTQ+ people. As stated by Professor Augsburger, at p. 195 of his treatise, “[t]he Jacob-Joseph story ... [begins as an epic tale] of family rivalry, domination, hatred, trickery, and alienation ... [but then goes through] surprising turns toward forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation.” In the end, it becomes “a story of love lived out in a manner that mirrors God’s good intentions toward those who act hatefully.” **Augsburger**, p. 199. Joseph no longer feels a need or a desire to lord it over his brothers and instead offers to become their benefactor and protector. In addition, he is able to forgive his brothers for what they have done to him, saying that “You meant evil ... but God meant ... good” (Gen. 50:20) and that “it was God who sent me ahead of you to save men’s lives” (Gen. 45:5). In words quoted by Professor Augsburger, at p. 199, Joseph became “perhaps the only true saint in the Tanakh,” reflecting in his own words and deeds the “God who does not deal out punishment for shortcomings, demand repayment for old injustices, or exact retributive justice against those who deserve retribution.” In undergoing this process of transformation from anger, bitterness, and vindictiveness to forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation, Joseph followed a course that parallels the experience of some, if not most, LGBTQ+ people. Like those LGBTQ+ people whose lives have been similarly transformed, he discovers

that “coming out is a religious act.” It is for this reason, above any other, that Joseph’s story is correctly characterized as “the quintessential ‘coming out’ story in the Bible.”

III. An Introduction to “Queer Theology”

Other commentators have focused on different “coming out” stories in the Bible in drawing analogies to LGBTQ+ coming out experiences. In the first commentary below, Benjamin Perkins, a gay Unitarian- Universalist and a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, analogizes the “coming out” experience to the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. In the second, Rev. Dr. Mona West, a lesbian biblical scholar and teacher, writer, and MCC pastor, compares the “coming out” experience to the exodus of the Hebrew nation from Egypt. Both of these essays were printed in the book Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible, which was published in 2000.

At the outset, it should be noted that the word “queer” evokes differing reactions among members of the LGBTQ+ community. In his 1994 book A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society, Bruce Bawer described the “broad cultural divide, and often considerable hostility” that existed between “subculture-oriented gays” and “mainstream gays,” the two categories of gay men that fell at the extreme ends of the cultural spectrum in LGBTQ+ society at that time. The terms “queer” and “queer theology,” originated in the “gay subculture” and particularly in “gay ghettos” like the Castro district in San Francisco, West Hollywood in Los Angeles, and Greenwich Village in New York City. The terms came into increasingly common usage toward the end of the Twentieth Century, when a right-wing backlash against LGBTQ+ nondiscrimination laws and a surge of prejudice against people with AIDS led to increasing alienation and isolation of the LGBTQ+ community from the rest of American society. People who self-identified as “queers” tended to be people who strongly identified with other members of the LGBTQ+ community, while at the same time feeling isolated from and/or rejected by the rest of society. [“Queers” was seen as an umbrella term that encompassed gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender

people, as well as such other sexual minorities as those who are “nonbinary,” “intersex,” “transvestites” or “questioning”]. “Queers” also tended to see themselves as social outcasts, marginalized and/or oppressed, and they tended to separate themselves, geographically and/or socially, from the larger and dominant heterosexual society that surrounded them. On the other hand, many “mainstream gays” were uncomfortable at best with being described as “queers.” They were more likely to see themselves as “just like everybody else,” except for their sexual orientation, and to strive for integration into rather than separation from heterosexual society. See Volume One of Study Manual – Placing the Issue of LGBTQ+ Inclusion in its Broader Context: A History of LGBTQ+ People in the United States of America, Lessons 2 & 3.

In its most simplistic form, “queer theology” can be thought of as a re-examination of scriptures from the unique perspective of the LGBTQ+ religious community. The Introduction to the compilation of essays in Take Back the Word, provides some of the background behind the development of this relatively new school of theology, at pp. 4-6:

“With the rise of postmodernism we have seen a shift in biblical hermeneutics [that is, principles of biblical interpretation] that considers the role of the reader in assigning meaning to the biblical text.... This focus on the reader has produced many new voices in the discipline of biblical criticism. These new voices have pointed out, among other things, that *there is no completely objective reading of the text. The scientific and objective stance of historical-critical methods of modernity has been nothing more than a reading from a privileged location described as European American, male, and heterosexual.*

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“.... The contributors in this volume read the Bible from a queer social location, and in their reading they cross boundaries in order to take back the Word from fundamentalist, exclusionary readings that demonize our community or justify a rhetoric of hate that leads to violence against us. [They] struggle against heterocentric privilege that erases us from the text.... The Hebrew and

Christian Scriptures are not the privileged possession of heterosexuals but belong to all Jews and Christians of faith” [Emphasis added]

Two examples of this new theological perspective, both of which support Michaelson’s view that “coming out” is “a religious act,” follow. First, Benjamin Perkins analogizes the LGBTQ+ coming out experience to the biblical story of Lazarus being raised from the dead:

Take Back the Word, pp. 196-97, 198-99, 202, “Coming Out, Lazarus’s and Ours: Queer Reflections of a Psychospiritual, Political Journey,” Benjamin Perkins: “The story of Lazarus’s resurrection continually haunts and captures my imagination, more than perhaps any other New Testament story....

“As I enter the text, I am struck by its unrelenting power to convey that life can come from a lifeless situation and existence, which has deep resonances for anyone who has lived a closeted existence. Lazarus’s story, in my estimation, is a queer tale because the themes contained within it speak to the psychospiritual journey of queer persons. For instance, in my own personal experience of coming out, I remember distinctly telling my friends that I felt as if I had been given a new life, that the hopelessness and despair that shrouded me like a thick cloud had lifted. Thus, for me, and many other queer individuals, it takes no stretch of the imagination to embody the narrative and, miraculously, bring it to new life!

“Lazarus’ story gives me permission, no, authority, to look at my own process of coming out as a sacramental journey. Therefore, I take seriously Jesus’ command to ‘come out.’ I also take equally seriously Jesus’ command to those surrounding Lazarus to ‘unbind him, and let him go!’ What follows is a result of my encounters with the Lazarus narrative and its life-giving hope....

“In this essay I will argue that Lazarus’s story can be understood as a coming out and, as such, should be celebrated as a sacrament, which I define as an event that celebrates the renewal of life and the Unitarian Universalist principles of ‘the interdependent web of existence’ and ‘the inherent worth and dignity of every person.’.... Sacraments call us to remember the sanctity of our existence and our relationship to the Divine....

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“Queer author Michael Nava writes that *the coming-out process for queers is similar, if not identical to being born again: ‘Being ‘born again’ and ‘coming out’ are transcendent experiences that produce a profound change in perception. You never look at yourself, your life, or your culture the same way again.’....*

“I view the coming-out phenomenon as a ‘process-event.’ *Coming out, when understood as a sacrament, suggests powerfully that something is occurring that is moving us toward a deeper understanding of ourselves, our world, and our Source.* In John 11, Jesus calls to Lazarus, shouting for him to come out of the tomb. Lazarus is called forth to life. For queer individuals, the parallel is unmistakable; we are called out in a process that moves us toward a greater integrity in our relationship to self and others. As radical theologian-priest-educator Matthew Fox describes it, ‘[the] sacrament of ‘coming out’ [is a] kind of letting go: a letting go of images of personhood, sexuality, and selfhood that society has put on in favor of trusting oneself enough to be oneself.’ Coincidentally, *what I am suggesting is that the move toward integrity and authenticity is best understood biblically.*

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“Fortunately, in the depths of our despair, doubt, and anguish, the miraculous happens—life bursts forth from death and hopelessness. Lazarus is called forth from the tomb. And like Lazarus’s coming out of his tomb, we too are called out of our closets/tombs. We are called to leave a mode of existence that encourages dishonesty and deception for a life that celebrates authenticity and vulnerability. In answering this call to come out, we are also called to resurrection” [Emphasis added].

Then the Rev. Dr. Mona West draws an analogy between the LGBTQ+ coming out experience and the exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt: **Take Back the Word**, pp. 72-75, “Outsiders, Aliens, and Boundary Crossers: a Queer Reading of the Hebrew Exodus,” Mona West: “For those who identify with

the Israelites [in the book of Exodus], at the core of these readings of revolution, deliverance, and liberation is the realization that Exodus is ultimately a story of transformation. Yahweh claims that this group of slaves Moses has led out of Egypt has become Yahweh's treasured possession, a priestly kingdom, a holy nation (Exod. 19:1-6). Indeed the experience of exodus and wilderness wanderings transforms the *habiru*—known in the ancient Near East as the aliens, the strangers, and the marginalized—into a people with a common religious history and experience of God. Walter Brueggemann points out that the word *habiru* is related etymologically and sociologically to the biblical term 'Hebrew.' From the root *abar*, meaning 'to cross over,' the Hebrew is 'one who crosses over boundaries, who has no respect for imperial boundaries, is not confined by such boundaries, and crosses them in desperate quest of the necessities of life. The Hebrew is driven by the urgent issue of survival.' It is these *habiru* that would eventually be transformed into the nation of Israel.

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"In essence, Exodus is a coming-out story. The habiru risk the security of their closets of slavery in Egypt (Exod. 16:3; Num. 11:5-6) in order to come into their full identity as God's people. This identity did not happen at the crossing of the Red Sea. The story tells us that they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. During this time of trial and rebellion, they discovered more fully what it meant to embrace this new identity.

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*".... Ken Plummer, in his book *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change, and Social Worlds*, claims that gay and lesbian coming-out stories exhibit elements of 'grand stories' that have to do with journey, enduring suffering, engaging in a contest, and establishing a home. He states, 'Certainly, over the years ... I have heard within the elements of these narratives over and over again the substance of the lesbian and gay coming-out stories. Here are men and women engaged on a voyage of discovery to be true to their inner self.' The themes of enslavement,*

exodus, wilderness wanderings, promised land, and exile parallel the stories of queer Christians who risk the security of their closets to find wholeness in relation to God and the believing community. Just as the Exodus was a crucial event for the Israelites, 'the most momentous act in the life of any lesbian or gay person is when they proclaim their gayness.'

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"Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, 'Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.' (Exod. 1:8-10).

"Queers identify with the nature of the oppression experienced by the Hebrews found in the first chapter of the book of Exodus. The dominant culture (the Egyptians) fears them because of their otherness and because of their numbers. Queers hear echoed in the words of the Pharaoh such phrases as 'don't ask, don't tell,' 'love the sinner, hate the sin,' 'self-avowed, openly practicing.' When we come out of our closets, we make our pharaohs nervous. We become too many. We become a threat to national security. When we come out of our closets, we experience the threat of genocide.... Queers experience this in the form of physical violence, hate crimes, and denied access to goods and services.

"....But the pharaoh does not have the last word. The Hebrews refuse to be silent. They cry out, naming their pain and suffering, refusing to accept things the way they are. Yahweh hears and responds. Ultimately, they are delivered from their enslavement by risking coming out of the closet of Egypt.

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"Coming out of the closet is a powerful, liberative act for queers. It is life giving. It is risky. It is the ultimate act of boundary crossing. Queers have refused to be silent. Like the Hebrews, queers cry out against the dominant culture, refusing to accept outsider status. In the act of coming out, queers cross over and

discover a new identity and a new name for God. Like the *habiru* of the Exodus, who go on to experience wilderness, promised land, and exile, queers embark upon a life long journey when deciding to come out. It is a journey that is often dangerous and exciting, and ultimately life giving and transforming” [Emphasis added].

Yet another essay from Take Back the Word provides a totally different perspective on the LGBTQ+ individual’s decision to “come out.” This essay was written by Dr. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, the “womanist” scholar and prolific author whose works include The Divine Feminine (1983) and Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? A Positive Christian Response (1978). In her essay, “Reading the Bible from Low and Outside: Lesbians and Gay People as God’s Tricksters,” Dr. Mollenkott takes issue with the many gay male Christians and Jews who assert the importance of LGBTQ+ people “coming out.” In support of her view that the Bible also supports the decisions of LGBTQ+ people who remain in the closet, she cites examples of “tricksters” in the Bible, essentially powerless people like Rebekah and her son Jacob, who resorted to deception to gain the inheritance that had been promised to them by God:

Take Back the Word, pp. 13-15, 16-17, 18-19: “As a lesbian Christian born in 1932 and growing up in the ‘40s and ‘50s, I have had to learn to read the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures from low and outside. From low because my status as female was secondary and silenced in the church of my youth, where girls and women wore hats to signify our submission to male authority and where even in Bible studies we were not permitted so much as to ask a question. From outside because my lesbianism (fully recognized by age eleven) took away from me even the humblest of insider status in a community that never mentioned that kind of sin. Someone did read Romans 1 to me when I was thirteen, telling me that if I continued to love women I would prove I was ‘without God in my mind’ and ‘worthy of death.’ Being a compliant type and passionately devoted to God, I did try to kill myself, as so many queer teenagers do. But worse than that attempt were the years of living death in marriage to a man who was convinced that I was

divinely created to clean up after him.

“I had to learn to read the Scriptures from low and outside because I had been trained to identify with the white heterosexual male point of view when reading the Bible. What an amazing and life-transforming shift occurred when I learned to see myself, not as Abraham, but as Sarah or Hagar or one of the lesser concubines, not as one of Jesus’ disciples, but as the determined Greek woman who cried for Jesus to heal her daughter but at first was told to go away (Matt. 15:21-28). When battered women from conservative denominations learn the ‘core insight’ that ‘God ... sides with those who are out of power’ and when they realize that women are ‘included in the biblical category of the poor, the oppressed, and the outcast’ [See Lesson 8 below], they are empowered to leave the batterer. That process worked in my life; as I divested myself of the male-identified androcentric and heterocentric mind-set and became woman-identified and queer-identified, I realized that the God of scripture lifts up the lowly and brings the outsider into the community. (Think of Ruth, a woman who became ‘better than seven sons,’ a poverty-stricken Moabite widow who became part of King David’s ancestral line, partly because she seduced Boaz on the threshing floor). Not only that, but I realized that God repeatedly uses ‘those with less clout ... to challenge those with more, in order to equalize or reverse the flow of energies that constitute power, be it cosmological, national, or personal.’

“Eventually, I learned on my own pulses what Hebrew Bible professor Carole R. Fontaine describes as typical not only of the Bible but of the divine entities of the ancient Near East from Sumer to Egypt: ‘Those who find themselves disadvantaged, on the ‘outside,’ in the margins as it were, make use of trickery and other forms of manipulative behavior (like gossip, mis-information, nagging, playing possum, distractions and deceptions) because they do not have what sociologists refer to as ‘assigned power.’ Assigned power is just that: assigned (usually by the elite in favor of the elite), but masquerading as divinely ordained, cosmically correct and unquestionably true—in short, an unassailable ‘given.’

“It seems to me vital that queer people learn to empower ourselves by reading the Bible from low and outside instead of identifying our agenda as we read with that of the heterosexual normative group. Some of us, of course, have more power than others, and to the degree that we have power, we must use it responsibly. But it is equally important to recognize those aspects of our experience that are systemic and oppressive and beyond our individual ability to change and then to find ways to undercut and subvert those inequitable systems.

“One trickster who did exactly that is the Reverend Dr. Jeanne Audrey Powers. A year before she retired from lifelong ministry in the United Methodist Church, Powers came out as a lesbian. She made clear that she had been working for gay and lesbian liberation all her life, although the church forced her to remain closeted by its statement that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian faith. Powers described to me her pain when recently ‘out’ lesbian women or gay men would express joy at having ‘regained their integrity.’ She felt (and I agreed) that she had always been a person of integrity but had been forced to practice subversion in an occupied territory that was the locus of her ministry and had thus silenced the fullest range of her voice as the price of that ministry. I know that her experience is typical of many who serve not only in United Methodism but in many other denominations of Christianity and Judaism or in public schools, for that matter. For their sake, and for the sake of clear thinking in general, I want to reclaim the Bible’s words about God’s tricksterism and God’s use of tricksters and to suggest that queer people who work for justice from within the closet may validly be honored as the trickster servants of God. ‘When the power-brokers simply will not listen, when the center forgets the margin—well, then, a trick may be in order.’

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“Womanist theologians have always been frank about doing whatever is necessary in order to survive.... [W]omanist Bible scholar Renita J. Weems states: ‘A challenge for marginalized readers in general, and African American women in

particular, has been to use whatever means necessary to recover the voice of the oppressed within biblical texts.’ That voice would include the perspective of the Bible’s many tricksters, those whose presence turns the worldly status quo upside down and inside out or even such strange moments as Abraham’s fooling potentates into thinking his wife was his sister because at the time that charade seemed necessary for survival or the Great Trickster’s sending the King of Kings to be born in a lowly stable. Fontaine comments, ‘The trickster exists to redistribute power: From the snake who beguiles to the Lamb who Redeems, readers of the Bible watch the interplay of potencies move from the ‘Haves’ to the ‘Have-Nots’.’

“Within the contemporary lesbitransgay Christian community, the wide-spread assumption is that all community members should—must—proclaim their identity openly. I question this ethic that ‘everybody must come out’ because it neglects the diversity of our contexts.... I do not question that it would be best (for both individuals and society) for everyone to come out if they can afford to. But within the queer community, there is such a huge variety of race and class differences that it is oppressive for some of us to put pressure on others of us.

“I was not surprised that ... opposition to my thesis about honoring necessary subversion came from certain well-heeled white gay males, not from lesbian women or queers of color or of poverty. An affluent white gay male has encountered oppression in only one area of his experience and hence can hope in most cases to achieve the standards of the Kantian categorical imperative (‘always act in such a way that your actions could be willed as universal laws’). But queers who are poor and/or nonwhite and/or women have experienced several interconnected oppressions. Hence they can more readily sense the need for subversion or tricksterism as survival and justice-making tactics.

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“Consider the story of Rebekah and her son Jacob. God told Rebekah that she was pregnant with twins who were struggling in her womb and would continue to struggle after birth, with the elder to serve the younger (Gen.

25:21-23). *Because of her inner knowledge, Rebekah is the only one who can see to it that the divinely ordained switch of inheritance and power actually will take place. To that end Rebekah instructs Jacob in an elaborate scheme to trick his old father into giving him the blessing, inheritance, and power of the firstborn son (Gen. 27:1-33).*

“Gwenyth Mapes, who had the courage to open a Planned Parenthood clinic in Montana after the former clinic had been burned to the ground, had this to say about Rebekah and her son:

Jacob becomes the archetypal trickster, a role that is lauded in many cultures because it is so versatile and ultimately necessary in the survival of the species. But what we forget is that Rebekah trained Jacob in this, thus forging the very nature of survival in him and in their descendants. What we also forget is that this trickster trait is the very quality for which women and minorities are lambasted throughout history: deception, subterfuge, lying, cheating, etc. *These qualities are necessary qualities of any person or group who is denied social power and has to achieve it in ways other than the system allows.* So we laud Jacob in this story, but lambaste the Rebekahs of the world, *unless we reinterpret the story and realize the important role Rebekah played and why she had to resort to lying and deception in order to achieve God’s plan for her sons.* No one else could do that for God, since only she knew the plan. And she could achieve God’s plan in no other way but trickery, because society offered her no other power.

“Lesbitransgay people should have no trouble recognizing themselves in the figure of Rebekah (a woman in a culture that does not value women except in certain rigidly prescribed roles) or in the figure of Jacob (the relatively powerless second son). In a heteropatriarchal culture like our own, queer people are distinctly ‘other’ and distinctly secondary, forced to compete uphill on a slanted playing field. *I offer Rebekah’s and Jacob’s gaining of power through subterfuge as a paradigm for all the queer people who are forced to disguise all or part of their*

reality as the price of fulfilling their vocation, their divine calling in life" [Emphasis added].

Dr. Mollenkott's views on the importance of "tricksters" in the Bible and their relevance to modern "closeted" gays and lesbians who are engaged in resistance to homophobic policies and practices within the church received strong support from Jeanne Audrey Powers (the same woman lauded by Dr. Mollenkott in the passage quoted above) in a sermon given on the scriptural text Exodus 1:8-2:15, as follows:

Loyal Opposition, "The Journey: A Sermon," Jeanne Audrey Powers, pp. 111-12, 113-16: "Women, only recently, have been uncovering stories that have been hidden from them in Scripture, and I found one as I was reflecting on this sermon. It's a woman's story, but with special relevance, I believe, for all of us attending this convocation. Pay close attention to the text! The Hebrew midwives engage in a lie, deliberately telling Pharaoh what was not true about the pregnant Hebrew women; the mother of Moses is deceptive and hides Moses in a floating basket; the daughter of the Pharaoh defies her father's orders that all Hebrew boy babies be killed; Moses' own sister operates under pretense and gets Pharaoh's daughter to allow the baby to go 'back to his mother's arms and breast.' Later, Pharaoh's daughter falsely claims she is his mother. Do you notice the action words that describe these women? The mid-wives lie, Moses' mother is deceptive, Pharaoh's daughter defies orders and later makes false claims, and Moses' sister operates under pretense. These are all extremely brave women in the face of Pharaoh's power. Their perseverance and determination saves the life of Moses, who enables the Hebrew people to be freed from their bondage. A powerless people are transformed into a self-determining nation. Indeed, these heroic women model for us liberation from constriction, using subversion to transform the faith community.

"There is yet a little more to be said. In the passage that follows, when Moses, as an adult, happens upon an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, he kills the Egyptian. But notice what he does first. The text says, 'He looked this way and

that, and seeing no one [Moses] killed the Egyptian' (Exod. 2:11-12). Smart man: His question was, 'Am I going to get caught?' The next day he confronts two Hebrews fighting amongst themselves, only to be told, 'Butt out. Who allowed you, a murderer, to judge us?' Realizing that word has gotten out about the killing, Moses escapes to Midian, lest Pharaoh realize that there has been a Hebrew in his own palace all the time.

"A subversive strategy is emerging—deception, operating under pretense, and making false claims. And let's add three more descriptions of this resistance strategy: (1) don't get caught; (2) when you know it is the right time, don't hesitate to confront; and (3) flee when you have to!

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"As I read about resisters and survivors during the time of Holocaust horrors, I kept thinking about what it means to be truly subversive to the Church's unjust life and teaching about homosexuality. As long as the phrases 'homosexuality and the Christian faith are incompatible,' and 'celibacy in singleness' continue to stand in our *Discipline*, no matter how these phrases are introduced or framed, our Church is on record as perpetuating heterosexism in its life and homophobia in its teaching.

"So I began to see some parallels between the behavior of some persons during the Nazi era and the way some straight and gay and lesbian people act in the Church today....

"We've already seen that 'subversion' takes many forms. Pharaoh told the midwives to kill all Hebrew baby boys. Not only did they disregard what he said, but they also lied about it when he called them into his chambers. These midwives were skillful masters of deception and practitioners of innocence when it was necessary.

"And in homes in Germany even youngsters learned to lie convincingly to authorities or feign innocence when caught.... Resistance—and faithfulness—takes many forms.

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“So I’d like to come right out and say that there are times when lying, deception, and operating under false pretenses is the most *life-giving* action, the *most* faithful response for Christians.’ Perhaps Augustine is saying, ‘Love God and sin boldly’ to some gay and lesbian clergy when they deny their sexuality for the sake of their ministry. The Exodus passage says that the midwives did it because they feared God more than they feared unjust authority. The midwives lied, and the people of God were given their lives back again. And the other women in the story defied, were deceptive, and made false claims. Because of it the Hebrews were called out of exile, bound for the promised land.”

Still another perspective on this issue is presented by Rev. Elizabeth Edman, who focuses on the impact of the individual’s decision to “come out” or “stay in the closet” on the LGBTQ+ community at large and particularly on other individuals who remain in the closet:

Edman, pp. 123-24: “Queer experience often begins with some level of awareness, the flickering discernment of an identity. *Coming out is the process by which a queer person gets honest about it.* This part of the process entails risk and requires courage. *Coming out, first to oneself and then to others, is a matter of personal integrity.* It requires a measure of safety and an ability to trust—to trust oneself, at the very least.

“The phrase ‘coming out’ is tied to the concept of ‘the closet.’ *The closet is the place where one can stay cloaked, metaphorically; where one’s sexual identity is not seen by others. Lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people have had to grapple with what we call the privilege of the closet: that our sexual identity is often, though not always, something that one can choose to hide or to disclose.* This makes sexual identity different from skin color (though not always), or sex (though not always), or using a wheelchair as your primary mode of getting around.

“Decades ago people who identified as gay began to realize that the single factor that most affected how someone felt about ‘homosexuality’ was whether

that person knew someone who was openly gay. The more clearly we came to understand this dynamic, the more we understood that coming out is not just a personal statement. Coming out is an act that changes the world. Coming out makes it easier for the person standing behind you in the closet to come out—and the person behind [her], and the person behind him, and so on. Once you really grasp this, it is hard to ignore the corollary: not coming out makes it that much more difficult for the person behind you to come out as well. A friend of mine, almost twenty years older than I, recently said, ‘Not coming out is never a morally neutral act.’

“The reason that coming out is so important is that it is crucial to building community, and community is crucial to building a measure of safety. But community now exists, and that means for many people coming out does not need to be the solitary and often perilous act it once was. This is not to say that it is no longer dangerous. The violence against our people is still menacingly alive. We face emotional violence and physical violence at the hands of family members, fellow students, bullies on social media, preachers in the pulpit, mobs on the street, and, in many parts of the world, cops and courts and judges within the legal system.

“But it is also true that people are safer, overall, in places where LGBTQ+ communities are strong. Coming out builds up the community, and the existence of that community provides support, encouragement, and balm to those who come out. As a community we have visibility and political power that allows us to organize against the violence directed at us. Thus, there is reciprocity between an individual and the community, a dynamic tension between the imperative to come out and the solid ground one needs to take the risk—the solid ground of relationship with people who know you, who see you, who love you, who understand what you face, who share some aspect of this part of you and who love it in you and in themselves” [Emphasis added].

**LESSON 7--FIVE FUNDAMENTAL BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES THAT SUPPORT
A POLICY OF LGBTQ+ INCLUSION (No. 4)**

**No. 4--The Actions and Teachings of Jesus Demonstrated His Commitment
to Welcoming “the Stranger” and Protecting the Marginalized;
They Support a Policy of LGBTQ+ Inclusion**

BIBLE PASSAGES: Jn. 3:16 (KJV, emphasis added)(“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”); Mt. 8:5-13 & Lk. 7:1-10 (Jesus heals the centurion’s servant); Mt. 19:3-12 (Jesus’ discussion of eunuchs)

THE INCLUSIVE ACTS OF JESUS: Mk.1:40-45 (Jesus heals an “unclean” leper by touching and cleansing him); Mk. 2:13-17 (Jesus calls a tax collector to be one of The Twelve, then dines with “many tax collectors and sinners”) [See also Lk. 15:1-7 & 19:1-10]; Mk. 7:24-30 (Jesus heals the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman); Matt. 12:15-21 (Jesus described as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy that the suffering servant will proclaim justice and bring hope to the Gentiles); Matt. 28:16-20 (The resurrected Jesus sends The Eleven into the world to “make disciples of all nations”); Lk. 2:25-32 (Simeon sees the infant Jesus in the Temple and prophesies that he will be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel”); Lk. 7:36-50 (Jesus defends the woman, “a sinner,” who anointed his feet and forgives her sins); Lk. 8:1-3 (Jesus and the Twelve were accompanied in their travels by “some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities” and who “provided for the others out of their resources,” including Mary Magdalene, “from whom seven demons had gone out”; Lk. 8:43-48 (Jesus heals the “unclean” woman with the flow of blood); Lk. 10:25-37 (Jesus tells a parable in which the hero is a Samaritan); Lk. 10:38-42 (Jesus commends Mary of Bethany for sitting at his feet and listening to his teaching while her sister Martha “was distracted by her many tasks”; Mary “has chosen the better part”); Lk. 24:44-49 (The resurrected Jesus tells the Eleven that “everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms must be

fulfilled” and that “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in [my] name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem”); Jn. 4:1-42 (Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well and discusses spiritual issues with her); Jn. 8:2-11 (Jesus intervenes to prevent a crowd from stoning a woman caught in adultery and forgives her sins)

I. Introduction

As the years have passed and the number of openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer Christians and Jews has increased, biblical scholars supportive of LGBTQ+ inclusion and full participation in the Church and the Synagogue have begun to not only defend the LGBTQ+ community against the attacks of the biblical literalists and legalists but also to re-examine the scriptures from the viewpoint of LGBTQ+ people with an eye toward finding passages that are affirming of sexual minorities and their relationships. They note at the outset that, for Christians, the various books of the Bible are not given equal weight. The four gospels of the New Testament, which focus on the actions and teachings of Jesus, must be the starting point for a discussion of homosexuality or of any other issue. Yet, it is certainly noteworthy that *none* of “the clobbering passages,” listed above at pp. 77-78, that are used to justify the Church’s condemnation and exclusion of LGBTQ+ people come from any of the four gospels. “Although Jesus said many things that apply to the lives of twenty-first century gay people, we have no indication that Jesus ever said anything negative on the subject of homosexuality.” **Miner & Connoley**, p. 2. It therefore can be, and has been, argued that Jesus’ silence on the subjects of homosexuality and same-gender sexual activity is in itself significant:

Michaelson, pp. 73-74: “As we move from the Hebrew Bible to the New Testament, our consideration shifts in several ways. First, we move from what is sometimes loosely referred to as the Judeo-Christian tradition to Christianity specifically.... [In addition,] we move into a literary context in which not all texts are created equal. If Jesus said something recorded in the Gospels, that statement is more important than a single comment in the Epistle of Jude, or, for that

matter, a superseded comment from one of the five books of Moses.

“So let’s start there. Here are all the statements Jesus Christ made about homosexuality:

“Surprising, isn’t it? Let’s check again—nope, nothing, even though Jesus lived at a time when pederasty and other forms of same-sex activity were common. *This silence speaks volumes. If [condemnation of] homosexuality were an important part of Christ’s message, why is it absent from it? It’s not as if Jesus hesitated to critique his society, after all. If this widespread practice were so abhorrent to him, would he really be silent?*

“We cannot simply pass over this silence, or attribute it, as some have, to a tacit acceptance of the Old Testament’s existing rules. Jesus wasn’t tacit about the values that mattered most. If regulation of homosexual behavior were one of them, the Gospels would not be silent. *On the contrary, the silence indicates supersession.* The Old Testament’s proscriptions on male anal sex are connected to prohibitions on idolatry. They are about ritual purity, not ethical law. For Christians, the distinction is central. *While the Hebrew Bible remains authoritative for moral teachings, it is not binding on Christians for ritual ones*—if it were, Christians would have to avoid shrimp and lobster, wear fringe garments, and perhaps offer sacrifices instead of hymns.

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“As we turn to the New Testament, then, we do so with practically a blank slate. *In the Christian context, the prohibitions of Leviticus should be understood as superseded.* Like the other ritual requirements of the ancient priestly code, they should bother the faithful Christian no more than a shrimp cocktail” [Emphasis added].

II. The “Whosoever” Texts

While Jesus had nothing to say directly *about* LGBTQ+ people, he had a great deal to say *to* them. John 3:16 (KJV) quotes Jesus as saying to Nicodemus: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” [Emphasis added]. Referring to this passage, Rev. Elder Don Eastman of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC) wrote: “The most beautiful word in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is ‘whosoever.’ All of God’s promises are intended for every human being. This includes gay men and lesbians.” Eastman, p. 1. *For the most part, Christ’s words to LGBTQ+ Christians are the same words spoken to all Christians.* Thus, from the viewpoint of LGBTQ+ Christians, what is most significant about John 3:16, and many other similar statements by Jesus, is the fact that LGBTQ+ peoples are *not expressly excluded* from the scope of Jesus’ promises. And those who argue that LGBTQ+ people are somehow implicitly excluded can find *no support* for their argument in either the teachings or actions of Jesus.

III. What Jesus Had to Say About Eunuchs (Mt. 19:11-12)

In Chapter 9 of God vs. Gay?, which is captioned “The Gospels: *What Jesus didn’t say about homosexuality*,” Michaelson argues (at p. 74) that, “[d]espite Jesus’s silence [on the matter, as discussed above], there are a few lessons we can glean from the Gospels regarding sexual diversity.” He then focused on three of these lessons: “The first is the story of the faithful centurion, told in Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10” [Michaelson, p. 75]; “The second, and related, point to make is Jesus’s general stance toward ‘family values’ and the nature of his community” [Michaelson, pp. 75-76]; and “Third, let’s consider Jesus’s attitude toward eunuchs, who were also very queer in their societal context” [Michaelson, pp. 76]. These same three “lessons” have been cited and relied upon by other scholars and commentators as well, and they will be analyzed below, albeit in reverse order.

To begin with, proponents of LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Church and in the

Synagogue must acknowledge that there is one statement by Jesus, quoted at Mt. 19:4-6, that has been used against us by our opponents, in the context of the debate over marriage equality. These people see Jesus' statement as support for their arguments that (a) "marriage = 1 man + 1 woman" and (b) monogamous heterosexual marriage is the *only* kind of sexual relationship that is acceptable to God. Those who take this position, however, ignore the fact that the statement they rely upon is almost immediately followed by a second statement by Jesus, at Mt. 19:11-12, that gay scholars and their allies have argued has a very affirming meaning for the LGBTQ+ community. Both of these statements are quoted and discussed in the following commentary, which argues that Jesus' overall message in this passage is one of acceptance of sexual diversity:

Miner & Connoley, pp. 44-46: "Some Christians confidently assert that God did not create homosexual people 'that way.'To bolster their position, they often cite Jesus' words in Matthew 19:4-6, where he responds to a question about whether divorce is permissible:

Jesus answered, 'Have you not read that the One who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.' Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.

"From these words, some Christians draw the conclusion that heterosexuality is the creation norm and, thus, heterosexual marriage is the only legitimate way for people to form romantic relationships. Ironically, Jesus' own words *in this very same passage* refute these conclusions.

"As the dialogue continues, Jesus' disciples are disturbed by his strict teaching on divorce. The disciples say that if divorce is not a ready option, perhaps it would be best for a man not to marry a woman. Jesus responds:

Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have

made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can. (Matthew 19:11-12)

“Here Jesus identifies three classes of *men who should not marry women*. Taking his categories in reverse order, first, there are those who have made themselves ‘eunuchs’ for the kingdom of heaven, *i.e.*, those who forswear marriage to better serve God. Second, he mentions those who have been ‘made eunuchs by others,’ an apparent reference to castrated males. But Jesus mentions a third category—eunuchs who were *born that way*. Some might argue that Jesus was referring to males born without testicles, but this would be extremely rare. Moreover, this interpretation ignores how the term ‘born eunuchs’ was used in other literature of the time.

“... [I]n the ancient world, including ancient Jewish culture (as reflected in the Talmud), ‘natural’ or ‘born’ eunuchs were not associated with missing testicles. Rather, they were associated with stereotypically effeminate characteristics and behavior (just like modern gay men), and were thought by Rabbi Eliezer to be subject to ‘cure’ (just like modern gays). Moreover, ... *eunuchs were commonly associated with homosexual desire. As a reasonably informed person of his time, Jesus would have been aware of this common view of eunuchs. Yet he very matter-of-factly asserts that some people are simply born that way.* The implication of his statement is profound—God created gay people the way they are! Jesus says so.

“Unlike Rabbi Eliezer, Jesus feels no need to ‘cure’ these born eunuchs. He speaks no words of condemnation. Rather he ... accepts them as a natural part of God’s creation order” [Emphasis added].

See also **Michaelson**, pp.76-77: “.... Jesus identifies three types of eunuchs in Matthew 19: eunuchs from birth, eunuchs who were made that way, and ‘eunuchs for heaven.’ ... [W]e are not entirely certain what this means. The ordinary understanding is that a eunuch is someone who has been castrated. This practice was common in the ancient world, and eunuchs played important roles as guardians of harems and assistants to female royalty. However, *Jesus is clearly*

not using the word in its ordinary sense, since those in the third category of eunuchs are not physically castrated but spiritually neutered, as it were, so that they can serve God. So what was meant by 'eunuchs from birth'? This could mean men who are physically unable to make children, either because of impotence or birth defects such as crushed testicles. But it may also mean men who are congenitally not attracted to women—people we might today call homosexual. This may seem like a novel interpretation but it is not; Clement of Alexandria, [an early Christian theologian who lived from 150-217 C.E. and taught at the Catechetical School of Alexandria in Egypt,] for example, believed that 'some men, from their birth, have a natural sense of repulsion from a woman, and those who are naturally so constituted do well not to marry.' It may well be that Matthew 19:12 is referring to such men.

“Even if it is not, however, it is striking that Jesus specifically recognizes, and does not judge, the presence of sexual/gender diversity among people. Some people are eunuchs, of whatever type, and they are able to refrain from marriage. Others are not, and they are permitted to marry, though it is still better not to do so: ‘The one who can accept [celibacy] should accept it’ [Matt. 19:12]. *As in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40, God’s emissary does not withhold the gospel from the gender-variant person who desires to hear it.*” [Emphasis added]. See Lesson 1 above, at pp. 34-37.

IV. Actions Speak Louder Than Words

In examining the Gospels for clues as to Christ’s attitude toward homosexuality, it is appropriate to look not only at Christ’s words but also his deeds. Michaelson has concluded, at p. 77 of God vs. Gay?, “that in addition to Jesus’ silence on homosexuality [which ‘speaks volumes,’ see above], his actions send a clear, radical message of inclusion.” At p. 76, he cited the following actions as support for this conclusion: “[L]et’s remember that Jesus and the apostles would, by the standards of their society, themselves be considered quite ‘queer,’ not in a sexual sense, but in terms of gender roles and societal expectations. Think about it: this was someone who told people to leave their parents and follow him

(Lk. 9:61-62; 14:26-27), to reject societal expectations of familial life and devote oneself to a different kind of community, a ‘family’ marked by love and spiritual fellowship (Mt. 12:50). This is a savior who lived his life on the margins, and who deliberately flouted the conventions of his day. Jesus was a boundary crosser. He violated Israelite purity codes, accepted a former prostitute into his inner circle, spoke with women when others did not (Jn. 4:27), and preached that precisely those who were most oppressed were most beloved of God.”

Similarly, in God Believes in Love, Straight Talk About Gay Marriage, Bishop Robinson looked to the biblical accounts of what Jesus did in order to answer the question “What would Jesus do if he found himself in twenty-first century America ... [and encountered] two men or two women getting married?”: **Robinson**, pp. 96-110: “What would Jesus do if he found himself in twenty-first century America, where lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people are experiencing greater and greater acceptance—both by the culture and by people and institutions of faith—and working for their equal protections and rights: What would Jesus think about two men or two women getting married?

“Anyone who claims to know what God thinks about anything is walking on thin ice.... That said, people of faith are asking this question all the time! ‘What is the godly, Christlike thing to do in this situation?’ is another way of meditating on what God thinks about something and what God would have us do.

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“First, let’s acknowledge that according to the accounts of the life of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels, Jesus never said anything about sexually intimate relationships between people of the same gender.... Everything we say about what he might have thought about such relationships is extrapolation from other things he thought, said, and did....

“We know, for instance, that Jesus was a champion of the oppressed, the poor, and the marginalized. [See discussion below of God’s mandate that God’s people provide justice, Lesson 8, starting at p. 247]. His sympathy for them came

from an attitude of infinite respect for all of God's children, and he seemed to be personally in pain over their suffering. The sick, according to the common understanding, were sick because of their own sins or the sins of their forebears. But Jesus always approached them with compassion—often pronouncing them forgiven of their sins just for good measure (much to the consternation of those who would judge them). Jesus was famous for his daring approach to lepers, seemingly not caring about his own possible infection and defying the rules that isolated lepers from the general population, reaching out and touching not only their bodies but their spirits.

"The poor had a special place in Jesus' heart, a sure result of his being steeped in the Scriptures of the Judaism in which he was raised. The prophets spoke truth to power and criticized the system that exploited the poor for the benefit of the wealthy and the powerful. Jesus continued in that vein throughout his life and work. Indeed, Jesus saved his most scathing criticism for the powerful of his day who clothed their oppression in religious garb.

"He was especially kind to those who were looked down upon by polite society. He was critical of the moral arbiters of his time, condemning their arrogance and judgmental attitude. He understood that the Roman occupiers and their local collaborators exacted a terrible price—financial and human—from the most vulnerable. This was not merely personal injustice but systemic oppression. He was a revolutionary who meant to change the system that oppressed the most vulnerable.

"What can we surmise from this? Jesus was consistently on the side of those who were outcast by society and bore the unfair burden of disdain, discrimination, and prejudice. It is likely that he would look at modern-day lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and hold real sympathy for them and their plight. He would have understood the implications of a system set up to benefit the heterosexual majority over the homosexual minority. It is hard to imagine Jesus joining in the wholesale discrimination against LGBT[Q+] people. Isn't it logical that he would be sympathetic to young gay teens who take their own lives rather

than live with the stigma attached to their sexual orientation? Would he not be found speaking a word of support, encouragement, and hope to them? Would he not be seeking a change in the hearts of those who treat them as outcasts?

“Jesus had an alternative vision of family. The religious Right has ‘family values’ as a centerpiece of its understanding of what God intends for humankind. There is very little in Scripture to back up the notion of a nuclear family, headed by a biological father and mother. Indeed, in addition to calling some of his disciples away from their families to follow him, Jesus had some startling things to say about family and for himself chose a radically different lifestyle.

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“Jesus redefines the meaning of family for himself and for his followers. Once, when he was preaching and teaching, his biological mother and brothers attempted to talk to him:

Someone told him, ‘Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, waiting to speak to you.’ But to the one who told him this, Jesus replied, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ And pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’

(Matthew 12:47-50).

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“What can we surmise from this? Jesus would not be shocked by or opposed to new definitions of family. He would understand the families of gay and lesbian people, based on intentional choice and shared values, rather than merely on biological origin.

“Jesus had some relationships that were especially deep and meaningful. From his disciples, he clearly singled out Peter, James, and John to share his most personal moments. These three men were with Jesus at pivotal times in his life and work, sharing his more private and powerful experiences....

“The Gospel of John mentions one other special relationship Jesus had. To

me, it is remarkable that this mention of such a relationship was left in the text. Four times, the disciple John is referred to as ‘the one whom Jesus loved.’ ... It is John who is depicted as reclining next to Jesus (New Revised Standard Version) and sitting on Jesus’ right in the place of honor (New English Translation) at the Last Supper. The New English Translation even says, ‘Then the disciple whom Jesus loved leaned back against Jesus’ chest’ and asked him a question (John 13:25). And then, dramatically, John is depicted at the foot of the cross with Jesus’ mother, watching Jesus suffer and die of crucifixion. From the cross, in [the] moments before his death, Jesus speaks to John and his mother:

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, here is your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

(John 19:26-27).

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“... While it would be wrong to infer from this account more than is stated here, it would also be wrong to understate the power of what is going on here and to treat it as anything less. It would be wrong to extrapolate that Jesus and John had a physically intimate relationship, but it would also be wrong to deny that Jesus found a soul mate in this ‘one whom Jesus loved.’

“What can we surmise from this? It is clear to me that Jesus would not be shocked by or opposed to alternate notions of family. He would not be shocked at same-gender relationships for mutual support and productive work. He would not be surprised to see two people unrelated by blood who choose to relate to each other as if they were blood kin. He would understand the concern by one man on his deathbed for the welfare of another man, since he himself exhibited that concern.

“It is clear from the record of the Gospels that Jesus had a wholly different view of women and children from his prevailing culture. Biblical Israel/Palestine

was firmly patriarchal. Women and children did not count for much. In keeping with his infinite respect for *all* people, Jesus challenged the dominant patriarchal view that relegated women and children to second-class status. He exhibited this view in his ‘casual’ relationships with women, freely and publicly engaging them in conversation—quite radical in his time. He did this even with foreign women, such as the ‘woman at the well,’ a much-despised-by-Jews Samaritan woman (John 4:1-30). This story even attests to the radical nature of his interchange with this woman and the disciples’ reaction to it: ‘They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman’ (John 4:27b). [See also Mk. 7:24-30 (Jesus’ dialogue with the Syrophoenician woman, who persuades him to change his mind and heal her daughter)].

“As for children, Jesus exhibited a welcome unusual for a man of his time. The disciples assumed that the Master would not want to be ‘bothered’ with children. ‘The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them’ (Matthew 19:13b). But Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs’ (Matthew 19:14). A similar account is included in Mark’s Gospel, adding, ‘And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them’ (10:13-16). The Gospel of Luke also includes this episode from Jesus’s life, making it one of the few stories or sayings mentioned in all three of the Synoptic Gospels. *This mention in Matthew, Mark, and Luke points not only to the surprising and remarkable nature of Jesus’s attitude toward children but also to its importance in understanding his inclusion of those normally discounted by the culture.*

“Steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures as Jesus was, it is not surprising that he often mentions care for widows and orphans as a measure of one’s compassion. [See Lesson 8 below, at p. 253, citing Lev. 19:10 & Deut. 10:18 & 14:29; compare Lk. 18:1-8; Mk. 12:40; Lk. 7:11-15] *Jesus’s care for widows and orphans was simply another example of his reaching out to and advocating for those who had been marginalized by societal mores.*

“Another part of Jesus’s advocacy for women related to marriage and

divorce. In Jesus's time, a man could divorce a woman simply by presenting her with a writ of divorce—for any reason, or for no reason at all. She had no such right. This was indicative of the imbalance of power between a husband and wife typical of the time. The wife's life and future were totally at the mercy of her husband. *Jesus preached a radical, new equality for women in the context of marriage.* He taught that the *only* permissible grounds for which a man might divorce his wife were unchastity. Otherwise, a man divorcing his wife was forcing his wife into adultery if she remarried. This may not seem like much progress in women's rights to the twenty-first century mind, but it was a big step forward in Jesus's time.

"What can we surmise from this? Jesus' attitude toward women and children is indicative of his commitment to the dispossessed and the marginalized. The second-class status of women and children was one of the inequities that Jesus railed against, not only with his words, but in his actions. It is impossible for me to believe that Jesus would not have a similar attitude toward homosexual people who have been treated as second-class citizens through no fault of their own. It seems entirely logical that Jesus would oppose systemic inequities and injustices for anyone.

"Jesus was a rule breaker. It is clear that he was steeped in the laws of Judaism.... Jesus knew the teachings and commandments of his faith and generally believed in them. But he was not a slave to them either.... [S]ometimes he openly defied the traditional teaching.... [citing several instances where Jesus or his disciples violated the commandment to perform no 'work' on the Sabbath]. It seems that for him, human need trumped rules and centuries of tradition. People came first.

"It seems clear that Jesus was not deterred by tradition and long-acknowledged religious thinking and custom. If people were in need and changing that thinking and tradition was required in order to respond to the needs of the people, then so be it. This leads me to believe that Jesus would not shy away from equitable and humane treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender

people, just because we have thought differently about them for centuries.

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“No one can ever know the mind of God completely. No one can say for sure what Jesus would think and do in response to a twenty-first century development. But for me, it is hard to imagine that Jesus wouldn’t take a kindly, supportive attitude toward the love felt for each other by two people of the same gender. *Can anyone imagine that Jesus would denounce and decry two men or two women who have fallen in love, have promised to live in a faithful, monogamous, lifelong-intentional relationship and now seek the civil status and the Church’s sacrament of marriage? I cannot.*

“At the very least, surely we can agree that it would be completely within the bounds of what we have come to expect from Jesus that he would reach out to those discriminated against and pushed to the margins by a hostile society. Surely he would speak out against antigay violence and advocate respect for all of God’s children, including God’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender children. Surely he would support stable, enduring, and loving relationships for the raising of children. Surely he would see the promises pledged in marriage by one man to another man, [or] by one woman to another woman, as life-giving and holy. It would be totally out of character for Jesus to do anything else.” [Italicized emphasis added].

An alternative analysis of Jesus’ actions and teachings was presented by Bishop Spong in The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible’s Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love:

Spong II, pp. 291-92: “Are males superior to females, free people superior to slaves, parents superior to children, heterosexuals superior to homosexuals, white people superior to people of color? That is the wisdom of a world dedicated to survival and driving all things into power relationships. But humanity is always impaired when it builds its sense of worth by denigrating the worth of another. What the Jesus experience showed was a vision of a new humanity and in that vision no one is diminished.

“Jesus crossed the boundaries separating males from females and invited women into full discipleship. His followers would say that in Christ there is neither male nor female, bound nor free, both of which were radical pronouncements in a rigidly patriarchal and slave[ry]-practicing world....

“Jesus also embraced the outcast. He touched the rotting flesh of the leper and gave him back his own humanity (Matt. 8:2-3). You are not repulsive, Jesus conveyed; you are human. Jesus welcomed the touch of the woman with the chronic menstrual discharge, though by touching him in her uncleanness she rendered him unclean according to the Torah (Mark 5:25-34). Jesus stood between the woman taken in the act of adultery and her accusers (John 8:1-11). No sinful deed made anyone ultimately rejectable, he said, certainly not worthy of death. That is the power that people experienced in him and it was so freeing, so life-giving that they said God was in Christ....

“Even religious rules are not ultimate, Jesus said time after time. Religious rules are seen to be invested with divine authority only because they have become part of our security system. But, said Jesus, even the Sabbath is not to be treated as a rule into which human life has to fit. The Sabbath has value only to the degree that it enhances our humanity. The Sabbath was made for human life; human life was not made for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). So it is with every religious doctrine, practice and rule....

“One who is fully human is not bound by all that seems to bind human life—tribe, prejudice, gender, sexual orientation, religion, finitude, fear. We are free of all of those things. That is the Jesus message. Or as St. Paul once observed, ‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?’ No! shouts Paul, answering his own question: ‘In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Rom. 8:35-39).

“That is the Christ experience. That is what the New Testament is all about....”

[See also the biblical passages listed at the beginning of this lesson under the caption “The Inclusive Acts of Jesus”].

V. Jesus Heals the Centurion’s Servant

In particular, biblical scholars have found significance for the LGBTQ+ community in a healing story that is recorded in Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10. Matthew’s account of this story, as written in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, states the following:

Matthew 8:5 – 13

“[5] When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him [6] and saying, ‘Lord, my servant [pais] is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress.’ [7] And he said to him, ‘I will come and cure him.’ [8] The centurion answered, ‘Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant [pais] will be healed. [9] For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave [duolos], ‘Do this,’ and the slave [duolos] does it.’ [10] When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, ‘Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. [11] I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, [12] while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ [13] And to the centurion Jesus said, ‘Go, let it be done for you according to your faith.’ And the servant [pais] was healed in that hour.”

At the outset, what catches the attention of many LGBTQ+ readers is the extraordinary lengths to which this Gentile of such prominence and authority was willing to go to save the life of a mere “servant” or “slave.” In Matthew’s account, the centurion personally seeks out this itinerant Jewish preacher and healer (Jesus) and essentially begs for his help. What could cause the centurion to do

this? The following commentary claims that the answer to this question lies in the Greek words that are used to define the centurion's relationship to the dying man:

Miner & Connoley, p. 47-50: "Just another miracle story, right? Not on your life!

"In the original language, the importance of this story for gay, lesbian, and bisexual Christians is much clearer. The Greek word used in Matthew's account to refer to the servant of the centurion is *pais*. In the language of the time, *pais* had three possible meanings depending on the context in which it was used. It could mean 'son or boy;' it could mean 'servant,' or it could mean a particular type of servant—one who was 'his master's male lover.' Often these lovers were younger than their masters, even teenagers.

"To our modern minds, the idea of buying a teen lover seems repugnant. But we have to place this in the context of ancient cultural norms. In ancient times, commercial transactions were the predominant means of forming relationships. Under the law, the wife was viewed as the property of the husband, with a status just above that of slave. Moreover, in Jesus' day, a boy or girl was considered of marriageable age upon reaching his or her early teens. It was not uncommon for boys or girls to marry at age 14 or 15....

"In that culture, if you were a gay man who wanted a male 'spouse,' you achieved this, like your heterosexual counterparts, through a commercial transaction—purchasing someone to serve that purpose. A servant purchased to serve this purpose was often called a *pais*.

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"Is it possible the *pais* referred to in Matthew 8 and Luke 7 was the Roman centurion's male lover? Let's look at the biblical evidence.

"The Bible provides three key pieces of textual and circumstantial evidence. First, in the Luke passage, ... additional Greek words are used to describe the one who is sick. [See Lk. 7:2 (NRSV): 'A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly [*entimos duolos*], and who was ill and close to death.']. Luke says this *pais* was the centurion's *entimos duolos*. The word *duolos* is a generic term for slave,

and was never used in Greek to describe a son/boy. Thus, Luke's account rules out the possibility the sick person was the centurion's son.... However, Luke also takes care to indicate this was no ordinary slave. The word *entimos* means 'honored.' This was an 'honored slave' (*entimos duolos*) who was his master's *pais*. Taken together, the three Greek words preclude the possibility the sick person was either the centurion's son or an ordinary slave, leaving only one viable option—he was his master's male lover.

"A second piece of evidence is found in verse 9 of Matthew's account. In the course of expressing his faith in Jesus' power to heal by simply speaking, the centurion says, 'When I tell my slave to do something, he does it.'.... When speaking here of his slaves, the centurion uses the word *duolos*. But when speaking of the one he is asking Jesus to heal, he uses only *pais*.... Again, the clear implication is that the sick man was no ordinary slave. And when *pais* was used to describe a servant who was not an ordinary slave, it meant only one thing—a slave who was the master's male lover.

"The third piece of evidence is circumstantial. In the Gospels, we have many examples of people seeking healing for themselves or for family members. But this is the only example of one seeking healing for a slave. The actions described are made even more remarkable by the fact that this was a proud Roman centurion (the conqueror/oppressor) who was humbling himself and pleading with a Jewish rabbi (the conquered/oppressed) to heal his slave. The extraordinary lengths to which this man went to seek healing for his slave is much more understandable, from a psychological perspective, if the slave was his beloved companion.

"....For objective observers, the conclusion is inescapable. In this story Jesus healed a man's male lover. When understood in this way, the story takes on a whole new dimension.

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"[When the centurion came to Jesus asking him to heal his *pais*, Jesus said

without hesitation that he would come and heal him]. It's that simple! Jesus didn't say, 'Are you kidding! I'm not going to heal your *pais* so you can go on living in sin!' Nor did he say, 'Well, it shouldn't surprise you that your *pais* is sick; this is God's judgment on your relationship.'

"Instead, Jesus' words are simple, clear, and liberating for all who have worried about what God thinks of gay relationships. 'I will come and heal him.'

"At this point, the centurion says there is no need for Jesus to travel to his home. He has faith that Jesus' word is sufficient.... [Jesus then turns to the crowd and] says in verse 10 of Matthew's account, 'I have not found faith this great anywhere in Israel.'....

"Jesus didn't just tolerate this gay centurion. He said he was an example of faith—someone we all should strive to be like."

See also **Michaelson**, p. 75: ".... Obviously, the primary point of this tale is to illustrate the power and importance of faith, and how anyone, even a Roman soldier, can possess it.

"Yet there is also an unmistakable same-sex subtext to this story. The servant for whom the centurion pleads is more than just an ordinary servant; one would not expect a Roman centurion to intercede—let alone 'beg' (parakaloon) on behalf of a mere cook or a housekeeper. Rather, as any contemporary reader would know, the relationship between a centurion and his favored servant is assumed to be a romantic one. The centurion's servant is a pais, a boy companion, not a duolos, a mere slave. And it was common practice for Roman centurions to have younger male servants who acted as concubines as well.... In other words, Jesus is being asked to heal not just the centurion's servant, but also his lover.

"Now, the text does not record the nature of this relationship, so it is subject to interpretation. However, consider for a moment how crystal clear this relationship would have been to someone hearing the story in the first century, or witnessing it firsthand. And consider, too, the radical act of healing the centurion's servant/lover: Jesus is extending his hand not only to the centurion but to his partner as well. *In addition to Jesus's silence on homosexuality in*

general, it speaks volumes that he did not hesitate to heal a Roman's likely same-sex lover. Like his willingness to include former prostitutes in his close circle, Jesus's engagement with those whose conduct might offend sexual mores even today is a statement of radical inclusion, and of his priorities for the spiritual life" [Emphasis added].

In his ground-breaking book Jonathan Loved David, which was published in 1978, Tom Horner, an Episcopalian priest, examined the same two incidents cited thirty years later by Miner & Connoley and by Michaelson and reached essentially the same conclusion:

Horner, pp. 122-24: "There are, in fact, two hints in the Gospels that indicate that [Jesus] would not have been hostile [to persons in homosexual relationships]. The first is the possible homosexual motif in the story of the healing of the centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10). It has always seemed to me that it was more than an ordinary concern that this Roman official displayed in this case for a mere slave. Luke uses here the word *duolos*, which is the ordinary Greek word for slave, but Matthew uses the word *pais*, 'boy' or, in this particular context, 'servant boy.' *Pais* is the same word, however, that any older man in Greek culture would use to refer to a younger friend—or lover.... In either case, however, Jesus made no note of it, which means that if the homosexual element were present, he was not disturbed by it. Instead, he was overwhelmed by the man's faith, which is clearly the paramount element in the story.

"The other hint in regard to Jesus' understanding is a remark he made about eunuchs, found as it now stands, perhaps out of context, in connection with one of his statements on divorce.... [See above at p. 231-32, quoting Mt. 19:11-12]. This is a very difficult saying [because it's meaning is unclear] [What Jesus knew about eunuchs is also unclear]. But he knew about eunuchs who were slaves, for in the eastern half of the Roman empire they were everywhere in evidence. The problem is that eunuchs, however they became such, were not totally without sexual desires but were, in many cases, active homosexual practitioners. And whether they were or not, by virtue of their having

no testicles—and, in some cases, no sexual organs at all—by much of the ancient world they were put in the same category as those who did assume the passive role in homosexual intercourse, that is, the catamites. *Whatever Jesus meant by this saying—and it is a difficult one—there is no question but that he is speaking of eunuchs in the most exalted terms.*

“Again, that Jesus would have received them is suggested by the fact that Philip the Deacon, very early in the Christian movement, received a eunuch from Ethiopia as one of the very first converts of the new Christian church.... [See Lesson 1 above at pp. 34-37]. If Jesus and Philip [and Isaiah, see above at pp. 34-35] thought so highly of eunuchs, who were most often homosexually inclined, would they not also look kindly on others who were homosexually disposed?” [Emphasis added].

LESSON 8--FIVE FUNDAMENTAL BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES THAT SUPPORT

A POLICY OF LGBTQ+ INCLUSION (No. 5)

No. 5-- A Just God Requires God’s People to Provide Justice, Including Fairness and Equality, for the LGBTQ+ “Strangers”

Who Dwell Among Us

BIBLE PASSAGES: Ex. 22:21-23; Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:17-19; 16:18-20; Mic. 6:6-8 (‘...[A]nd what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?’); Am. 5:21-24 (“But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”); Isa. 11:1-9; 30:18b (“For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him”); Lk. 1:46-55 (“the Magnificat”); 6:17-26; 10:25-37 (the good Samaritan); 16:19-31; 18:18-25; Mt. 19:23-24; 25:31-46 (the last judgment)

I. The Biblical Mandate to Pursue Justice

In Chapter 6 of God vs. Gay?, which he subcaptioned “Inequality is an affront to religious values,” Michaelson cited instances in which LGBTQ+ people have been subjected to discriminatory treatment (for example, in employment, housing, and prosecution for crimes based on sexual activities between

consenting adults) and “judged secondhand, unfairly, and cruelly, according to stereotype rather than reality.” **Michaelson** at p. 48. He continued, as follows: “This situation is unjust, and flies in the face of our religious mandate to pursue justice and fairness for everyone. Whenever we see inequality, we ought to devote ourselves to eradicating it. Our religious values compel us to right these wrongs. ‘Justice—*justice, shall you pursue,*’ demands Deuteronomy 16:20. This is the Hebrew Bible’s call: not to oppress the stranger, to set up just courts that judge people fairly, to ‘proclaim liberty throughout the land’ (Lev. 25:10). And it is echoed by the prophet Isaiah, who is quoted by Jesus in Luke 4:18: ‘God has anointed me to preach good news to the humble, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom to the captive, and liberation to the prisoner’ (Isa. 61:1). And by Micah, who tells us to ‘act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God’ (Mic. 6:8)” *Id.*

These fundamental religious principles have been reiterated repeatedly throughout the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, including the books of both the major and minor prophets:

Living the Questions, sec. 7, pp. 1-3: “While different in style, tone, and context, each of the Hebrew prophets had the same concern about justice and community—about being the people of God together.... What they say has less to do with foretelling the future than telling what God’s will is for the people of God. [Compare **Robinson** at p. 41:([I]n [the Judeo-Christian] tradition, a prophet is not one who foresees the *future* but rather one who is courageous enough to see the inequities, immoralities, and sins of the present. A prophet is the one who stands up and speaks truth to power’][*Italicized emphasis added*]].

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“According to John Dominic Crossan, one of the most pressing questions for 21st Century Christians is ‘What is the Character of Your God?’ The character of the God in whom we place our allegiance shapes our character as people of faith. The prophets remind us of God’s character. Although Crossan is quick to point out

that we can't generalize the message of the prophets..., *a recurrent pronounced theme on the prophets' lips is divine justice. The God of the Bible is a just God.* Often misunderstood as retributive justice, Crossan helps us to understand that God's justice is about distribution, not retribution. God is concerned about fairness and equality, not vengeance and retribution.... *[A] God who seeks fairness and equality begets a people who seek fairness and equality"* [Emphasis added]. See Deut. 16:18-20 ("You shall appoint judges ... and they shall render just decisions for the people. You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. *Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue* so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you."). [Emphasis added].

II. Justice: A Recurrent Theme Throughout the Bible

As indicated above, justice was "a recurrent pronounced theme on the prophets' lips." **Living the Question**, sec. 7, p. 2. In God of the Lowly: Socio-Historical Interpretations of the Bible, Willy Schottroff examined the prophet Amos, his prophetic book, and the social and historical context in which he exercised his prophetic ministry:

Schottroff & Stegemann, "The Prophet Amos: A Socio-Historical Assessment of His Ministry," Willy Schottroff, pp. 27, 28, 31, 33-36: "The prophetic book, nine chapters in length, that has come down to us under the name of 'Amos,' appears in the Old Testament as the third of the 'twelve prophets'—that is, the third among the books of the twelve 'minor' prophets that follow upon those of the three 'major' prophets. Contrary to the impression this order might give, it tells us nothing about the time when each prophet came on the scene or the temporal succession of the prophets. As a matter of fact, *Amos is the earliest representative of classical biblical prophecy in Israel.*

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"... Amos exercised his prophetic ministry during the reigns of Kings (Azariah)-Uzziah of Judah (787-736 B.C.) and Jeroboam II of Israel (787-747 B.C.).

The period during which he was able to work as a prophet—that is, until the priest Amaziah put a sudden end to his activity at Bethel—is probably not to be regarded as very long....

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“Amos functioned as a prophet in the northern kingdom, Israel: at its capital, Samaria...; at the sanctuary of Bethel...; and probably also at the sanctuary of Gilgal.... By birth, however, he was a Judean....

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“... [W]hat the deuteronomistic history has to say in 2 Kings 14:25, 28 on the success of Jeroboam II has given rise to the widespread view that the reign of this king was a final age of domestic and foreign peace, political stability, and economic prosperity that was granted to the northern kingdom between its persistent and eventful disputes with its neighbors and especially with the Arameans in the second half of the ninth century B.C., and the increasing Assyrian threat to its very existence that began when Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 B.C.) took the throne....

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“The threat to the northern kingdom that was becoming increasingly visible on the frontiers of Israel at this time may have provided an external occasion and point of departure for Amos’s pessimistic view of the future. The real basis for it, however, is to be sought not in the external circumstances of that particular moment but in the internal state of Israel itself. *The military successes won under Joash and Jeroboam II had evidently laid the basis for a period of relative peace and economic prosperity. These new conditions, however, seem to have benefitted primarily, if not exclusively, the governing upper class in the northern kingdom of Israel.* At any rate, it is the extravagant, luxurious lifestyle of ‘the notable men of the first of the nations’ (6:1)—as Amos mockingly calls the members of the leading class among the Israelites in Samaria, the capital—that

the prophet heavily emphasizes in his utterances.

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“Amos’s critical description of the life and doings of the leading class in the northern kingdom in the time of Jeroboam II is not meant as a critique of luxury as such.... *Amos was opposed to the luxury and expensive lifestyle of the upper class in the northern kingdom because he regarded the price paid for this wealth as being too high: the impoverishment, even destitution, of other strata of the population. Moreover, the means by which this wealth was gained—the unscrupulous exploitation of the masses by those in a position to oppress them—seemed to him impermissible, at least when judged by norms that he regarded as alone compatible with the basic experience of Israel. This basic experience of Israel past and present told the nation ... that Yahweh scorns what is mighty (gbh, Amos 2:9a) and strong (hason, 2:9a) and takes his place at the side of the weak and the small (qaton, 7:2, 5) in order to provide them with living space (3:15) and the necessities of life (8:1-2).*

“Social reality in Israel in the time of Jeroboam II was, of course, in striking contrast to this ideal....

“The most conspicuous means used by those in positions of economic and social power to promote their own interests was the manipulation of the law, which only too readily opened the door to a perverted and corrupt administration of justice. Especially the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner—in other words, those groups among the people that were in a weak position both socially and legally—and, generally speaking, those low on the social scale were the victims of this biased interpretation of the law in favor of the mighty and the socially influential.... The upper class, insatiably hungry for land and bent on building up great landed estates ... robbed the people of house and land on a scale that reminds us of the repression of the peasantry in the history of East German territories.

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“Amos’s accusations make especially clear the unmerciful fate of a debtor at the hands of his creditors (whoever they might be) if he defaulted or perhaps even became completely insolvent. They endeavored without pity to extract everything they could from him in payment of rent due or taxes still owed, in the form of grain....

“.... A trifling debt—the price of a pair of sandals, for example—was enough to bring the insolvent debtor into slavery for debt and to be sold ... and bought ... as a serf” [Emphasis added]

See also Law, pp. 13-14, 38-42: “As a Christian, doing justice is part of my calling and duty. *Justice means equal distribution of power and privilege among all people.* In the vision of the Peaceable Realm [as described in Isa. 11:6-9], the balanced distribution of power among the animals is essential. However, most of the time, we think of peace as the lack of conflict and the assurance of protection. Therefore, in the name of peace, many social systems exercise authority to control people’s behavior. The rationale is that if people are fearful of the punishment prescribed by the law of the system, they are less likely to hurt others or destroy properties. Fear is the operating principle in this kind of system....

“Our vision of the Peaceable Realm is not based on fear. Instead it is based on the lack of fear.... This lack of fear is created by the even distribution of power.... *True peace cannot be attained without justice. To do justice, then, is to be able to see and recognize the uneven distribution of power and to take steps to change the system so that we can redistribute power equally.*

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“In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the attitude toward the powerful and rich is very different from the attitude toward the poor and the powerless. The powerful in society are challenged to give up their power and wealth and redistribute it in order to achieve equality among the people of God. To the powerful, the emphasis is on serving and being humble. The powerful are judged by God for their use of their power and privilege. In some places in Scripture, the

powerful are actually put down. 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God' (Matthew 19:24).

"The powerless, however, are lifted up, cared for and loved by God because of their faithfulness. To the powerless, the emphasis is on endurance and faithfulness. God has compassion on those who are oppressed and suffering. They are loved by God even though they have no worldly goods and power. They are blessed even though they are suffering now. The powerless are powerful in God's sight even though they are oppressed now. God will deliver them from all this....

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"The Gospel invites the powerful to take up their cross and follow Jesus. Salvation for the powerful comes from the decision to give up power and take up the cross. The Gospel, however, never asks the powerless to choose the cross because the powerless, by their condition of powerlessness, are already on the cross.... [S]alvation [for them] comes from endurance and faithfulness in the hope of God's deliverance through the resurrection" [Emphasis added].

Three "powerless" groups in society are repeatedly mentioned throughout the Bible as being deserving of special attention and treatment from those who are fortunate enough to possess wealth, status, and power:

Living the Questions, sec. 8, p.2: "Over and over, Hebrew Scripture lists three groups as worthy of special kindness, extra thoughtfulness, and intentional consideration: strangers, widows, and orphans (cf. Leviticus 19:10; Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:29 [see also Ex. 22:21-23]). The legal mandates in the Old Testament are unique among the other known judicial systems in the Ancient Near East in their consistent and outspoken advocacy of the weakest, least protected, and disadvantaged members of the society.

"Strangers' are listed with 'widows and orphans' because strangers were alone—they lacked any kinship-connection that would otherwise protect and support them. [See Lesson 3 above, The Story of Sodom and Gomorrah, at p.

105]. Jesus ate with the outcast, the stranger and preached that whatever you do to the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you do to me. Paul defines the mark of the true Christian as one who extends hospitality to strangers (Romans 12:13).

“Ephesians 2:11-22 takes it even further. They used to be ‘aliens,’ strangers, they had ‘no hope.’ But ‘in Christ Jesus,’ these strangers become part of a common humanity with believers. The dividing walls have been ‘broken down.’ The anonymous author of Ephesians says, ‘don’t exclude people because they aren’t the way you want them to be. Remember, not too long ago, *you* were the strangers and some wanted you to be circumcised to be part of the fellowship. Remember that?”

See also **Living the Questions**, sec. 8, p. 4: “Jesus radicalized any romantic notion of hospitality into the care and love for those with no social standing, those of limited resources and questionable credibility. In the judgment scene in Matthew 25[:31-46], the king says to those being given the kingdom: *I was naked and you clothed me, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me....* Essentially, followers of Jesus are challenged to overcome fear of the stranger and to give attention to the lonely, the excluded, the unfamiliar.

“In Greek, the word ‘hospitality,’ *philonexia*, has at its root the same word which gives us the English word xenophobia. Our treatment of the ‘alien’ or ‘foreigner,’ reveals our core values of hospitality or hostility toward those who are different. Seeing the face of Christ in the stranger at our door is often a challenge. But the spirit of hospitality found in the Bible recognizes the child of God in everyone and obliges us to treat one another accordingly.”

As Michaelson points out, at p. 49 of God vs. Gay?, biblical concern for the “stranger” in society is directly connected to the Hebrew experience of oppression in Egypt, as depicted in the book of Exodus: “The Bible is exquisitely clear on how we are to relate to minorities in our midst: ‘The stranger that dwells with you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers once in the land of Egypt’ (Lev. 19:34). ‘You shall

not mistreat a stranger, nor oppress him: for you were strangers in the land of Egypt' (Exod. 22:21). What is asked of us, in such exhortations, is to recall that those we would demonize, those we would 'other,' are people like us, created in the image of God.... *Thus the mandate to do justice comes from a reminder of our own shared experience of oppression.* Israelites, too, were strangers once—persecuted and enslaved. We may be comfortable now, but we are commanded to remember that this was not always the case—and to act appropriately. *Thus the biblical command to do justice merges with the mandate to feel empathy....* [See Lesson 3 above, at pp. 193-95]. We are called upon to remember what it is like to be oppressed, and to try to get to know the group that is being disfavored... *This is especially true in the case of minorities; it is precisely when a majority of people have a certain view [of a minority group] that protection of minorities is most necessary*" [Emphasis added].

In Interpreting Isaiah, Herbert M. Wolf traced the inter-connected themes of justice, righteousness and concern for the poor, the hungry and the oppressed as they occurred repeatedly throughout the book of Isaiah. **Wolf**, pp. 74-75, 83, 103-04, 159-60, 223-24, 229-30, 294-95. For example, at Isa. 58: 2-9, the prophet gives God's response to the complaint of the Israelites held captive in Babylon that He had ignored their fasting and their prayers:

"[D]ay after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. 'Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?' Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?

"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the

thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and to bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am"
[Emphasis added].

From the perspective of the LGBTQ+ community, the most meaningful passage in Isaiah is Isaiah 56:1-8. As stated in Miner & Connoley, at p. 43, "Just like gay, lesbian, and bisexual people of today, eunuchs were the sexual outcasts of Jewish religious society." See Lesson 1 above at pp. 34-37, Lesson 2 at pp. 69-74, and Lesson 7 at pp. 230-33 & 246-47. Yet, at Isaiah 56:1-8, which is quoted in Lesson 1 above at pp. 34-35, the prophet asserted that God has linked the eunuch to the more traditional Hebrew "outsider," the foreigner or the "stranger," and that both have been promised a place in God's re-created community. See Wolf, pp. 223-24:

"Previously Isaiah intimated that Gentiles would be part of God's people (49:6; 52:10; 55:3-5), but chapter 56 states this truth plainly. The 'salvation,' or restoration, of Israel from Babylon was soon to be a reality (v. 1) and so was the inclusion of foreigners in God's family.

"When Israel was rescued from Egypt, God made a covenant with her at Mount Sinai and asked the people to obey Him in all things. Now that the nation was on the verge of being released from Babylon, the people could once again respond to the Lord wholeheartedly. Their obedience could be summed up as keeping 'the Sabbath' (v. 2) because the Sabbath was a sign of the covenant (cf. Exod. 31:13; Ezek 20:12, 20). Unhappily Israel did not keep the Sabbath with much enthusiasm before the Exile (cf. Jer. 17:22-23), and so God's warning is clear. *Foreigners and eunuchs who love the Lord and keep the Sabbath will find greater acceptance than rebellious Israelites.*

According to the law, foreigners and eunuchs could not participate in the assembly of the Lord (cf. Deut. 23:1, 3, 7-8), but a new era was dawning.

“The promise of verse 5 [that eunuchs who keep the Sabbath, choose the things that please God and ‘hold fast my covenant’ will be given ‘a monument and a name better than sons and daughters ... an everlasting name that shall not be cut off’] is a startling one because the hope of every Jew was to have many children and grandchildren to insure the continuation of one’s family line. Sometimes those who had no surviving sons built a monument as a memorial (e.g., 2 Sam. 18:18). The best memorial of all, however, is a life of obedience, and the Lord promises those who serve him faithfully will never be forgotten. One is reminded of the salvation of the Ethiopian eunuch, whose conversion through reading Isaiah 53 and the witness of Philip is recorded in Acts 8:26-39.

“Verses 6-8 summarize the devotion of foreigners to the Lord and their participation in worshiping Him. Because of their commitment to the covenant, they will be invited to the holy mountain of Zion where the temple was located. The pilgrimage of the Gentiles to God’s holy mountain also is mentioned in 2:2-3 and in 66:20. It is an important theme in Isaiah. The acceptance of the offerings and sacrifices of the Gentiles is similar to Isaiah’s description of worship during the messianic age (60:7). Earlier, Isaiah denounced the sacrifices brought by hypocritical Israelites (1:1-13)” [Emphasis added].

Turning to the New Testament, there is widespread agreement that Luke was the gospel writer who placed the greatest emphasis on the themes of justice and concern for the poor, the marginalized, and the alien, as expressed in word and in deed in Christ’s ministry. Thus, for example, the following commentary highlighted the importance of the poor and of social outcasts in the gospel of Luke:

Morris, pp. 45-46: *“The poor.* Jesus came to preach the gospel to the poor (4:18), and Luke reports a blessing on the poor (6:20); by contrast there is a woe for the

rich (6:24), whereas Matthew speaks of ‘the poor in spirit’ (Mt. 5:3). Preaching good news to the poor is characteristic of Jesus’ ministry (7:22). The shepherds to whom the angels came (2:8ff.) were from a poor class. Indeed the family of Jesus himself seems to have been poor, for the offering made at the birth of the child was that of the poor (2:24; cf. Lev. 12:8)....

“The other side of this coin is an emphasis on the dangers of riches. Luke has a ‘Woe’ for the rich (6:24), and he tells us that God sends rich people away empty (1:53). There are parables warning the wealthy, such as the rich fool (12:16ff.), the unjust steward (16:1ff.), Dives and Lazarus (16:19-31). There are warnings for the rich in the stories of the rich young ruler (18:18-27), of Zaccheus (19:1-10), and of the widow’s mite (21:1-4).

“The disreputable. Luke tells us that on one occasion ‘the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear’ Jesus (15:1). This is not an isolated incident, for Luke finds occasion to mention many who were scarcely respectable. Thus he tells us of Zaccheus (dismissed by the bystanders as ‘a sinner,’ 19:7), and of the feast Levi made for a crowd described by the Pharisees as ‘tax collectors and sinners’ (5:30). In the same strain he recounts the story of the sinful woman who wept over Jesus’ feet and anointed them and of whom Jesus said that her many sins were forgiven and that ‘she loved much’ (7:37-50). The prodigal son was not exactly a model of rectitude and the unrighteous have a way of turning up in the parables in this Gospel (7:41ff.; 12:13-21; 16:1-12, 19-31; 18:1-8, 9-14).”

Related to these passages and concerns is the theme of reversal, which first appears in Luke’s gospel in a story that is not found in any of the other three gospels, Mary’s visit to her cousin Elizabeth (Lk 1:39-56). This is the occasion on which she utters the song of praise that is commonly known as “the Magnificat.” (Lk. 1:46-55). Included are the following words (vv. 51-53):

“[God] has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

“He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

“He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.”

Commenting on this section of the Magnificat, Morris wrote:

Morris, pp. 84-85: “The impression left by an English translation is that Mary continues to recite God’s habitual actions.... *It is perhaps more likely that she is looking forward in a spirit of prophecy and counting what God will do as so certain that it can be spoken of as accomplished (this is frequent in the Old Testament prophets). This section of the song tells of a complete reversal of human values.* Indeed, through his Messiah God is about to overthrow all these.... There is a revolutionary note about filling *the hungry* and sending *the rich* away *empty*. In the ancient world it was accepted that the rich would be well cared for. Poor people must expect to be hungry. But *Mary sings of a God who is not bound by what people do. He turns human attitudes and values of society upside down*” [Italicized emphasis added]

Foreigners (non-Jews) also played a very prominent role in Luke’s gospel.... [For example,] Luke is the only gospel that recounts Jesus’ telling of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30-37). The significance of Jesus telling a story in which a Samaritan, a member of a hated and despised minority in Jesus’ time, is portrayed as “the hero” of the story, is not fully appreciated by most modern readers, as it would have been when Jesus told it:

Morris, pp. 207-08 (referring to Lk.10:33-35): “The audience would have expected a priest and a Levite to be followed by an Israelite layman. They would almost certainly now be anticipating an anti-clerical twist to the story. Jesus’ introduction of the Samaritan was thus devastating. In view of the traditional bitterness between Jew and Samaritan, *a Samaritan* was the last person who might have been expected to help. But this man *had compassion* on the sufferer. He attended to him as best he could on the spot.... [In addition,] the Samaritan did not regard his duty as done when he had brought the man to shelter. He continued to look after him.

“He continued his kindness even when he had to leave [by making arrangements with the innkeeper for the man’s continuing care].... It is a most

attractive picture of a man who did more than the minimum. He saw a man in need and did all he could” [Emphasis added].

III.LGBTQ+ People Are Marginalized People Too

In Chapter 6 of God vs. Gay?, Michaleson argued that “[t]hese commandments [not to mistreat or oppress the strangers among us, but to empathize with them and treat them justly] apply to all the ‘strangers’ who dwell among us,” including the members of the LGBTQ+ community:

Michaelson, pp. 49-51: “These commandments apply to all the ‘strangers’ who dwell among us, and indeed, many gays and lesbians have found common cause with other minorities in their struggles against interlocking and intersectional oppressions. But there is something unique about gays and lesbians: that the stranger may be within one’s own family. Remember, *few gay people grow up with gay parents, so many gay people know what it is like to be strangers even within their own homes.* As such, the mandate to love the stranger imposes a higher responsibility in this case, because the stranger may be within: In the church pew, as a preacher inveighs against homosexuality. Around the dinner table, when someone makes an anti-gay joke. In the junior high school, where bullies pick on ‘sissies.’ *LGBT[Q+] people may be strangers even when we are among our families and communities. The stranger may be the person next to you, whom you don’t yet know is gay.*

“Now, some might argue that unlike other strangers, gays and lesbians are defined by conduct. We are not innocent but are acting in ways that invite reproach, and so these calls for justice ring hollow....

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“Really, even if one were to maintain that some same-sex activity is prohibited by religious law, how could we justify singling it out for discrimination, when so many of us fall so short of the mark all the time? Even if homosexuality were sinful behavior, to single it out for [condemnation or vilification] is to treat it unequally.

“Surely this is why the crux of the [Sermon on the Mount’s] message is ‘Do

not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure that you use, it will be measured to you' (Matt. 7:1-2). None of us sits in so lofty a perch as to be able to judge other people and not be found wanting ourselves. None of us can meet these standards, which is why none of us can sit in judgment of another. *Jesus did not sit in judgment of the marginalized; he fought on their behalf, against the power structures that demonized them.*

"As with love, which requires empathy and humility to 'stand in the shoes' of the other, so too with justice.... When any person is oppressed, none of us is truly free" [Emphasis added].

In Reading the Bible from the Margins, Miguel A. De La Torre similarly argued that LGBTQ+ people are among those marginalized peoples who should be viewed as recipients of the special attention and concern of God and Jesus.

Following are excerpts from his book:

De La Torre, pp. 31-32, 108, 144-45, 130-32: "*Jesus' audience was primarily the outcasts of society. This is why it is important to understand the message of Jesus from the perspective of the disenfranchised. The marginalized of Jesus' time occupied the privileged position of being the first to hear and respond to the gospel.* By making the disenfranchised recipients of the Good News, Jesus added a political edge to his message.

"Jesus used parables that resonated with the lives of the poor, the tax collectors, the prostitutes—in short, the marginalized. God's self-revelation to humanity does not occur from the centers of world power but in the margins of society. It is not from the court of Pharaoh that God's laws are revealed to humanity but from their slaves. Nor does the incarnation occur in the imperial palace of Caesar, or to the household of the high priest in Jerusalem. Rather, God is made flesh among the impure Galileans, impure because they were seen by the center as half-breeds, from a territory peopled by Arabs, Greeks, Asians, Phoenicians, Syrians, and Jews, a region where the unclean Gentiles outnumbered the Jews.

“Paul attests to this phenomenon in his first letter to the Corinthians when he writes:

God chose the foolish things of the world so that the wise might be shamed, and God chose the weak things of the world so that God might shame the strong. *God chose the lowborn of the world and those despised, and those who are nothing so that God can bring to nothing those that are [wise by human standards, powerful, and/or of noble birth].* (1 Cor. 1:27-28).

Paul understood that the gospel message was dismissed by the center of society. The rejected stone became the cornerstone of the gospel, becoming a stumbling block for the builders who rejected it.

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“... To read, see, and define Christ from the margins is to make the message of the gospel relevant to those who are disenfranchised and trying to survive just one more day. *As during the days of his earthly ministry, Jesus is not to be found among the religious elite who occupy the center of society, comfortable in their ornate cathedrals; rather he is found among the publicans, tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners, in short, those who are considered outcasts by society. It is to the margins of society that we must go in order to find Jesus. The margins of society, in the here and now, in this time and place, are understood as encompassing the poor, Hispanics, Amerindians, Asian Americans, blacks, members of other disenfranchised groups, women, and gays.*

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“Matthew 25:31-46 describes the last day when the risen Christ will return to earth in all his splendor, escorted by the host of heaven, to take his seat on the throne of glory. All the nations will be assembled before him as he separates people from one another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep he will place on his right hand, and the goats on his left. Then the ruler of all will say to those on his right hand, ‘Come, you whom my Father considers

blessed, take for your heritage the reign prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; *I was an alien and you made me welcome*; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me.'

"'But to those on his left hand he will say, 'Depart from me you cursed ones, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons. For I was hungry and you never gave me food; I was thirsty and you never gave me anything to drink; *I was an alien and you turned me out*, naked and you never clothed me, sick and in prison and you never visited me.' *And when both the virtuous and condemned ask when they did these things to Jesus, Christ will respond, 'Truly I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of these, the least of my people, you did it to me.'*

"Jesus does not divide sheep from goats by their denominational affiliation, by the church they attended, or by their confession of faith. *The litmus test is what they did or did not do to the least, to the poorest. Jesus asks if the individual participated in liberative acts that led others toward an abundant life or if he or she instead participated in enslaving acts that led others to death.* He specifically asks if we fed the hungry, gave water to the thirsty, *welcomed the alien*, clothed the naked, visited the sick or the prisoner behind bars. *The radicalness of salvation ... is that Jesus judges all people on how they interacted with the disenfranchised in society....*

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"No doubt many within the overall Christian church have strong negative attitudes toward gays and lesbians. Some Christians encourage violence toward gays and lesbians when they reduce sexual orientation to a disease or sin and encourage a crusade against those whom they perceive God hates. Violence is further advocated when Christians remain silent in the face of the violence encountered by the [Matthew] Shepards of our community. Perpetrators of gay bashing feel themselves justified in enforcing the rules of God and nature,

administering justice to those whom God hates. *Christians become complicit with the violence they breed due to their attitudes, words, and actions toward ‘the least of my people.’*

“Historically, bible texts have been used as clubs to submit gays and lesbians to conformity. Some of the most verbal (and physical) attacks upon gays and lesbians have been generated from the conservative Christian community, as demonstrated during Shepard’s funeral [when members of the congregation of the Rev. Fred Phelps waved anti-gay signs, shouted anti-gay slogans, and engaged mourners in loud and nasty debates]. Yet Jesus warns that anyone who calls someone *rhaka* will be liable to the Sanhedrin or even hell’s fire (Matt. 5:22). Most Bibles translate the Aramaic term *rhaka* as ‘fool’ or renegade; however, scholars have suggested that the word could also be translated as ‘sissy.’ Regardless, Jesus clearly indicates that the many Christians who participate in name-calling are in danger of condemnation. Why? Because all of God’s creatures contain the image of God, all have dignity and worth, and all, as part of the creation story, participate in the final words of the sixth day of creation, ‘And God saw all which God had made, and behold, it was very good’ (Gen. 1:31). Gays and lesbians, known by God before they were formed in their mother’s womb (Jer. 1:5), are also part of God’s creation, and hence, they too are good.

“Because of the violence many gays and lesbians face, they must also be considered among ‘the least of my people.’ [See below at pp. 266-67 & above at pp. 186 & 226]. The social pressure to conform to heterosexuality, the tormented experience of an orientation that contrasts with what society considers normative, and the physical danger encountered as hate crimes and gay bashings continue to rise in this nation relegate gays and lesbians to the margins of society. If we say that Jesus is in solidarity with ‘the least of my people’ and if gays find themselves the victims of oppressive acts, then we must conclude that, to remain faithful to a liberative reading of the Bible, Jesus is gay, not because he has participated in homosexual activities but because what is done to the ‘least of my people’ is done to Christ. When Matthew Shepard was crucified, Jesus was again crucified”

[Emphasis added].

It should be noted that many of the sources quoted in this Study Manual were published several years ago and, to varying extents, they may be outdated, depending upon where one lives; nevertheless, “the fifties” are still alive and well in many parts of the United States. Indeed, a more recent source suggests that modern-day LGBTQ+ people are confronted by conditions that are not so different from those faced by others who came before them and that are described above. In 2016, the Rev. Elizabeth M. Edman, an Episcopalian priest who self-identifies as “queer,” wrote a book titled Queer Virtue: What LGBTQ[+] People Know About Life and Love and How it Can Revitalize Christianity. In her book, she describes some of the common experiences that bind modern-day lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender people, and other queer people together: **Edman**, pp. 47-48: “In 2014 engaging in same-sex sexual activity was a criminal offense in more than seventy-five countries across the globe. People convicted of violating these laws could be put to death in at least five countries, including the US ally nations of Saudi Arabia and Qatar. [NOTE: A more recent article published in the Washington Post on April 4, 2018, listed ten nations where homosexuality may be punished by death: Afghanistan, Iran, Mauritania, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. All of these nations have Moslem-majority populations and are located in either Africa or the Middle East. In several, capital punishment can’t be imposed under the civil law but can be imposed under *sharia* law, often by stoning.]. One nasty remnant of British colonialism is Section 377, an anti-sodomy law written into the penal codes of British-occupied states. More than thirty countries still have on the books either Section 377 or a law modeled on it, including Singapore, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Jamaica.

“The persistence of these laws is unnerving to gay people and our allies. In many countries these are not mere statutory relics of a bygone colonial era, but are actively enforced with severe consequences. Even in countries that do not criminalize homosexuality explicitly, such as Egypt, queer people have in recent

years been prosecuted for ‘debauchery’ or other vague charges. The drumbeat of state-sponsored violence remains background noise in the lives of LGBTQ[+] people across the globe, marching us backward from the progress that we have made in trying to build a more just and less violent world.”

Of course, the threat of death, imprisonment or other forms of state-sanctioned violence is miniscule in the United States when compared to many other parts of the world. But LGBTQ[+] Americans still face the threat of violence (to a lesser degree) and they also face other forms of oppression:

Edman, pp. 48-49: “We do not have to look to nonwestern nations for constant news of queerphobic assaults. The New York City Anti-Violence Project (AVP), which works to prevent and respond to violence against and within queer and HIV-afflicted communities in New York, charts these crimes on a continuous basis. On August 17, 2013, Islan Nettles, a trans* woman of color, was beaten to death in central Harlem. On May 17, 2013, Mark Carson, an openly gay man, was shot and killed in Greenwich Village, *surely one of the most gay-friendly neighborhoods in the world*.

“These laws and attacks got a lot of attention when they were first reported, but they were not new then, and they are not unusual. *What is shocking is that for all the changes we have seen, for all the movement on legal and social fronts, we don’t seem to make a dent in curbing the violence being perpetrated against LGBTQ[+] people.*

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“The danger is real. In 2012 the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) documented more than two thousand incidents of hate violence against LGBTQ[+] people in the United States. Transgender women were twice as likely to experience discrimination, threats, and intimidation as survivors who did not identify as transgender women, and transgender women of color were nearly three times as likely to experience police violence compared to white cisgender [that is, non-LGBTQ+] survivors.

“Shugrue dos Santos reminds us that it is a privileged idea that ‘safety is normal.’ And not just on the streets. Of hate violence reported to the NAACP, the highest number of incidents are those perpetrated by landlords, tenants, or neighbors. Second highest are those perpetrated by employers or co-workers. Safety is indeed not normal, not for the vast majority of people in the world, and certainly not for most queer people—not even in our homes or workplaces” [Emphasis added].

One form of state-sponsored oppression that still impacts the lives of numerous LGBTQ Americans is the continuing threat of court-ordered termination of parental rights. On February 17, 2019, the Washington Post recounted the story of one such widely-publicized judicial proceeding in an obituary for Sharon Bottoms Mattes, 48, that it captioned “Same-sex partnership cost her custody of her son.” The following excerpts are taken from that obituary:

“Sharon Bottoms Mattes, a central figure in a prolonged court battle in the 1990s who lost custody of her son to her mother after Virginia courts ruled that she was an ‘unfit parent’ because she was involved in a same-sex relationship, died Jan. 21 at her home in Richlands, N.C. She was 48.

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“In 1991, Ms. Mattes, then known as Sharon Bottoms, gave birth to a son, Tyler Doustou. By then, she was already divorced from the boy’s father, who was not involved in raising the child. About a year later, Ms. Mattes and April Wade, a food-service worker, formed a household together near Richmond. Ms. Mattes’s mother, Kay Bottoms, later sought to gain custody of Tyler. The bitter court battle—pitting mother against daughter and involving intimate and embarrassing details of their lives—played out in courtrooms for three years before it was ultimately decided by the Virginia Supreme Court. The case was watched closely, as gay and lesbian activists sought to extend their parental rights. It was watched just as closely by conservative religious groups, who viewed it as ‘another step in the gradual degradation and deconstruction of American society,’ as Walter E.

Barbee, president of the Family Foundation, put it.

“The Virginia branch of the American Civil Liberties Union handled much of Ms. Mattes’s legal defense. After a juvenile court judge ruled in favor of Kay Bottoms’s demand for custody, the case [was] heard before Circuit Court Judge Buford M. Parsons Jr. According to testimony, Ms. Mattes’s mother had a live-in boyfriend who, M. Mattes said, subjected her to repeated sexual abuse, beginning when she was 12. After dropping out of high school, Ms. Mattes held a series of part-time jobs, mostly as a store clerk, and had a short-lived marriage. Her former husband, Dennis Doustou, testified in support of Ms. Mattes.

“Under questioning, Ms. Mattes admitted that she and Wade occasionally kissed in Tyler’s presence and, in private, engaged in oral sex. At the time, oral sex was considered sodomy in Virginia and was classified as a felony, whether performed by straight couples, same-sex couples or anyone else. It was not decriminalized until 2014. Parsons upheld the juvenile court’s decision awarding custody of Tyler to Kay Bottoms, declaring in his decision that Ms. Mattes’s ‘conduct is illegal and immoral’ and ‘renders her an unfit parent.’ Ms. Mattes was allowed to see her 2-year-old son from Monday morning to Tuesday night—but only if she did not take him to the home she shared with Wade, who had no visitation rights.

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“In 1994, a Virginia Court of Appeals panel ruled unanimously that Ms. Mattes should have primary custody of her son. ‘I’m not a hero,’ she said at the time. ‘I’m just a mother trying to get her son back.’ Her legal victory was short-lived. Lawyers for her mother filed an appeal, during which the custody arrangement remained unchanged....

“In 1995, the case of *Bottoms vs. Bottoms* reached the Virginia Supreme Court. In a 4-to-3 decision, the court determined that the ‘moral climate’ in Ms. Mattes’s home made her ‘an unfit custodian at this time.’ Her mother was granted permanent custody of Tyler. ‘Living daily under conditions stemming

from active lesbianism practiced in the home,’ Justice A. Christian Compton wrote, ‘may impose a burden upon a child by reason of the ‘social condemnation’ attached to such an arrangement.’ Conservative groups hailed the decision as a victory for traditional moral values. Gay rights groups were outraged.... In 1996, Ms. Mattes abandoned her legal fight. She gave no more interviews for the rest of her life.

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‘We don’t regret this fight, but we feel it’s something we shouldn’t have to go through,’ Ms. Mattes told the New York Times in 1995, in one of her final public statements. ‘I deserve my baby. I gave birth to him. I want him.’”

In many ways, it is the acts of ‘spiritual violence’ that are the most damaging form of oppression against LGBTQ+ people:

Edman, pp. 50, 51-52: “It sickens me how effectively fear of sexual difference continues to be used as a weapon against my people. This is a deep and disturbing spiritual malaise that afflicts not only perpetrators of violence, but also and far more heartbreakingly the people who find themselves in the crosshairs. In 2011, Michael Bacon, a priest, began to compile news reports of young people who had killed themselves, or tried to, because they were being bullied. Within a few weeks, Michael had uncovered approximately seventy accounts of youth suicides in countries around the globe. Thirty-five were reported to the press to be gay. He found multiple instances of girls killing themselves as couples. It is not a surprise, though it should be, that several of the news accounts included explicit reference to religious-based taunts, or worse, queerphobic quotes from local pastors.

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“The weapons against queer people differ not just in scale from those used in acts of racial terror, but also in method. *Because we are seldom born into queer families, many of us spend years alone before we find queer community. Those who would terrorize us have thus crafted weapons that pick us off individually*

before we have found our people. Though queer people certainly are forced to deal with external threats of violence, *the terrorism directed against us relies heavily on weapons that we ingest with our minds, hearts, and souls.* These are spiritual weapons. *Delivered relentlessly over a course of years, these weapons prove to be so spiritually corrosive that many queer people take their own lives to escape the inflicted pain and internalized shame.* Some queer youth do indeed flee north, or west, to find safe harbors in urban centers with large LGBTQ[+] communities. But others simply flee the world that has bullied them relentlessly and condemned them as evil” [Emphasis added].

Rev. Edman claims that the “queer” person faces all of these forms of oppression with an attitude of proud defiance, of courage, of willingness to take risks, of openness, and of unwavering honesty, regardless of the consequences of his or her actions:

Edman, pp. 46-47, 124, 59: “To live a queer life is to put oneself at risk—among family members, at work, on the street, and even in our homes. Telling the truth about queer identity takes courage. Embarking on the quest to find other queer people can be frightening, even perilous. *If Christians understand and respect nothing else about queer experience, they should recognize this: proclaiming what you know to be true—especially in the face of hostility and ridicule—takes guts. Many queer people have a visceral understanding of Jesus’s words, ‘Those who try to make their life secure will lose it.... For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?’* [quoting Lk. 17:33 & Mk. 8:36].

“Nowhere do we walk the walk of faith more than in our quotidian [meaning ‘ordinary’ or ‘everyday’] decisions to live openly, visibly—on the streets, in our jobs, everywhere. Being out in a hostile world requires trust in something more important, and thus more secure, than physical safety. It may be a prioritization of one’s identity—‘I have to be who I am.’ It may come from a sense that it simply matters to tell the truth—a prioritization of one’s integrity. And it may come from the knowledge that things will only change—for me, for all of us—by risking hits on ourselves individually as we witness to a larger truth: that

our identities, our integrity, have value. This is rooted in the knowledge that one's truth is a part of a larger truth, and at some point this larger truth will win out.

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“For LGBTQ[+] people who are not yet out in significant arenas of their lives, there may be an inherent paradox in the tension between the need to create community and the need to have community in order to be safe. *The simple truth is that lots of us have come out in relative isolation. Many of us still have to do this.* You may well be the first person in your school to declare that you are trans*—even if you live in a large metropolitan area. You may be the only person you know in your faith community who is intersex. You may live in a town where a young lesbian just had the shit kicked out of her on a public sidewalk, and suddenly whatever small group of queer people you know about has gone quiet. *You may feel alone, and even the knowledge that others have gone before you and faced in other places what you face now may not feel very comforting—not when you are the one about to take the risk.*

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“.... [Today,] I count myself blessed to live in New York, to work in a politically progressive office, to have the support of my church and my bishop. All of this has made it so much easier to be myself. *My life has not always been like this. Many of us—perhaps most of us—have paid terrible prices for our honesty along the way....*” [Emphasis added].

In Bishop Robinson's view, advocacy on behalf of LGBTQ[+] people and opposition to their oppression are fully consistent with and indeed called for under the long-standing Judeo-Christian prophetic tradition of having concern for and taking care of the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized:

Robinson, pp. 41-44: “Deep within the Jewish, and therefore also Christian, heritage and history is a razor-sharp focus on heeding the cries for justice from those who are oppressed. Much of the Jewish Scriptures (called the ‘Old Testament’ by Christians) are devoted to the stories of the prophets. Let's remember that in that tradition, a prophet is not one who foresees the *future* but

rather one who is courageous enough to see the inequities, immoralities, and sins of the *present*. A prophet is the one who stands up and speaks truth to power. A prophet is the one who risks his own neck to tell the powers that be what they least want to hear, who calls to account the behavior of the powerful and the wealthy, on behalf of the oppressed and the poor.

“The prophet becomes the voice of the voiceless. Lest we trivialize this role, remember that the prophetic voice is not merely whining but rather speaking with moral and religious authority about how God would have us act toward one another. The prophet is pleading not necessarily his own case but that of the oppressed and powerless minority who are being treated unjustly. Even the Psalms often articulated the cries for justice from the oppressed, calling upon God to ease their burdens, overturn their enemies and restore justice to the world.

“Jesus clearly understands himself to be in this prophetic tradition. Indeed, some of his disciples and onlookers wondered aloud if he is ‘one of the prophets.’ That is because he is constantly railing against those in power—whether it be the power of the Roman occupiers or the powers that be in the religious establishment who collaborate with the occupiers—for their treatment of the marginalized, the dispossessed, the sick, and the poor. Jesus often mentions the lack of care for ‘widows and orphans,’ who are powerless because there is no man in their lives—a man being necessary for social, economic, and political standing. Jesus was always getting into trouble for his prophetic confrontations with the secular and religious powers that be, and indeed, it was his critique of—and the potential for leading a rebellion against—those powers that got him crucified.

“For Jews who take the prophetic tradition seriously, and for Christians who seek (at least in theory) to be Christlike, one has to wonder what prophetic messages God would want uttered in His name in this day and time. Certainly the cries of the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized should be heeded by the powers and principalities. But *is it too far a stretch to imagine that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people would be among those for whom God would*

have us advocate? Would not the God of love want us to plead the case of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, even if we have no existential stake in that issue?

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“There is much in our religious tradition that calls us to this ministry of advocacy on behalf of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and against their oppression, both within religious institutions and in the culture. It seems clear to me that it is not just those directly affected by these issues who are called to that work of advocacy but rather all who value and seek justice for all. Indeed, we will never achieve fair treatment and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people until straight people own this as their issue too” [Emphasis added].

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