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ADDRESSING ISSUES RELATED TO LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND
TRANSGENDER (LGBT) SELF-IDENTIFYING CHRISTIANS
IN THE ASIAN AMERICAN CHURCH

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Anthony Young Chon
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ADDRESSING ISSUES RELATED TO LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND
TRANSGENDER (LGBT) SELF-IDENTIFYING CHRISTIANS
IN THE ASIAN AMERICAN CHURCH

Anthony Young Chon

Read and Approved by:

Andrew T. Walker (Faculty Supervisor)

Timothy Paul Jones

Date _____

To Ruth,

My best friend and love of my life,

How precious you are for you are fully known

And deeply loved by the great I AM and I.

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PREFACE

During my time in ministry while working on this thesis I have been reminded multiple times that “brokenness is a bridge not a barrier.” Over the years the pain and tears that many congregation members shared with me in their struggle with their gender and sexuality is what bore this thesis. My hope and prayer is that this work the Lord has begun in and through me will not end here but will bear much fruit in bringing healing to the hurting. I am forever grateful for everyone who has encouraged me to pursue this study and have walked with me on this journey.

I want to begin by thanking my beautiful wife, Ruth, who is my greatest fan. Thank you for your patience, support, and loving me through this process by taking care of everything especially our four kids, Hope, Hosea, Hudson, and Hosanna. You all bring immense joy to my life and I love you all to the moon and back.

Second, Soo Hyuk Chon and Young Ja Chon, thank you for being my parents and never giving up on me. Even when it was difficult for you to accept my calling into full-time ministry it was the both of you who encouraged me to continue to pursue it when I gave up. Thank you for always praying for me and being an example of what it means to be faithful to Christ and the Church.

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Fourth, I want to thank the faculty at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. I am grateful for my supervisor, Dr. Andrew Walker, for his wisdom and helpful insights on this topic. I could not have asked for a better professor to oversee my thesis. I also extend my thanks to Dr. Timothy Paul Jones and Dr. Theodore Cabal for making the

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Lastly, I give my utmost thanks to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Without you, I would not be alive today. Your Word has been the guiding light that has made me who I am today. May I always remember to trust in You with all my heart and lean not on my own understanding but in all my ways acknowledge You so that You would make my paths straight (Prov 3:5-6).

Anthony Chon

Naperville, Illinois

December 2020

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

An emergence of revisionist literature by queer Asian theologians is challenging orthodox teachings on gender and sexuality in the Asian American Church. These unorthodox teachings have brought forth a dilemma in pressuring Asian American churches to be affirming of homosexuality and transgender identities. LGBT self-identifying Christians¹ are leaving traditional evangelical churches as issues of shame have also caused friends and family members of LGBT self-identifying Christians to join affirming ministries. If the Asian American church desires to remain faithful to the Word of God and to care for the least of these then the church needs to learn how to reduce the marginalization of LGBT self-identifying Christians by providing clear biblical correctives and plausibility structures for its members.²

“Before there was Gay Shame, there was already gay shame.”³ These were the opening words of David M. Halperin at the Gay Shame conference in 2003. Halperin, who is considered a pioneer of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT)⁴ studies, points to the fact that shame has always been a part of the gay identity. Shame is a key

¹LGBT self-identifying Christians are defined in this thesis as people who experience same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria but do not identify as LGBT or engages in homosexual acts or transgender behavior as he/she strives to find his/her identity in Christ.

²This thesis affirms and is in line with the “Nashville Statement.” See The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, “Nashville Statement,” accessed October 13, 2020, <https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement>.

³David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, eds., *Gay Shame* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2016), 41. The Gay Shame movement emerged in response to the Gay Pride movement which suppresses all aspects of shame associated with homosexuality. Gay Shame seeks to reclaim shame in a way that does not ignore its history and culture but pursues to portray it in a new way.

⁴When referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender it will simply be LGBT.

component in understanding the plight of those who identify as LGBT. The systemic issue of shame that affects the LGBT community becomes even more complex for cultures that are shame based. For Asian Americans, shame is closely tied with their identity. A survey among Asian American college undergraduates discovered that “the avoidance of shame was found to be a strong motivating factor in determining their ethnic identification”⁵ and that “the process of ethnic identification is unique for Asian-Americans in that shame . . . is a culturally powerful motivating force in defining oneself.”⁶

Shame is deeply embedded into the fabric of what it means to be Asian American, therefore LGBT Asian Americans are “doubly oppressed”⁷ as a result of their race and sexuality. The journal of *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* published a study on measuring the multiple marginalization of LGBT adults who are people of color (LGBT-POC). This empirical research assessed the microaggressions⁸ experienced by LGBT-POC through a self-reporting scale. The study defined microaggressions as “brief, daily assaults on minority individuals, which can be social or

⁵Christine J. Yeh and Karen Huang, “The Collectivism Nature of Ethnic Identity Development among Asian-American College Students,” *Adolescence* 31, no. 123 (Fall 1996), 645-661. A total of 87 college students from a California university participated in the study and “40% of the sample described shame as an important factor in ethnic identity development” (656).

⁶Yeh and Huang, “The Collectivism Nature of Ethnic Identity Development,” 658.

⁷Kevin K. Kumashiro, “Supplementing Normalcy and Otherness: Queer Asian American Men Reflect on Stereotypes, Identity, and Oppression,” *Qualitative Studies in Education* 12, no. 5 (1999), 491. According to studies by Hom and Ma, their research suggests that Asian American LGBT experience oppression based on race and sexual orientation simultaneously. They are doubly oppressed or doubly marginalized.

⁸Microaggression is a term originally coined by Chester Pierce in 1970 who used it to describe the ways in which African Americans were being discriminated against by their white peers. Since then the term has expanded to include any non-white racial and ethnic minority as well as marginalized groups based on religion, sexual orientation, gender, disability, and age. Microaggression has become a controversial issue for Asian Americans because of stereotypes like the model minority myth which has removed Asian Americans from being categorized as “people of color” (POC). There is a false narrative portraying Asian Americans as not being marginalized and has become a dominant, advantaged, and successful group. Asian Americans have thus been pitted against other racial and ethnic groups. As a result of this monolithic portrayal, it is difficult for Asian Americans to find their place in either white or POC communities as Asian Americans are stigmatized and discriminated against by both dominant and oppressed groups. See Janelle Raymundo, “Are Asian Americans POC? Examining Impact of Higher Education Identity-Based Policies and Practices,” *The Vermont Connection* 41, no. 5 (2020), 26-35.

environmental, verbal or nonverbal, as well as intentional or unintentional (Sue et al., 2007).”⁹ Perpetrators may not perceive their interpersonal exchanges as microaggressions as they “may believe their actions to be innocent or harmless and may not understand the potential impacts of these behaviors on recipients (e.g., Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Sue et al., 2008).”¹⁰ This study categorized the results into three main sections: microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidation. They discovered that these microaggressions resulted not only in perceived damages but led to actual mental, emotional, and physical harm. As a result, while LGBT Asian Americans are doubly oppressed, LGBT self-identifying Christians in the Asian American church¹¹ experience a triple marginalized status because of their religious affiliation.¹² The Asian American church leans strongly against homosexuality¹³ but lacks in distinguishing those who identify as gay or engage in homosexual acts with those who are same-sex attracted (SSA),¹⁴ same-sex oriented (SSO),¹⁵ or have gender dysphoria (GD).¹⁶ It is necessary to

⁹Kimberly F. Balsam et al., “Measuring Multiple Minority Stress: The LGBT People of Color Microaggressions Scale,” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 17, no. 2 (2011): 163. A comprehensive list of well-documented references is provided in regards to the mental and physical health of racial and ethnic minorities. These groups are labeled as oppressed populations.

¹⁰Balsam, “Measuring Multiple Minority Stress,” 163.

¹¹L2 Foundation, “How Many Asian American Churches in the USA” last modified July 2, 2009, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120513215826/http://l2foundation.org/2009/how-many-asian-american-churches-in-the-usa>. This study will focus on, but is not limited to Chinese and Korean American churches as these two ethnic groups represent the majority of Asian American churches.

¹²Jonathan H. X. Lee et al., *Asian American Religious Cultures* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2015), 88-89. Multiple examples of discrimination against sexual and ethnic minorities are provided with references to published stories and essays. These stories describe spiritual experiences of racism and queerphobia from family, community and church members.

¹³Pew Research Center, “Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths” accessed April 22, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/07/19/asian-americans-a-mosaic-of-faiths-social-and-political-attitudes>. The most recent Pew Research on Asian Americans reports that around two-thirds of Asian-American evangelicals believe homosexuality is not to be encouraged.

¹⁴Same-sex attraction is a description of a sexual feeling or desire for the same gender. When referring to same-sex attraction it will simply be SSA.

¹⁵Homosexual orientation is a persistent, strong and enduring sexual attraction towards the same gender. When referring to same-sex orientation it will simply be SSO.

¹⁶Gender dysphoria is the dissonance a person experiences between their biological gender and the gender the person identifies as. When referring to gender dysphoria it will simply be GD.

clarify what it means to identify as a Christian who experiences SSA, SSO, and GD. Although there is a distinction between each of these categories, those who experience any one of these feel a sense of shame.

This sense of shame prevents LGBT self-identifying Christians from sharing openly about personal sins and dealing with issues of SSA, SSO, and GD in the Asian American church.¹⁷ As a result, an increasing number of LGBT affirming religious organizations have been established since the early 2000's "to provide pastoral care to one another, to facilitate spiritual growth, and to advocate greater acceptance within the broader LGBT, Asian American, and Christian communities."¹⁸ These religious institutions seek to affirm homosexuality through a reinterpretation and revision of biblical texts.¹⁹ They challenge the traditional view on the doctrine of God by propagating an unorthodox belief that is queer. A significant number of queer Asian literature has been written in regards to the spiritual experience of homosexuals and transgenders, but there is a lack of literature written about and by Asian American LGBT self-identifying Christians who are faithfully walking with the Lord.²⁰ The Asian American church must provide not only examples of LGBT self-identifying Christians living faithfully but implement biblical teachings and plausibility structures²¹ that are

¹⁷Connie S. Chan, "Psychological Issues in Asian Americans," in *Teaching Gender and Multicultural Awareness: Resources for the Psychology Classroom*, eds., Phyllis Bronstein and Kathryn Quina (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2003), 185. For Asian Americans, public displays of emotion are frowned upon. Conflict avoidance is also considered a virtue in being able to silence and hide one's feelings.

¹⁸Lee, *Asian American Religious Cultures*, 91.

¹⁹Lee, *Asian American Religious Cultures*, 92. Lee provides an extensive resource of Asian American LGBT affirming religious organizations. Notable institutions that work towards an ecclesiology of inclusion listed by the Institute for Welcoming Resources are Brite Divinity School, Chicago Theological Seminary, Vanderbilt Divinity School and Yale University Divinity School. Members of the Emerging Queer Asian Pacific Island Religion Scholars are Michael Sepidoza Campos, Elizabeth Leung, Joseph Goh and Hugo Quero.

²⁰Lee, *Asian American Religious Cultures*, 89. It is not until the 1990's that LGBT self-identifying Christians began to write about their experiences in struggling with culture and race. In regards to their faith, most works have been silent when speaking about their lives and spiritual experiences of LGBT Asian American Christians.

²¹"Plausibility Structure" was first coined by the sociologist Peter L. Berger which is a social

correctives against these revisionist institutions and writings. Theological correctives and practical applications need to be readily available for churches to learn and implement.

Familiarity with the Literature

To address the marginalization of LGBT self-identifying Christians in the Asian American church, I will engage with the works of several Asian American biblical scholars such as Tat-Siong Benny Liew, Choon-Leong Seow, and Patrick Cheng. These authors reinterpret scriptures from an Asian contextual lens that affirms same-sex marriage. The tools that are utilized for interpreting God's Word is not exegetical but contextualizes Scripture according to cultural and relational experiences. As a result, there is a lack of literature that provides biblical correctives as well as viable examples that display redemptive stories of LGBT self-identifying Christians who are living out their faith with biblical integrity.

Affirming Literature

The source I will be engaging with that will serve as the primary affirming literature is from Patrick Cheng. Cheng is a leading author and scholar amongst LGBT self-identifying Christians in the Asian American church. He graduated from Yale and Harvard Law and is an Episcopal priest, theologian, and attorney. He is an Associate Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and served as chair of the American Academy of Religion's Committee on the Status of LGBTIQ Persons in the Profession. Cheng is a revisionist who has published extensive works on gender, sexuality, and queer theology from an Asian perspective. This thesis will focus on reviewing and critiquing three of his works,

structure that is created to legitimize a belief system where individuals and groups socialize in a reality that is real to them. For example, without the plausibility structure of the church the legitimacy of Christianity would not only be questioned but the reality of Christianity would cease to exist from society.

Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit,²² *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*,²³ and *From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ*.²⁴

Although Cheng raises awareness of the issues surrounding LGBT self-identifying Christians, he addresses it through an Asian theological lens.²⁵ Cheng reinterprets passages in Scripture and adapts classical Trinitarian theology to “help queer Asian American Christians understand better the complex interplay among the distinct ‘melodies’ of sexuality, race, and spirituality . . . in which queer Asian American Christians can better understand ourselves [sic] and our relationship to God.”²⁶ This thesis seeks to provide a biblical corrective of Cheng’s writings and implement plausibility structures in an Asian American church context.

In *Radical Love*, Cheng writes that his purpose is twofold, it is a “response to those antigay Christians who insist that queerness has nothing to do with Christian theology” and also to help “Christians who have wrestled deeply with reconciling their queerness with their faith.”²⁷ This is evident in all of his writings as he provides a revisionist view of Scripture that affirms homosexuality, therefore it is vital that the church provide a biblical and theological corrective of his views. Not only is there a lack of research and literature that biblically addresses the marginalization of LGBT self-identifying Christians, but hardly any critical review of Cheng’s writings can be found.

²²Patrick S. Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit* (New York: Seabury Books, 2013).

²³Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011).

²⁴Patrick S. Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ* (New York: Seabury Books, 2012).

²⁵Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014).

²⁶Patrick S. Cheng, "A Three-Part Sinfonia: Queer Asian Reflections on the Trinity." in *New Overtures: Asian North American Theology in the 21st Century*, ed., Eleazar S. Fernandez (Upland, CA: Sopher Press, 2012), 173–91.

²⁷Cheng, *A Three-Part Sinfonia*, 13.

Corrective Literature

The sources that will serve as the primary biblical and theological correctives are *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*,²⁸ and *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality*.²⁹ In addition to these texts I will use the journal article “A New Testament Perspective on Homosexuality”³⁰ and the exegetical debate from “*Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality*.”³¹ Though these texts do not come from an Asian perspective, together they provide a comprehensive work in examining the scriptures which prohibit homosexuality.

Mark Yarhouse is the primary author in whose writings provide plausibility structures for LGBT self-identifying Christians in the Asian American church. Many consider Yarhouse to be the leading Christian evangelical psychologist in understanding homosexuality and gender dysphoria. Yarhouse is a professor and the Dr. Arthur P. Rech and Mrs. Jean May Rech Endowed Chair in Psychology at Wheaton College. In his books, *Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Parents, Pastors, and Friends, Ex-Gays?*,³² *Understanding Sexual Identity: A Resource for Youth Ministers*,³³ and *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*,³⁴ Yarhouse presents structures for the church that can be applied in helping

²⁸Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002).

²⁹DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

³⁰Thomas R. Schreiner, “A New Testament Perspective on Homosexuality.” *Themelios* 31, no. 3 (2006): 62-75.

³¹Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1998).

³²Mark A. Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Parents, Pastors, and Friends* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2010).

³³Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Sexual Identity: A Resource for Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

³⁴Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).

LGBT self-identifying Christians to faithfully follow Christ according to the truth of God's Word.³⁵ The plausibility structures that are suggested and adapted for this thesis focuses on four areas which are; language, identity, family/friendship, and marriage. The purpose of these structures is not so much to change a person's sexual orientation but to help people "identify themselves in ways that are in keeping with their Christian beliefs and values."³⁶ In addition to these texts, *Same-Sex Attraction and the Church: The Surprising Plausibility of the Celibate Life*,³⁷ *Welcoming But Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality*³⁸ and *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian*³⁹ all present practical applications that will greatly contribute to this work in providing biblically-based plausibility structures for the Asian American church.

Void in the Literature

A prevailing issue that the Asian American church faces is a lack of research and literature addressing the marginalization of LGBT self-identifying Christians in the Asian American church from a biblical perspective. Even with the research that is available for Asian American churches, almost all come from a liberal theological perspective. Theologians like Tat-Siong Benny Liew, Choon-Leong Seow, and Patrick

³⁵Yarhouse makes a three-tier distinction when talking about homosexuality. The first tier is same-sex attraction, the second tier is homosexual orientation and the third tier is gay identity. Yarhouse holds the belief that there is no natural progression. SSA does not lead to a homosexual orientation and gay identity but he argues that a person's identity can be in Christ thus choosing not to act upon his/her attraction or orientation.

³⁶Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 91.

³⁷Ed Shaw, *Same-Sex Attraction and the Church: The Surprising Plausibility of the Celibate Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015). There is another title for the book which is printed in the UK and titled *The Plausibility Problem: The Church and Same-Sex Attraction*.

³⁸Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

³⁹Wesley Hill, *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015).

Cheng, along with other liberal scholars have cornered the market in discussions on gender and sexuality in the Asian American church. An imperative for the Asian American church is to learn how to think, teach, and provide biblical correctives and plausibility structures for LGBT self-identifying Christians who are marginalized lest Asian American churches assimilate into the mainstream culture of affirming same-sex marriages. This study will provide the preventative, corrective, and creative means for the church to be able to welcome but not affirm those who struggle with SSA, SSO, and GD.

Thesis

A clear biblical view of gender and sexuality is essential in addressing the marginalization of LGBT self-identifying Christians in the Asian American church. Establishing a correct biblical view of same-sex attraction and gender identity is the foundation towards guiding the Asian American church in creating plausibility structures for LGBT self-identifying Christians. The significant lack in literature regarding the spiritual experience of Asian American LGBT self-identifying Christians makes it all the more imperative for the church to implement correctives against revisionist institutions and writings. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze and critique revisionist writings in order to prevent unorthodox teachings in the church. The goal is to provide biblical correctives and practical applications for the Asian American church so that the church can develop an ecclesiology that is not only theologically correct but applicable in addressing issues of marginalization of LGBT self-identifying Christians in the local church as well as for the larger Asian American community.

CHAPTER 2

CULTURAL AND CONTEXTUAL ISSUES

This chapter begins with a biblical worldview for cultural engagement and then presents the mandate for believers to engage culture which is not only a command given by Jesus (Matt 28:18-20) but is clearly taught in the Old and New Testaments. The issues of contextualization raised by eastern and western theologians will be addressed as the main focus of this chapter while engaging with the intersection of these theologies whose works challenge Orthodoxy. The use of these contextual methodologies and the implications it has on biblical interpretations of homosexuality and gender identity will be explored. The purpose of this chapter is to reveal how subjective methods of contextualization based on experience construe the original meaning of the text allowing for queer reinterpretations of Scripture. The argument made in this chapter is that proper contextualization of Scripture requires a historic and exegetical method of biblical interpretation that accurately communicates the literary context and authorial intent of God's Word.

A Biblical View of Cultural Engagement

The cultural engagement of believers is a dilemma that the church faces as Christ-followers are called to be in the world yet not of it (John 17:14–19). For centuries the church has wrestled with what it means to be pure, undefiled, and unstained (Jas 1:27). By engaging with the world there is a fear of becoming like the world but by disengaging with the world the church is in grave danger of becoming irrelevant and losing its religious rights. Although relevance and religious freedom are at stake, the church faces a greater peril if it distances itself from people who are most in need of

Christ. Jesus warns the church by proclaiming, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt 25:45-46).¹ This warning of being separated from the fellowship of Christ forever is not driven by fear but out of love as “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16-17). Jesus reveals to the world His saving grace and unconditional love by laying down His life for us. John, therefore, makes this charge that the love of Christ is not in us if we, like Christ, do not lay down all we are; our goods, our rights, our privileges, and our lives to help, seek and save the lost (1 John 3:16-17). This does not mean that believers are to compromise the truth of God’s Word but must critically contextualize the Word of God in a way that does not take away or diminish the truth of the Gospel.

Engaging culture is not a question of whether or not believers ought to but believers are commissioned by Jesus to engage culture. The most significant text on cultural engagement derives from the Great Commission. Historically this mandate has had competing traditions that have displayed a variety of different practices from churches.² The Great Commission is not explicit in teaching about which theoretical model is ideal when engaging culture, but it is biblically clear that culture must be engaged in order to win people over to the Gospel.³ A clear example of the need for

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

²Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 223-27. Keller reviews Reinhold Niebuhr’s five models of cultural engagement and critiques Niebuhr who advocates for a transformational model. Keller does not favor one model over the other but provides four of his own models for engaging culture; Transformationist, Relevance, Counterculturalist, and Two Kingdoms. He supports the blending together and usage of all four models.

³Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 58-68. Wright interprets the passage on the Great Commission as having a broader implication for God’s purposes for creation, Israel, the church and Christ. He argues that a missional hermeneutic of the Great Commission cannot be evaded. A biblical context and the context of the reader matter when interpreting the Bible because “questions of who you are, where you are, and whom you live among as a reader make a difference” (42). Also see Deyoung and Gilbert’s exegetical work on the Great Commission. Kevin Deyoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the*

cultural engagement is when Paul argues how he became “a Jew, in order to win Jews. . . I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:19-23).⁴ Paul also argued that the Gospel is not only for the Jews but now has come to the Gentiles revealing the need for preachers to be sent all over the world in order for everyone to call on the name of the Lord (Rom 10:13-18).⁵ The Great Commission is more than simply winning as many people to Christ but it is a calling for entire tribes, languages, people groups, and nations to be redeemed through the Word.⁶ In order to reach every nation with the Gospel, it is indicative and imperative that multiple cultures will be engaged. Cultural contexts matter when hearing and appropriating the Gospel in making disciples of all nations. This may seem like a daunting task, but the disciples are not left to themselves in accomplishing this mission. They are equipped with God’s Word and assured with a promise that Christ’s presence will be with them wherever they go, even to the very end of the age.

Old Testament References

The Scriptures are replete with references that provide examples of how believers are to engage with culture. In Ezekiel 47:22, Israel was commanded to let

Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 27. Deyoung and Gilbert are not against an understanding of cultural engagement from the Great Commission but are careful in placing these types of interpretations in appropriate theological categories so that more explicit priorities in the Great Commission are not sacrificed.

⁴Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 425-30. Fee explains how Paul finds himself having to adjust in-between different Jewish and Gentile religious and customary laws in order to win as many over to Christ. This did not mean that Paul did whatever he wanted to do but for Paul this meant that “‘being under (or ‘keeping’) the law’ has to do with being Jewish in a national-cultural-religious sense; but as a new man in Christ he also expects the Spirit to empower him (as well as all of God’s new people) to live out the ethics of the new age, which are the ‘commands of God’ (7:19) now written on hearts of the flesh (cf. Ezek. 36:26-27),” (430).

⁵Thomas R. Schreiner, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 571-72. Schreiner argues that Paul is not stating here that everyone has heard the Gospel therefore all missionary work is completed. He argues that Rom 15:24 reveals the Gospel has not reached everyone as Paul still needs to preach the Gospel in Spain. Paul is claiming that the missionary work now includes the Gentiles indicating that the missionary work extends to all people.

⁶John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 257-59.

sojourners who were not Israelites to receive an allotment of the inheritance among the tribes of Israel. Their children were to be included as well and were to be considered no different than native-born children of Israel. In Psalm 67:5, the Israelites are instructed to engage the world through worship “Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!” In Isaiah 56:7 God’s people are instructed to engage the world through prayer as He declares “for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.” In 1 Chronicles 16:7-36 King David appoints Asaph and his associates to praise the Lord by ascribing God’s attributes in song. According to this passage, the reason God desires for His name to be praised and proclaimed is so that God would be made known to all the families, in all the nations, and throughout all the earth. This theme is repeated throughout the song and in the Old Testament where worship is a means of revealing God’s glory to the world (Ps 22:27; Isa 56:6-8; Zech 2:10-11).

New Testament References

God’s desire for His people to praise His name is not exclusive to only the Israelites, but He longs for all of creation to shout His praise as found in both the Old and New Testaments. A picture of this is displayed in Acts 2:47 when Luke records people of different nations and languages gathered together “praising God and having favor with all the people.” The apostle Paul is also seen engaging with different cultures in order to reach everyone as he argues in 1 Corinthians 9:22 that he has “. . . become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.” Paul’s intention is to reach all peoples as “ambassadors for Christ” regardless of gender, ethnic, social, political, economic, and religious background (2 Cor 5:20). Most importantly Jesus says in Mark 11:17 in reference to Isaiah 56:7 that “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations” ensuring that God is not only the God of the Jews but the God of any and all foreigners who believe in the Lord. This is why at the end of Matthew 28:19 Jesus gives His followers the great commission to “make disciples of all nations.” Jesus gave his life

in order to ransom “people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev 5:9). Jesus describes what the kingdom of heaven is like and how the world will come to know that Jesus Christ is Lord. Right before Jesus is betrayed He lifts up a high priestly prayer, that just as the Father, the Son, and Spirit are one that we would be one so that when the world sees the unity of the body of Christ they would know that Jesus is Lord (John 17:20-26). The way in which the world will come to know and believe Jesus is Lord is through Christ’s command and commission which requires believers to engage culture.

A Critical View of Western Contextualization

One of the most influential writings on addressing this question of cultural engagement has been Richard Niebuhr’s book on *Christ and Culture*. For the past half-century Niebuhr’s analysis of how Christians should interact with culture has been the main focus of discussion for western evangelicals. His analysis has once again been recently brought to the forefront as D.A. Carson revisits Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*. In his review, Carson rightfully criticizes Niebuhr’s paradigms in lacking a faithful scriptural interpretation and biblical worldview of history. Though Carson does not explicitly accuse Niebuhr of creating a cultural Christianity, it is implicit as Carson accuses Niebuhr of being unfaithful to key biblical plotlines, characters, and turning points of Scripture that advance the Gospel. Reexamining these paradigms is, therefore, necessary as all of Niebuhr’s models have been adopted by the church in one way or another. Whether or not these models produce moral therapeutic deists⁷ there is a need

⁷Christian Smith and Melina Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162-63. Sociologists Smith and Denton first coined the term “Moralistic therapeutic deism (MTD) in their book *Soul Searching*. They define MTD through a combination of beliefs based on 5 points: 1) A God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth; 2) God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions; 3) The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself; 4) God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem; 5) Good people go to heaven when they die.

for these models to be more cruciform. Niebuhr's models are insightful as a basis for discussion but must be further defined and developed biblically in order to create structures for the church that is Christocentric. As Carson points out in Mark 12:13-17 that up to this moment in history the church and state were inseparable, but now Jesus distinguishes the church from state. This does not mean that Jesus completely separates the two but invites believers to live in that tension faithfully.

Religion that is pure and undefiled defined by James, the brother of Jesus, is visiting "orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (Jas 1:27). According to James, the church is to care for the marginalized, but this cannot take place without the church being distinct from the world. To be distinct does not mean that the church is to isolate itself from the world. By not engaging the culture the church is neglecting the marginalized in their affliction which results in the staining of itself. The answer is then, not only to just do justice, but the church must also be holy. The paradigm in which Carson expresses for a theology that can reconcile this tension faithfully is through a "transnational and transcultural community."⁸ The biblical portrait that Carson paints is a church that is not in isolation but a community that reflects different ethnic, cultural, and social classes. The church is a community that is also called by God to submit to governing authorities but stands together against those authorities which goes against God's authority. The faith of believers, which is never meant to solely be private, is for the public display of God's glory in all areas of life in church and state.

Carson is not alone in admonishing the church to engage the culture in this way as Richard Neuhaus also cautions Christians in his book *The Naked Public Square* that America will inevitably become a "darker and colder place."⁹ Unless we understand

⁸D.A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 57.

⁹Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1984), 264.

the demands of the naked public square in America and rightly address them, Americans will face the consequence of losing any sense of value judgment.¹⁰ Russell Moore argues as well in his book *Onward* that Jesus challenged the contemporary religious teachers and leaders of His time, and so do we like Jesus need to walk towards hostility rather than walk away from it. By engaging the culture, we preserve the Gospel because by nature the Gospel is missions oriented. According to Moore, in order for believers to have life we must connect with people outside the church. The Gospel is a call to an “engaged alienation” where we must not lose the strangeness of Christianity that “preserves the distinctiveness of our gospel while not retreating from our callings as neighbors, and friends, and citizens.”¹¹

Carson, Neuhaus, and Moore provide historical, theological, and biblical truths in addressing issues regarding the cultural engagement of Christians, but in their admonishments, they do not address the specific difficulties that ethnic minorities face in their cultural contexts. Cultural engagement for ethnic minority churches in America is multifaceted. Actively engaging in American culture is an issue even more so for ethnic minorities who have to navigate between different cultures and languages. For believers who are Asian, the influence of Confucian moorings of shame and assimilation speaks against voicing out personal beliefs in public. A greater emphasis is therefore placed on personal spiritual growth and being at peace, harmony, and unity with the community. Sacrificing oneself for the sake of the community is what is emphasized in the church and therefore Niebuhr’s model of “Christ of Culture” and “Christ and Culture in Paradox”

¹⁰Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 146. Neuhaus contends that the loss of value judgement resulted from the lack of cultural engagement. According to Neuhaus, what has happened is that “every value judgment” has become simply a personal opinion that is of “private interest.” Neuhaus claims that this has brought “home to the outrage of many Americans, the protection of an alternative life-style’ such as homosexuality turns heterosexual marriage into just another ‘alternative life-style’” (146).

¹¹Russell D. Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 8.

may speak more to easterners than “Christ against Culture, Christ above Culture, and Christ the Transformer of Culture.”

To radically break from culture, seek to reform culture, speak in the public square, or walk towards hostility is contrary to eastern cultural norms. This does not mean that the truth of the Gospel changes, but how the Gospel is communicated differs according to cultural contexts. Moore contends that “if Christians are to be shaped and formed by the authority of Scripture, we ought to train our own consciences to see how questions facing our neighbors now intersect with God’s kingdom purposes.”¹² Although biblical exegesis is the foundation for our theology it is our theology that informs our exegesis. For example, a robust theology of shame requires seeing it biblically through the lens of multiple cultural contexts since it carries different meanings in different cultural contexts. As Moore rightly points out, it is not “more ‘ministry’ to the poor or racial minorities or immigrant communities” that we need but “we need to be led by the poor and by racial ‘minorities’ and by immigrant communities.”¹³ The need to lead as pointed out by Moore does not necessarily mean that ethnic minority churches should take charge but that others should take their cues of cultural engagement from ethnic minority churches.

Western Evangelicalism in the East

Western evangelical churches cannot properly engage ethnic minority cultures without first addressing the contextual issues of western evangelicalism that have emerged in the East. This is essential as “western theologians must be aware of the cultural beams in their own eyes before attempting to remove specks from non-Western eyes.”¹⁴ In *Grassroots Asian Theology*, Simon Chan addresses the issue of western

¹²Moore, *Onward*, 38.

¹³Moore, *Onward*, 126-27.

¹⁴Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “One Rule to Rule them All?: Theological Method in an Era of World

evangelicalism and its lack of contextualizing the Gospel. Chan calls reformed evangelicalism “elitism” where a westernized version of the Gospel is not relevant in practically reaching the needs of people from the east. This is not just an issue for non-westerners but ethnic minorities living in America. Chan criticizes that “elite theologians may theologize about the poor and oppressed, but such a theology is not likely to find much traction among the poor themselves.”¹⁵ Connie Ho Yan Au makes the observation that many Asian countries are stricken by poverty because of colonialism, capitalism, and communism. Au further claims that “in China, Korea, and Japan, where Confucianism is deeply rooted in the culture so that women have to surrender to men and the youth to the elderly, and in India where the caste system determines the fate of one’s life according to their ‘inborn’ social status, charismata are not merely a matter of religious experience, but social liberation.”¹⁶ According to Au, this is a key reason for the widespread acceptance of Liberation Theology and Pentecostalism in Asia¹⁷ which focuses on orthopraxy rather than an orthodoxy that is found in western evangelicalism.¹⁸

East Asian Theological Studies

The need for Asian Theological Studies is increasing as the majority of Christians are now from the East and Pentecostalism is the fastest-growing Christian

Christianity” in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2006), 116-17.

¹⁵Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 28.

¹⁶Hope Antone et al., eds., *Asian Handbook for Theological Education and Ecumenism* (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2013), 84-85.

¹⁷Antone, *Asian Handbook*, 84. For further clarification see Au’s historical work on Pentecostalism. Au explains that Pentecostalism was not made based on “any denominational doctrines and institutions.” Au claims that it was a result of praxis through a “self-interpretation of the Bible” based on Asian contexts and experiences.

¹⁸“Orthopraxy” is an adherence to right practice in living faithfully through righteous acts while “Orthodoxy” is an adherence to right belief in doctrine and creeds of the early church.

movement in the world.¹⁹ According to the World Christian Database, one of the greatest concentrations of Pentecostals is found in China with an estimated number of 72 million.²⁰ Chan sees this growth of Pentecostalism in Asia as the solution for Asian theologies which have either adopted or has been indoctrinated by western elitist themes and contexts.²¹ Chan argues that studying the lived theologies of believers in Asia will produce a better theology for the Asian Church as well as the global church. This is not just a proposal for an Asian Theology but a challenge in the way that theology ought to be done. In order for theology to be authentic, Chan insists that it must be comprised of the larger Christian tradition which includes all the saints throughout history. This is where Chan differs from Niebuhr's theology of culture as he criticizes Niebuhr's adoption of a Tillichian approach to social engagement. As an existential philosopher, Paul Tillich's approach to social engagement has been based on the "method of correlation." This method seeks to utilize Christianity as a means for answering questions on human existence. Tillich's methodology, which has dominated mainline Asian Theology, is challenged by Chan as he raises the need to supplement Asian Theology with a more comprehensive theology of social engagement.²²

According to Chan, Tillich's philosophy on social engagement has led Niebuhr to believe that culture is neutral and is the "all-embracing reality" ("reality sui generis") within which Christians discover their identities. In this approach culture sets the agenda

¹⁹Pew Research Center. "Christian Movements and Denominations." Last modified December 19, 2011. https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-movements-and-denominations/#_%20ftnmove1. For further details see the Pew Forum Analysis in 2011. The Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary cites that there are 279 million Pentecostal Christians and 305 million charismatic Christians in the world only second to the Catholic church. The estimation is that there will be over 1 billion Pentecostal-Charismatics in 2050.

²⁰Pew Research Center. "The New Face of Global Christianity: The Emergence of 'Progressive Pentecostalism'" Last modified April 12, 2006. <https://www.pewforum.org/2006/04/12/the-new-face-of-global-christianity-the-emergence-of-progressive-pentecostalism>.

²¹Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 28.

²²Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 36.

for the church; the church has to find its *raison d'être* [reason for being] in relation to the larger 'culture.'"²³ This view of social engagement has numerous consequences as it produces a cultural Christianity. In addition, Chan points out that this approach does not entail a high view of the church. This is a reductionistic understanding of the church which makes it out to be "simply a means to a higher-end to be realized in the world and its *raison d'être* essentially instrumental, then its public and institutional character becomes irrelevant."²⁴ The church is not merely an institution whose chief end is to promote social justice by seeking to liberate the world of sin, where sin is redefined and reduced to social, economic, political, and gender inequalities. The question is then posited as to what distinguishes the church from any other secular movement or philanthropic organization. In addressing the oppressions and injustices of this world the church must learn what it means to be in the world but not of it. This is the dilemma that the church faces today where religious experience is closely tied to social liberalism therefore alternate solutions to this issue must be explored.

A Critical View of Eastern Contextualization

Jana Rosker, who is a professor of Asian studies and the founder of the department of Asian studies at the University of Ljubljana, explains the difference between Western and Eastern views of contextualization. Rosker argues that Western traditions have placed a greater emphasis on "reason" which is rooted in European epistemologies while Eastern traditions have placed a higher value on "pragmatics" which stems from a holistic view of the world.

According to the prevailing traditional European epistemologies, knowledge has mainly been gained through observation and reasoning. However, in traditional Chinese thought, knowledge . . . stems from moral contents and which cannot be separated from (social) practice The method which determined most of the

²³Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 36.

²⁴Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 36-37.

epistemological teachings found in the Chinese classics was based on a holistic world view, and was directed towards a comprehension which could be achieved through education and learning. The basic contents of these teachings were rooted in the premises of pragmatic and utilitarian ethics.²⁵

As a result of Chinese classical teachings, East Asian interpretations of biblical texts such as Micah 6:8 places prominence in one's deeds, in doing justice, over having faith in the Word. As a result, walking humbly with the Lord is defined by the pragmatic and utilitarian ethics of doing good. Walking humbly with the Lord is inclusive of doing good but according to D.A. Carson it means "'to walk thoughtfully' in the light of the covenant's requirements."²⁶ God's covenant is not based on our works but the works of Jesus Christ, meaning that we are justified by His work on the cross and sanctified "by the washing of water with the word" (Eph 5:25-32). Through the lens of Scripture, the church is able to clearly see, assess, and engage culture faithfully according to God's Word. We are commanded not only to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength but also with our mind (Matt 22:37; Luke 10:27). God's calling for His people is therefore driven not by people or culture but by God's Word which compels us into action. Os Guinness expresses that "Calling is more than purely cultural, but it is also more than purely personal. Discover the meaning of calling and you discover the heart of the gospel itself."²⁷ Guinness acknowledges that his "own critiques of the Western World and the Western Church are as comprehensive and critical as anyone's,"²⁸ but he is not discouraged as he believes that the Gospel will prevail as the truth of God's Word will always remain. The problem is not with God's Word but with people, therefore Guinness

²⁵Jana Rošker "Epistemology in Chinese Philosophy" The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer Edition 2018), Last modified April 5, 2018. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/chinese-epistemology>.

²⁶Gordon J. Wenham et al., eds., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 830.

²⁷Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), 58-59.

²⁸Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life*, 92.

believes that the truth of the Gospel will always find its way and be rediscovered over again. Christ reveals this truth to us, that He is the Word who has always been, will always be, and will never change (Matt 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33; John 1:1-14).

The written Word of God is the necessary means by which God has chosen to preserve the truth of the Gospel. The Gospel is faithfully proclaimed through the written Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. This means that the church must make Christ known through the lens of Scripture illuminated by the Holy Spirit. A biblical worldview cannot have culture be the primary instrument used to inform and interpret God's Word. The culture is not what sets the agenda for the church but it is the Word of God that directs its ultimate purpose and meaning in relation to the larger culture. The late missiologist Paul Hiebert defines Biblical Worldview as "the human understandings of the underlying givens in Scripture, rather than as the creation as God sees it."²⁹ Hiebert claims that the lens in which we use to understand Scripture is historically and culturally biased therefore interpreting the truth revealed in Scripture has to be "[t]hrough careful study of the Bible and discussions in the church as a hermeneutical community."³⁰ A high view of Scripture reveals a high view of the church where the two are interdependent in establishing a biblical worldview that is not distorted by the world. Establishing a biblical worldview requires a hermeneutical community of believers who read and study God's Word historically and interculturally. This is the method which Chan advocates for early in his writing as he references Hiebert who speaks of the need to "clearly grasp the biblical message as originally intended" through "the international community of churches and the church down through the ages."³¹ Chan argues that the global church

²⁹Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 265.

³⁰Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 267.

³¹Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 86, quoted in Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 11.

and tradition needs to have a more critical role in the way that Scripture and theologies are interpreted and developed in the church.

Engaging Simon Chan's Writings

The need and importance of a critically historical and textual reading of the Bible is emphasized by Chan but as he progresses in his writing, he appears to place greater emphasis on the church and culture over the Word. Rather than a historical and exegetical approach, Chan tends to lean toward a social and cultural approach. This is evident as he writes that his desire is ultimately for “an Asian theology that takes seriously both sociopolitical and ethnographic contexts, integrates these two poles, and offers an alternative approach to social engagement.”³² Chan believes that this will resolve the divide between mainline protestant and liberal Catholic theologies in Asia as it will properly contextualize the Gospel with the current traditions and ecclesial experiences of the Asian Church.³³

Chan is praised by many for his prognosis of the modern church but is also admonished in the way that he comes to this resolve. He is criticized for the fact of being “virtually silent when it comes to the role of exegesis (or biblical interpretation).”³⁴ Biblical references and interpretations are absent in the foundation and support of his arguments. Even though Chan makes clear that he is not doing systematic theology, Jackson Wu who is an orthodox reformed evangelical, finds Chan's book to be more systematic than biblical. In his review of *Grassroots Asian Theology*, Wu is concerned that Chan is purporting a theology which finds its answers based on questions asked by the reader rather than the reader's questions being shaped and altered by the original

³²Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 41.

³³Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 61.

³⁴Jackson Wu, review of *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up*, by Simon Chan, *Themelios: An International Journal for Students of Theological and Religious Studies* 39, no. 3 (2014): 614.

meaning of the text. Wu questions Chan's methodology by posing the possibility for "instances where the biblical authors provide a better starting point for Asian theology than those suggested by modern readers?"³⁵ Wu is not dismissing Chan's methodology but is holding Chan accountable to his prior claim that Asian theology must not only be lived out but be historically and textually critical.

Although multiple methods of contextualization are possible, an objective form of biblical criticism that is historically critical is necessary to properly "exegete" a text. Exegesis is the process of interpretation that draws out the author's original meaning from the text which is addressed to a specific audience and time in history. Without an objective means of interpretation, anyone is able to "eisegete" a text which subjectively imposes meaning onto a passage that the author did not originally intend. Without a critically objective way of interpreting biblical texts, anyone can perform hermeneutical gymnastics and contort Scripture to mean whatever they want.³⁶ This does not mean that contextualization does not take part in the interpretive process but there must be an awareness of the biases within our interpretational lenses. David Sills warns missionaries and preachers who attempt to avoid altering the Gospel while evading the hard work of contextualization. Sills argues that "if one does not contextualize, he is doing just that-changing the gospel. He becomes a modern-day Judaizer. He is in effect telling his hearers that they must become like him to be saved."³⁷ An example of this is provided by Sills when an illiterate indigenous believer in Peru feared for her salvation because she was taught that literacy was a requirement for church membership. This equation led her

³⁵Wu, review of *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 614.

³⁶D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 125-6. For a fuller discussion see Carson's chapter on "Presuppositional and Historical Fallacies."

³⁷M. David Sills, *Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 198.

to believe that literacy was a requirement for eternal life therefore she believed her salvation was in jeopardy.

Engaging Jackson Wu's Writings

In order to combat against this type of false teaching, preachers of the Word are instructed to be equipped with sound doctrine and be ready to teach in every season of life (2 Tim 4:2-4). The hard work of critically contextualizing the Gospel is necessary as more and more people desire to hear what their itching ears want to hear. Although God's Word extends to all people in every circumstance throughout history, contextualization is the means by which this is achieved. The fact of the matter is that there is only one Gospel but how the Gospel is expressed differs between cultures therefore the Gospel cannot be presupposed or assumed. In his book *Saving God's Face*, Wu addresses in detail the issues pertaining to the different methods of contextualization.³⁸ As an evangelical theologian, Wu does not carry the same sentiment of hostility towards western theological influences like Chan. Unlike Chan who uses the term "Elitist" as a condescending reference to western reformed evangelicalism, Wu uses the word "Western" but not as a derogatory term. Wu explains that "this label is used because certain patterns and emphases are especially prominent in Western theology" such as law, guilt, justification, judgment, and individualism.³⁹

Wu provides extensive work in the area of biblical criticism but is also criticized for his lack of references to Asian authors in contextualizing the Gospel. Rather than focus on Chinese contextualization, Wu attempts to integrate both eastern and western theologies for a western audience. In an effort to do so Wu is criticized for

³⁸Jackson Wu, *Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation Through Honor and Shame* (Pasadena, CA: WCIU Press, 2012), 21-24 . For a fuller discussion see Wu's chapter on "Common Methods of Contextualization."

³⁹Wu, *Saving God's Face*, 14.

potentially missing “the significant voices of the emerging urban churches in China and the development of fluid “hybrid-identities.”⁴⁰ Although Wu references a minimal number of Asian authors, he is able to adequately address the issue at hand. In focusing on aspects of western evangelicalism Wu is not dismissing or condemning western thematic emphases. Wu is challenging missiological thinking that uses a predetermined framework when formulating the Gospel. Wu argues that when priority is placed in determining what the Gospel is rather than first asking and answering the question “what is contextualization?” a logical fallacy is committed.⁴¹ By determining first what the Gospel is, begs the question of value in contextualizing the Gospel since it is already assumed and presupposed. One of the examples that Wu presents is the articulation of the Gospel where western theology claims that “the theory of penal substitution is the heart and soul of an evangelical view of the atonement.”⁴² Wu does not dismiss penal substitution as a Western construct as he repeatedly affirms penal substitution as a biblical statement and tradition he upholds.⁴³ Despite his affirming view of penal substitution, he claims that this assertion leads towards a selection of Scripture that is thematically western while passages that contain eastern concepts are minimized or disregarded in the work of the evangelist. This is exemplified in one of the most widely distributed tools of evangelism which was created by Campus Crusade for Christ (CRU).

⁴⁰Richard Cook, review of *Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame*, by Jackson Wu, *Themelios: An International Journal for Students of Theological and Religious Studies* 39, no. 1 (2014): 205.

⁴¹Wu, *Saving God's Face*, 10.

⁴²Wu, *Saving God's Face*, 67. Wu asserts that the majority of protestants would align with Thomas Schreiner's belief that penal substitution is the basis for an evangelical view of the atonement.

⁴³9 Marks, “Still Not Ashamed: A Response to Jackson Wu,” last modified, September 3, 2019, <https://www.9marks.org/article/still-not-ashamed-a-response-to-jackson-wu>. Wu is questioned in regards to his view and stance on penal substitution. He is accused of distancing himself from penal substitution by “engaging in confusing revisionist exegesis of key texts . . . His writings at times seem to undermine penal substitution, if not deny it.” Samuel and Sequeira do state that perhaps they may be misunderstanding Wu's efforts to offer a corrective but in his efforts to do so he lacks clarity. They believe that this brings an imbalance into the discussion of penal substitution among honor and shame cultures.

The past half-century a yellow booklet known as the *Four Spiritual Laws* has been translated into more than 200 languages and utilized by Christians all over the world in sharing the Gospel through the theory of penal substitution.⁴⁴ Although the theory of penal substitution faithfully contextualizes western contexts of law and guilt, it falls short in faithfully contextualizing eastern contexts of honor and shame found in Scripture.⁴⁵ It was not until the leaders from CRU attended the Honor-Shame Conference in Wheaton College that they saw the need to contextualize the Gospel for eastern cultures. As a result, at the end of last year in December, CRU created a tract titled “Honor Restored.”

The purpose of contextualization is more than just bridging contexts in order to highlight different cultural understandings of the Gospel. Contextualization is not simply the means of how to communicate and apply the Gospel but how to interpret Scripture. The process of bringing cultural awareness to the Gospel is not as if something is added to the Word, but as Wu describes “it is the mind’s perception of and/or response to the gospel.”⁴⁶ This means that the cultural context of the reader contributes to identifying themes that are already present in the biblical text. Wu contends that “someone with an East Asian worldview will more naturally see a number of concepts within the Bible that reflect the distinctives of his or her culture.”⁴⁷ For example, one might more easily see themes like honor, shame, and collective identity. Faithful contextualization recognizes this distinction between the two contexts in order to locate cultural concepts inherent in

⁴⁴CRU, “Innovators in Evangelism & Discipleship,” accessed March 4, 2020, <https://www.cru.org/us/en/about/what-we-do/innovators-in-evangelism-discipleship.html>. Bill Bright, who is the founder of CRU, began writing an evangelistic presentation in 1956 called “God’s Plan for Your Life.” This ultimately turned into a booklet in 1965 called “Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?”

⁴⁵Penal substitution is vital and central to the Gospel but when breaking the law and guilt is the sole focus of Christ’s forgiveness for the individual without addressing the atonement of shame for the sins committed communally, there is a lack in faithfully presenting the Gospel, especially in Asian contexts.

⁴⁶Jackson Wu, “Two Kinds of Contextualization and Why They Matter (Part 2),” Jackson Wu (blog), January 16, 2013, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jacksonwu/2013/01/16/two-kinds-of-contextualization-and-why-they-matter-part-2>.

⁴⁷Wu, “Two Kinds of Contextualization,” Jackson Wu (blog).

the biblical text. The inability to distinguish between the two leads to a contextual method that is syncretistic. Wu specifically points this out in K.K. Yeo's writings which, "seems consistently to collapse Chinese culture into Paul's letters, as if Paul were actually writing to modern Chinese people."⁴⁸

Yeo's attempt to genuinely practice a "cross-cultural hermeneutic" at times appears to be syncretistic and universalistic. The difficulty with cross-cultural hermeneutics is the ability to maintain the original meaning of the text without minimizing or changing the original contextual understanding of the Gospel. Yeo asserts that "Confucian classics and the Bible are fairly close at certain points while differing radically from each other at others. Holding on to their incommensurability in tension is a challenging interpretative move of CCT [Chinese Christian Theology] that will fulfill each other's blind spots."⁴⁹ Yeo rightly acknowledges the interpretive challenges of contextualization but then makes an alarming statement by implying that the Bible itself has blind spots. Although Yeo states that the truth of God's Word and the limitations of the interpreter's knowledge are distinct, his explanations do not always clearly distinguish between the two. His attempt to overcome the partial limitations of theology by focusing on "crosscultural (global) interpretation"⁵⁰ rather than historical criticism leads to a method of interpretation that is contrary to his evangelical convictions.

⁴⁸See examples provided by Wu in regards to the theological writings of Yeo. K.K. Yeo, *Musing with Confucius and Paul: Toward a Chinese Christian Theology* (Eugene, OR.: Cascade, 2008); K. K. Yeo, *What Has Jerusalem to do with Beijing: Biblical Interpretation from a Chinese Perspective* (Harrisburg, PA.: Trinity Press, 1998).

⁴⁹Jeffrey P. Greenman and Gene L. Green, eds., *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective: Exploring the Contextual Nature of Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 114.

⁵⁰Greenman and Green, *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective*, 115.

Engaging Asian American Contextualization

Cultural contexts are necessary for the interpretation of Scripture but the truth of Scripture cannot be rightly assessed through the lens of culture. The culture is not what interprets Scripture but the Bible provides ways to truthfully assess the world. The urgency in learning how to faithfully interpret and read the Bible interculturally cannot be stressed enough especially with the growth of ethnic minorities in America.⁵¹ The increase of ethnic diversity in the Evangelical Covenant Church has led North Park Theological Seminary (NPTS) to provide a program in Reading the Bible Interculturally. Max Lee is an Asian American evangelical theologian and professor of New Testament Theology who created a course at NPTS titled “Ethnic American Biblical Interpretation.” Although Lee holds to a historical-critical approach of biblical interpretation, he invites guest lecturers who hold contrarian views like K.K. Yeo to teach in his class. Lee also references in his work the writings of Asian American Theologian Tat-Siong Benny Liew whose method of contextualization is inclusive of literary, historical, political, and cultural criticisms.⁵²

Despite having divergent views, Lee argues that “the historical-critical method provides the best interpretative framework for allowing the biblical text to speak to us as ‘other’ in its own historically contingent voice rather than overriding its voice with our own.”⁵³ This is where Lee differs from the interpretive methods of Chan, Yeo, and Liew. Lee does not support a reader response hermeneutic where the reader’s questions shape

⁵¹United States Census Bureau, “The Nation's Older Population Is Still Growing, Census Bureau Reports,” last modified June 22, 2017, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2017/cb17-100.html>. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, out of all the ethnic minority groups, the Asian population saw the largest percentage in growth. The statistical growth for the largest population also included people who identified as two or more races. The report also revealed that babies of color are now the national majority among infants.

⁵²Tat-Siong Benny Liew and Gale A. Yee, eds., *Semeia 90-91 The Bible in Asian America* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 43.

⁵³Max J. Lee, “Reading the Bible Interculturally: An Invitation to the Evangelical Covenant Church and Evangelical Christianity,” *The Covenant Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (2015): 10.

the text but the text shapes the questions that the reader asks. Lee argues that "any method committed to meaning as a production of the reader—risk obscuring Scripture's 'otherness.'"⁵⁴ Lee holds to the same method of contextualization as Wu, where culture is not the primary means of interpretation but takes part in the exegetical process. Lee argues that "the cultural location of the reader does not simply shape their reception of Scripture's meaning. Rather, this location can aid in accessing its meaning through the process of exegesis itself."⁵⁵ Lee claims that there are semantic gaps in the English lexicon when translating words from ancient texts. The example that Lee presents is with the Hebrew word "Hesed." The English language is inadequate in translating "Hesed" which Lee references as being "used some 246 times in the Old Testament, over half of which occur in the Psalms (as in Psalm 107:1, which reads: "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love [hesed] endures forever"). A single English gloss such as 'mercy,' 'loving kindness,' 'steadfast love,' 'favor,' or even 'grace' does not convey the concept adequately."⁵⁶ Lee provides an alternative translation of the word "Hesed" as proposed by Uriah Y. Kim. Kim who, "suggests that the Korean term *jeong* fills this semantic gap in the English lexicon."⁵⁷

Lee synthesizes Kim's explanation of the term *jeong* which "denotes a kind of 'stickiness' between persons due to a shared experience, or many shared experiences over time, that remaps relationships, loyalty, and responsibility across existing social boundaries."⁵⁸ This one word in Korean captures the "affection-mercy and faithfulness-loyalty" that lacks in the English language. Even though Lee does not agree completely

⁵⁴Lee, "Reading the Bible Interculturally," 10.

⁵⁵Lee, "Reading the Bible Interculturally," 6.

⁵⁶Lee, "Reading the Bible Interculturally," 6.

⁵⁷Lee, "Reading the Bible Interculturally," 6.

⁵⁸Lee, "Reading the Bible Interculturally," 7.

with everything Kim writes, he supports the principle that an intertextual reading of the Bible is necessary for providing the tools for exegesis. Lee stresses again the need for intertextual reading as he expresses what it means for believers to be born again in Christ. The need is not only for a spiritual rebirth but also a need to be culturally born again. As a result, both the Word of God with one's own cultural history requires careful and critical study in order to see cultural biases imputed into the text. Lee contests that it is only then that believers can correctly contextualize Scripture and engage with the issues facing the Asian American church. Just because Lee is born Asian American does not automatically qualify him as an expert in Asian American biblical hermeneutics. Lee makes a personal admission that he needs to be born again culturally which requires an intense study of his own ethnic cultural history. Without studying his own culture, Lee testifies that he cannot "adequately interpret Scripture in [a] way that directly addresses the unique spiritual and communal challenges faced by Asian American churches."⁵⁹

The invitation to address the spiritual and communal challenges faced by Asian American churches is open to anyone willing to engage the culture.⁶⁰ Asian American theologians like Lee and Liew do not believe that being Asian American is a requirement to participate in Asian American Theology. Both Lee and Liew object to the "unhealthy implication that only 'Asian American persons' (however defined) can participate in the production and discussion of Asian American biblical hermeneutic . . . the 'it-takes-one-to-know-one' assumption."⁶¹ Their argument is that as "long as one is willing to mine the literature, history, politics, and culture of a particular ethnic group, that person may seek

⁵⁹Lee, "Reading the Bible Interculturally," 9.

⁶⁰Jackson Wu is an example of someone who is not Chinese or claims to be Chinese but has done the work to interpret Scripture to address the needs of the Asian American church. Wu reveals in his book *Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes* that J.W. is his pen name. The reason for this pseudonym is for security reasons and also out of respect for his host culture having lived there for almost two decades.

⁶¹Tat-Siong Benny Liew, *What Is Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics? Reading the New Testament Intersections: Asian and Pacific American Transcultural Studies* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 4.

to apply the biblical text to this specific cultural location, regardless of their own ethnicity or cultural location.”⁶² Liew offers an Asian American biblical hermeneutic that can be practiced by everyone and applied to any intercultural reading of the Bible. Reading the Bible intercultural according to Liew is “an interdisciplinary enterprise that hinges upon both ethnic/cultural studies and biblical scholarship.”⁶³ Although ethnic-cultural studies and biblical scholarship are necessary for an intercultural reading of the Bible, both are not equally hinged. The enterprise in which Liew is inviting everyone to participate in is in stark contrast to Lee’s method of biblical scholarship which places authority in the text. Lee has been invited to pursue alternate methods of biblical scholarship and has accepted Liew’s invitation to consider different methodologies. Despite the alternatives that Liew offers, Lee continues to opt for the historical approach of biblical interpretation contesting that it is currently the best method of biblical interpretation.

The importance of understanding cultural contexts in regards to how sexuality and gender are viewed biblically cannot be understated but when the text is reinterpreted from a lens outside the authors’ original perspective it reduces the text to a relative moral teaching. Interpretive methods which are devoid of its authorial intent remove the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the sacredness of the text. This is why the apostles along with the early church fathers fought so hard against heretical misinterpretations of the Gospel (Acts 15:24; Gal 1:6-9; 2 Cor 11:4; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 4:1; 2 John 1:10; Jude 1:4). In *How We Got the Bible*, Timothy Paul Jones contends that one of the most common errors committed is the hermeneutical fallacy of trying to “force an ancient culture to fit into the mold of modern expectations.”⁶⁴ Cultural contextualization without

⁶²Lee, “Reading the Bible Intercultural,” 10.

⁶³Lee, “Reading the Bible Intercultural,” 10.

⁶⁴Timothy Paul Jones, *How We Got the Bible* (Torrance, CA: Rose Publishing, 2015), 70.

proper historical criticism opens the door for heretical interpretations of Scripture that lead people astray from the truth of the Gospel. Jones states that “the four New Testament Gospels belong in the category of ancient biographies and were clearly intended to be read as historical testimonies.”⁶⁵ This is clearly evident in the introduction to the Gospel of Luke as the author states that the purpose of his letter is to compile a historical record of eyewitness accounts (Luke 1:1-3).⁶⁶

The Gospels as it is written and is intended to be read points to a historical-critical method of interpretation. Social and cultural contextualization cannot be the primary means of interpreting the Scriptures as Wu provides examples of authors who practice these methods which are not historical. Peter Enns, who is a liberal scholar, interviews Christian author Jenn Hatmaker in regard to changing her mind biblically on homosexuality.⁶⁷ Wu criticizes both of them for falsely applying biblical truths through selective readings of Scripture to affirm same-sex marriage. Their conclusions are an appeal to emotion rather than logic resulting in non-sequitur arguments. An example of this is found in Hatmaker’s interpretation of Matthew 7:15–20 where Wu restates her view that “Christians who affirm a traditional position about LGBTQ overwhelmingly bear ‘rotten’ fruit.”⁶⁸ She argues that this is true because families have been broken by the systemic issues of bigotry within the church. Wu then argues that by their own definition Jesus also bears rotten fruit because later in Matthew 10:34-37 “Jesus explicitly says he

⁶⁵Jones, *How We Got the Bible*, 81.

⁶⁶Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007). Blomberg argues that Luke was written as a historical document where there is “good evidence to support Luke’s confidence in the accuracy of his narrative” (46).

⁶⁷Peter Enns, “Jen Hatmaker - Changing Your Mind About the Bible: A Survivor’s Guide,” *The Bible for Normal People*. Podcast audio, January 29, 2018. <http://www.npr.org/2017/08/11/542753070/scientists-can-t-explain-all-the-appeal-of-an-eclipse>.

⁶⁸Jackson Wu, “Why Jen Hatmaker Apparently Thinks I’m Going to Hell,” Jackson Wu (blog), February 9, 2018, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jacksonwu/2018/02/09/why-hatmaker-thinks-hell>.

will cause ‘broken families.’ Does Hatmaker then want us to reject Jesus?”⁶⁹ Wu warns against this type of social and cultural method which focuses on the reader’s response whose questions shape the text. Wu is clear that his argument is not in regard to the issue of homosexuality but is about contextualization. The purpose of God’s Word is to shape the reader and the readers’ questions about who Jesus is in regard to Christ’s relationship with God the Father, the Spirit, and His people.

This issue of contextualizing Scripture subjectively is not just with Hatmaker and Enns but has become increasingly prevalent among modern-day authors and scholars. If the saying is true that “all theology is contextual theology” then it is all the more urgent that contextualization is applied faithfully. This takes hard work and discipline where a faithful interpretation of Scripture requires both an exegetical and cultural contextualization of the Scriptures.⁷⁰ D.A. Carson points out that there is an urgent demand for honing our exegetical skills in light of “the impact of the new hermeneutic on our understanding of contextualization in world missions that mature thought is urgently required.”⁷¹ The Bible cannot be solely studied in fragments but must follow the plotline of Scripture where the parts align with the whole story. According to Carson a critical interpretation of God’s metanarrative requires adequate justification.

Adequate justification-lexical, grammatical, cultural, theological, historical, geographical, or other justification. In other words, critical exegesis in this sense is exegesis that provides sound reasons for the choices it makes and the positions it adopts. Critical exegesis is opposed to merely personal opinions, appeals to blind authority (the interpreter’s, or anyone else’s), arbitrary interpretations, and speculative opinions.⁷²

⁶⁹Wu, “Why Jen Hatmaker Apparently Thinks I’m Going to Hell.”

⁷⁰Jackson Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015). This work is one example of many resources for learning how to contextualize the Scriptures faithfully.

⁷¹Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 17.

⁷²Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 16.

The use of current social, cultural, and political beliefs in order to reconstruct the historical context of Scripture falls under the list of exegetical fallacies. Carson accurately and succinctly diagnoses the current state of biblical interpretation through a quote made by Pulitzer Prize historian David Hackett Fischer. In his book on historical fallacies, Fischer argues that not all historical methods of scholarship are equal and that some are not even good at all.

Among my colleagues, it is common to believe that any procedure is permissible, as long as its practitioner publishes an essay from time to time, and is not convicted of a felony. The resultant condition of modern historiography is that of the Jews under the Judges: every man does that which is right in his own eyes. The fields are sown with salt, and plowed with the heifer, and there is a famine upon the land.⁷³

According to Fischer, there is currently a great deficiency within historical criticism, yet these deficiencies can be corrected by recognizing and addressing these fallacies. In the same way, the church today must recognize and address the fallacies in their method of interpreting Scripture. Without an objective means of interpreting Scripture, the Word of God is open for interpretation according to what is right in anyone's eyes. The church must teach and provide a proper method of contextualization in order to interpret God's Word faithfully as He originally intended.

Engaging Queer Contextualization

Social and cultural contexts cannot be the primary hermeneutical method of biblical interpretation as these methods remove the historical context and meaning of the text. In understanding the philosophical ends to which an improper method of contextualization leads to, such as legitimizing same-sex marriage, results in a queer theology of God's Word. Theologians like Lee allow visiting professors to teach on queer theology in the classroom in the name of academic scholarship, but the works of liberal

⁷³David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970), xix, quoted in D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 16.

scholars like Liew seep into the theology of students to the detriment of the church. Liew's work is not only unconventional but controversial as he is criticized by Reverend Robert J. McManus who is the Bishop of Worcester. McManus declares Liew's interpretations as false and perverse. McManus argues that Academic freedom is necessary for the educational process at Catholic institutions but declares "how that academic freedom is exercised, particularly in the fields of Theology or Religious Studies, cannot provide cover for blatantly unorthodox teaching."⁷⁴ The attempt to justify Liew's redactions in the guise of academic scholarship is seen in his reinterpretation of John's Gospel in order to provocatively engage discussion on the topic of minority biblical criticism.⁷⁵ Minority criticism, which presents opposing views of orthodoxy, has been completely disregarded by dominant criticism because it reinterprets Scripture devoid of its historical context through subjective relativity. This enables Liew to reinterpret the Gospel by portraying Jesus as queer, feminine, homoerotic, incestuous, transgendered, and a drag king who has a sexually masochistic relationship with God the Father.

One of the most startling and provocative examples provided by Liew is during the crucifixion scene as he suggests that "when Jesus' body is being penetrated, his thoughts are on his Father.

During the passion, Jesus is not only beaten (18:22-23; 19:3) and flogged (19:1); his body is also nailed and his side pierced (19:18, 23a, 34, 37; 20:24-28). Oddly, John defines Jesus' masculinity with a body that is being opened to penetration. Even more oddly, Jesus' ability to face his "hour" is repeatedly associated with his acknowledging of and communing with his Father (12:27-28; 14:12, 28; 16:10, 17,

⁷⁴Roman Catholic Diocese of Worcester, "Statement by Bishop McManus on Professor Liew's analysis," last modified March 30, 2018, <https://worcesterdiocese.org/news/statement-by-bishop-mcmanus-on-professor-liews-analysis>.

⁷⁵Tat-siong Benny Liew, "Queering Closets and Perverting Desires: Cross-Examining John's Engendering and Transgendering Word across Different Worlds," in *They Were All Together in One Place?: Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, ed. Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 251-88.

28; 17:1-25; 18:11), who is, as Jesus explicitly states, “with me” (16:32) throughout this process, which Jesus also describes as one giving birth (16:21-22).⁷⁶

Jesus is in other words, “imagining his passion experience as a (masochistic?) sexual relation with his own Father.”⁷⁷ Liew argues further that in the passion narrative Jesus’ desire is not only to copulate with the Father but also invites believers and unbelievers to participate in this communal act. Liew reinterprets this invitation to be more than a platonic relationship with Christ as our Lord and Savior. Liew adds that “[o]ne may, as a result, turn around Jesus’ well-known statement in John, ‘No one comes to the Father except through me’ (14:6c): Jesus himself needs others to *cum* (emphasis mine) with the Father Jesus’ statement that ‘I in them [his followers] and you [the Father] in me’ turns out to be quite a description.”⁷⁸ The interpretation of the passion narrative in the Gospel of John according to Liew is quintessentially queer.

Christ’s sexuality is not only questioned but traditional interpretations on Christ’s gender identity is challenged as Liew points out themes of gender parody throughout the Gospel of John. Liew explains that Christ’s incarnation, transfiguration, the taking off of his outer garment to wash his disciples’ feet, and leaving behind His clothes at the gravesite are all indications of Jesus being transgendered.⁷⁹ Liew insists that this is consistent with the reoccurring theme of Jesus existing in-between liminal spaces throughout the Gospel of John. Jesus shares repeatedly that He was sent into this world but does not belong to this world because His kingdom is out of this world (John 3:13, 16, 31; 6:33, 38, 41-42, 50-51, 58; 8:23, 36; 16:28; 20:17, 21). Also, Christ’s sudden post-resurrection appearances and His followers’ inability to recognize Him are

⁷⁶Liew, “Queering Closets and Perverting Desires,” 266.

⁷⁷Liew, “Queering Closets and Perverting Desires,” 266.

⁷⁸Liew, “Queering Closets and Perverting Desires,” 265. Liew’s interpretation of the text is a play on words with no exegetical work. The Greek word “come” ἔρχομαι (13.50) has no sexual reference or implication in its lexical and semantic domain. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies).

⁷⁹Liew, “Queering Closets and Perverting Desires,” 269-70.

consistent with the theme of Jesus having to transition between different places. His existence in-between these liminal spaces results in Christ's coming out of the closet by having to reveal His transgendered identity (John 21:4, 7).

The themes that Liew presents are not just limited to the Gospel but Liew points out that these transgendered themes are present in the Old Testament as well. Liew argues that when Rebekah “gives instructions to and demands obedience from Jacob in a plot to deceive the father (Gen 27:5-13)” that Jacob, by dressing up as his brother is an example of a transgendered theme in the Old Testament. Rebekah is also pointed out in this act to be “a woman with balls, [who] is in a sense also a transvestite.”⁸⁰ Liew attempts to provide historical context for his arguments by citing ancient Greek philosophers and historians who tie together gender identity with the way garments were utilized and worn.⁸¹ The problem with Liew's conclusion that “Jesus' ‘seamless tunic’ betrays, then, his drag-kingly concern to conceal his body in order to perform masculinity”⁸² is that this is not a direct historical interpretation of the text. The examples provided are not even extrabiblical sources but are culturally historical arguments for the use of garments during the first century which is projected onto the biblical text.⁸³ The language used to describe Christ's gender and sexuality as queer is highly offensive and perverse. Even religious traditions outside the Christian faith would deem these interpretations as highly inflammatory and sacrilegious.

⁸⁰Liew, “Queering Closets and Perverting Desires,” 263.

⁸¹Liew, “Queering Closets and Perverting Desires,” 258.

⁸²Liew, “Queering Closets and Perverting Desires,” 258.

⁸³Jacob dressing up like his brother is not a crossing of genders as well as it was viewed as deceptive. Deuteronomy 22:5 clearly prohibits cross-dressing for the purposes of appearing to be like the opposite gender therefore Scripture clearly gives proscriptions against transgenderism. In Peter J. Harland's study on the wording of Deuteronomy 22:5 argues that cross dressing “was to infringe the natural order of creation which divided humanity into male and female. That distinction was fundamental to human existence and could not be blurred in any way” (76). See Peter J. Harland, “Menswear and Womenswear: A Study of Deuteronomy 22:5,” *University of Cambridge* 110, no. 3 (1998): 73–76.

Liew is applauded by liberal scholars for accomplishing what he set out to achieve by engaging discussion on the works of minority biblical critics who go against dominant critical interpretations of Scripture⁸⁴ but it is highly doubtful that the New Testament writers had in mind as their primary focus the sexuality and gender identity of Jesus and His disciples. Liew's transgendered reading of Scripture hypersexualizes the biblical texts in a way that the original authors never intended. At the most basic level of hermeneutics, a plain reading of the Gospels renders an unlikely interpretation of a transgendered and homoerotic relationship within the Godhead and Christ's disciples.⁸⁵ No evidence is found in the Scriptures of the Trinity, Jesus, and His disciples being queer, transgendered, or having same-sex relations. William Loader and Joe Dallas dismiss these suggested types of readings which argue that same-sex behavior is implied. The arguments presented such as the centurion having same-sex relations with his male servant (Matt 5:8-13; Luke 7:1-10) or Jesus having an erotic relationship with the disciple whom He loved (John 13:23) is highly speculative at best.⁸⁶

The implication by queer theologians that the healing of a person means Jesus approves of their lifestyle is a leap in logic according to Dallas. He believes that it is presumptuous to assume that healing comes from merit as opposed to grace as Jesus did not heal out of obligation but compassion. Jesus did not approve of the lifestyle of everyone He healed as seen at the healing of an invalid at the pool on the Sabbath. After

⁸⁴Colleen M. Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine Characterization* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 28-30. Liew synthesizes the work of Conway who reinterprets the New Testament authors' view of Jesus' masculinity. Conway claims that "sophia" was a dominate theme in John's Christology affecting how women were viewed in the first century. Conway argues that Jesus was "sophia incarnate" and that Jesus' masculinity was simply a construct projected upon Him within first century Greco-Roman society.

⁸⁵R. Albert Mohler Jr. "Homosexuality and the Bible." The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed March, 4, 2020, <http://equip.sbts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/homosexuality-and-the-bible.pdf>.

⁸⁶William Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 336-37; Joe Dallas, *The Gay Gospel?: How Pro-Gay Advocates Misread the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2007), 195-97.

Jesus heals the invalid, He tells him to sin no more (John 5:14). Dallas contests that there is absolutely no account of healing that implies this in any of the Gospel or historical accounts. He contends that what we do know is that “Christ healed hundreds, perhaps thousands, of individual in mass settings (see Matthew 4:23-24; 8:16), curing all who were present [but] are we really to assume that every sick individual who came to Jesus for healing was living a righteous life, which would make His touch a stamp of approval?”⁸⁷ In regards to Jesus’ beloved disciple Loader argues that there is no indication they had any erotic relationship as Jesus would not have had a different sexual ethic than his Jewish contemporaries. This would be the same for the New Testament authors as Loader examines how even for Mark, who has a different approach to the Law from Paul states that “it is likely that he, like Paul, would have rejected same-sex relations, even though no reference to them appears in his list of sins in 7:21-22.”⁸⁸ For queer theologians like Liew, the hermeneutical questions they raise seem to outweigh the exegetical evidence of the biblical text. Revisionists have little to no merit in their scholarship as their queering of Scripture lacks any textual exegesis that is widely accepted among biblical scholars.

Conclusion

The lack of engagement and learning how to critically contextualize the Gospel has led to cultural misinterpretations of Scripture and opened the door for revisionists to rewrite Scripture. This is alarming as the works of Asian liberal scholars increasingly continue to challenge traditional orthodox teachings of homosexuality and gender identity while the works of Asian reformed evangelical scholars remain silent on these issues. This is a wakeup call for Asian American Evangelicals to contribute to this discussion as

⁸⁷Dallas, *The Gay Gospel?*, 196.

⁸⁸Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality*, 337.

the Asian American church is gifted with the ability to keenly recognize and address contextual issues within Scripture. This is possible because of the fluid nature and hybrid-identity the Asian American church holds between different cultures. Asian American Theology is the intersection of eastern and western theologies where both Asian and American cultural influences are integrated throughout the life of the believer. Asian American Theology is the lived experience of Asians born in America which is uniquely different from believers living in Asia or Asian immigrant believers in America. This brings about a unique contribution to the discussion of cultural engagement and contextualization that is different from Eastern Asian Theology and Western Anglo Evangelicalism. As pointed out by Helen Lee “Asian American leaders are reaching both the masses and margins of evangelicalism, born out of their bicultural heritages that seek to merge the best of both their Asian and American influences.” Lee presents this promising future but then raises the question “Will evangelicalism fully welcome and include these voices, or turn them away for being too different, too foreign?”⁸⁹

Unless evangelicalism fully welcomes and includes these voices, systemic issues that plague the church will continue to persist. Ethnic minority churches are able to navigate and be a bridge between different cultures and languages in ways that mono-ethnic ministries cannot. Ethnic minority churches are intrinsically transnational and transcultural which exhibits a biblical model of Christ’s heavenly kingdom that others can learn from. The Asian American church is able to not only contribute to the conversation on same-sex relations and gender identity but has the ability to lead the discussion. Statistically, the primary fear that LGBT people face is the shame of having to share their gender and sexual orientation with family, friends, and church members. Shame is central in understanding the contributing factors of marginalization leading to high rates of homelessness, drug abuse, and suicide. Asian Americans constantly live in

⁸⁹Helen Lee “Asian Americans: Silent No More,” *Christianity Today*, October 2014, 38.

this cultural tension and have learned how to conciliate between competing interests. The aversion of hostility enables Asian American Christians to speak with convictional kindness and without being contentious just as the apostle Paul uses his freedom “to become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:19-23). Paul says that he does it “for the sake of the gospel” in order that he would “share with them in its blessings.” This is the blessing in which God has given to the Asian American church in reaching a culture in America that is growing more and more multiethnic. A possible solution to this issue facing the evangelical church is the Asian American church leading by example in the way the Word of God is contextualized.

CHAPTER 3

QUEER THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

The writings of Tat-Siong Benny Liew as reviewed in chapter 2 is the result of an unorthodox method of contextualizing the Scriptures through a contemporary cultural lens. This same method is reflected in the works of Choon-Leong Seow and Patrick Cheng which will be reviewed and critiqued in this chapter. The primary focus in this chapter will be on the writings of Cheng who ignores the apostolic tradition of textual transmission and argues for a queer reading of the Scriptures. A plain reading of these unorthodox texts will reveal that there is no warrant for a queer interpretation of the Scriptures. These subjective methods twist and strips the meaning for which these texts were intended and places teachers and hearers of the Word in grave danger (Gal 1:8-9, 2 Pet 1:20-21; 2:1-3, 9-13; 3:16; 1 Tim 4:16; 6:3-5; 2 Tim 2:15; 4:3-4; Heb 1:1-3; 2:1-4; Rev 22:18-19). A faithful interpretation of the Scriptures is of utmost importance because “what is at stake is the teachings of Jesus.”¹ Even the apostle Paul admits that if the disciples misrepresent who God is in the revealing of His Son then Christians are to be the most pitied (1 Cor 15:12-19).

Review of Homosexuality and Christian Community

In the past decade, a significant work on the Bible and homosexuality was

¹Sean McDowell, “What Does the Bible Say About Homosexuality? Sean McDowell and Matthew Vines in Conversation,” YouTube video, 2:10:34, February 3, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFY4VtCWgyI>. McDowell gave this opening statement in his debate with Matthew Vines on the topic of “What Does the Bible Say About Homosexuality?” In his book, *How to Talk About the Bible and LGBT Inclusion*, Vines suggest that experience should cause us to go back and reinterpret Scripture but McDowell challenged Vines in his hermeneutics asking him “where does Jesus teach that we are to evaluate biblical teaching based on experience?” After much debate there were no concessions in the hermeneutical methods between McDowell and Vines. Vines concluded that there seems to simply be an irreconcilable difference of opinion in the way they both approach and interpret Scripture.

produced through a collection of essays written by professors from Princeton Theological Seminary. This work was intended to present two different sides of biblical interpretation on homosexuality as well as to discuss the broader implication these interpretations have in the church and society. The works are sectioned into three parts, the first part focuses on the interpretation of Scripture, the second part looks at the implications from these interpretations and the third part presents an assessment and overview of the arguments concluding with a pastoral exhortation on how believers are to live faithfully. Choon-Leong Seow is the general editor of the book and claims to have a high view of Scripture but fails to present in his writings exegetical work that biblically allows for same-sex marriage (SSM).² Instead, Seow presents a contextual interpretation of the Scriptures based on cultural and personal experiences. Seow argues that an Asian theological framework allows for the interpretation of Scripture which affirms homosexuality. He admits that it is experience rather than exegesis that drives his theology.

I used to believe that homosexual acts are always wrong. Listening to gay and lesbian students and friends, however, I have had to rethink my position and reread the scriptures. Seeing how gay and lesbian people suffer discrimination... I have reconsidered my views. I was wrong . . . I have no choice but to take the testimonies of gays and lesbians seriously.³

This shift in affirming homosexuality does not come from an exegesis of God's Word as Seow acknowledges but instead has happened by taking the testimonies of homosexuals seriously. Seow did not reconsider his views by studying the Scriptures but he explicitly states that he was wrong as a result of seeing the suffering and discrimination of homosexuals.

Seow is not clear in his writings on how confident he is in his reinterpretations or redactions. Seow mentions that he is able to find some "comfort" because he believes

²When referring to same-sex marriage it will simply be SSM.

³Choon-Leong Seow, ed., *Homosexuality and Christian Community* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 25.

that the Scriptures give him “the warrant to trust that human beings can know truths apart from divine revelation.”⁴ He does not expound on his statement of knowing truth apart from divine revelation. A logical fallacy is made where Seow is arguing that humans have the ability to know the truth of God’s Word, therefore we should trust that humans should be able to know truth apart from God’s divine revelation.⁵ Seow appears to be equating or giving equal authority to God’s general revelation with God’s special revelation. He does not seem to distinguish or see an issue between the divine revelation of God’s Word which is a truth that is necessary for salvation with God’s general revelation through nature which is a truth that is not necessary for salvation.

Seow also argues that he finds room in the creation account for marriage to be more than binary, but Thomas Schreiner pushes back on this claim by stating that “Choon-Leong Seow sees space in the creation account for homosexuality I would argue, however, that Rom. 1:26–27 rules out the notion that there is space in the creation narrative for same-sex relationships, since Romans 1 functions as a commentary on the creation account.”⁶ Seow believes that in this debate over homosexuality there is “nothing less than the gospel at stake”⁷ but he does not show the seriousness in which he wrestled with the text in order to come to his conclusions. Even in the accounts where Jesus is confronted with questions on sex and marriage, He does not become more liberal in His interpretations but becomes more restrictive than the traditionalist views (Mark 10:1-12; Matt 19:4-8). Thomas W. Gillespie who is one of the contributing authors admits there are essentially three strategies for revisionists “Whenever homosexual acts

⁴Seow, *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, 25.

⁵Seow makes a post hoc fallacy by concluding incorrectly that knowing truth through God’s general revelation results in the same as knowing truth through God’s special revelation.

⁶Thomas R. Schreiner, “A New Testament Perspective on Homosexuality.” *Themelios* 31, no. 3 (2006): 62-63.

⁷Seow, *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, 25.

are mentioned in scripture . . . (1) revise the sense of the texts; (2) discount the significance of the texts; and (3) critique the validity of the texts in light of more central biblical themes.”⁸

The strategies as described by Gillespie is the approach in which these redactors demand a cultural hermeneutical approach in contextualizing all biblical interpretations on homosexuality. For example, in Brian Blount’s section, he claims that Paul’s understanding of homosexual activity is inextricably connected with idolatry but argues that contemporary scholars and readings of Pauline literature suggest that homosexuality is no longer the result of idolatry. For Blount, this means that it is now possible to be a homosexual and a believer in Christ.⁹ These affirming authors dismiss the historical context and suggest the removal of these homophobic passages before it becomes unexplainable or an embarrassment in light of contemporary contexts. This does not reflect a high view of Scripture and the Gospel but places greater authority in the human spirit and the interpretive community.¹⁰ Although Seow attempts to provide a balanced approach in presenting arguments from both sides, it is apparent that greater weight has been given in favor of SSM where less than half of the contributing authors have an opposing view of homoerotic sexual activity in the Bible.

Synopsis of Rainbow Theology

In *Rainbow Theology*, Patrick Cheng clearly sets forth the purpose of his book which is to write “within the larger context of the exclusion and silencing of LGBTIQ people of color.”¹¹ Cheng frequently uses the term lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender

⁸Seow, *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, 118.

⁹Seow, *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, 35.

¹⁰See Albert Mohler’s commentary on Blount’s writings and theology. Albert Mohler, “Biblical Authority: Must We Accept the Words of Scripture?,” *Albert Mohler*, March 22, 2006, <https://albertmohler.com/2006/03/22/biblical-authority-must-we-accept-the-words-of-scripture>.

¹¹Patrick S. Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit* (New York:

intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) people of color (POC) interchangeably with the word “queer.” Cheng clarifies that when he writes about LGBTIQ-POC he is specifically referring to “persons-including, but not limited to, African American, Asian Americans, Latina/os, and Indigenous people—who belong to racial and ethnic groups that have been historically marginalized within the United States and/or colonized by European and North American powers around the world.”¹² For each of these ethnic and racial groups, Cheng provides a historical survey of queer theologies as he attempts to challenge the way all theology is currently done.

Rainbow Theology is sectioned into two parts as Cheng has two goals in mind. In the first half of his book, he highlights the writings of queer theologians of color. Cheng focuses on writings from four ethnic and racial identities, Black, Asian, Latina, and Indigenous people. He makes clear that these categories were sub-grouped by ethnicity and color not in support of these traditional labels but in order to explore the similarities and differences within each of these subgroups. Cheng’s goal in surveying these categories is to bring to light the writings within these subgroups which he believes have been kept silent by a heteronormative culture. He claims that queer people and ethnic and racial minorities not only experience oppression and isolation from the larger culture but also from within their own ethnic, racial, and religious communities.

The second half of the book focuses on the theory of Rainbow Theology. Cheng defines Rainbow Theology as “a theology that celebrates the experiences of queer people of color.”¹³ His goal is to bring forth the marginalized experiences of queer-POC

Seabury Books, 2013), xv.

¹²Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, 10.

¹³Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, xviii. Cheng defines queer theology in detail by quoting one of his other books in a footnote. He defines queer theology as “LGBTIQ people ‘talking about God.’ Second, queer theology is talking about God in a ‘self-consciously transgressive manner, especially in terms of challenging societal norms about sexuality and gender.’ Third, queer theology is talking about God in a way that ‘challenges and deconstructs the natural binary categories of sexual and gender identity.’” Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: Introduction to Queer Theology* (New

by allowing their stories to be heard. He does this by exploring three rainbow themes; multiplicity, middle spaces, and mediation. The word rainbow is not only utilized as a symbol for LGBT-POC identification, but he uses it to contrast his arguments against a monochromatic theology that is oppressive. The three rainbow themes are compared with three monochromatic themes that are classified as; singularity, staying home, and selecting sides. He then examines the three rainbow themes and concludes his book with a practical view on the Christological implications of a rainbow theology.

Critical Review of Rainbow Theology

Cheng goes to lengths in defining his terms and identifying social constructs categorized by society. He is methodical in pinpointing specific ideologies and themes as well as discussing the scope and limitations of his study. An extensive number of LGBTIQ-POC theologians who have written about the Asian American queer experience are referenced. He provides numerous sources for each racial and ethnic group but lacks in finding Two-Spirit indigenous scholars. Cheng is credited by his peers for having tried as much as possible to go beyond his own social location by attempting to have different perspectives other than his own. He admits that he will “inevitably fall short in terms of my sources and examples.”¹⁴ Despite his disclaimer, Cheng does not just simply fall short in his endeavor to provide sources, he is not able to produce even a single Two-spirit indigenous scholar.

Although Cheng is criticized for having no reference to Two-Spirit indigenous scholars, this is not the focus of this study.¹⁵ This study is limited to Asian Americans therefore this review does not provide an overview and critique of the chapters on Black,

York: Seabury Books, 2011), 9.

¹⁴Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, 13.

¹⁵Pamela R. Lightsey, review of *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, by Patrick Cheng, *Black Theology* 12, no. 2 (2014): 189.

Latina/o, and Two-Spirit Indigenous Theologies. Only connections made by Cheng that relate Asian Americans to other ethnic minorities will be addressed. This is in no way disregarding the plight of the following ethnic and racial minorities but the scope of this study pertains to issues solely regarding Asian Americans. For example, Cheng draws similarities with the oppression of Asians and African Americans where the association between the two was so close that Chinese immigrants in the workforce were called “nagurs” which was adapted from the derogatory N-word used for negros. Chinese workers were characterized as “heathen, morally inferior, savage, childlike and lustful.”¹⁶ Cheng further makes references tying the plight of Asian Americans with other ethnic and racial minorities by citing the California Supreme Court ruling in “People v. Hall.” In the ruling, Chinese witnesses were not allowed to testify in court whether it was in favor or against white people. In addition, Cheng references the Chinese Exclusionary Act which banned Chinese people from entering the United States and denied citizenship to Chinese immigrants who were already living in the States.

Cheng tries to tie together these racial discriminatory and exclusionary acts with the marginalization of queer Asian Americans. Whether or not Cheng does this intentionally, his writing implies that race and sexuality are not mutually exclusive but are categorized as having the same indivisible rights. He does not separate the marginalization of Asian Americans as a result of their ethnic identity but includes their sexual identity and ties them together. Rather than argue in detail how race and sexuality are tied together, he presents stories of how queer Asian Americans have triumphed historically over these adversities, formed networks, built communities, published works, and have been elected into government positions. Cheng allows these stories to make his argument but Ryan T. Anderson pushes against this idea that race and sexuality are the same. Anderson argues that when the United States Congress passed the Employment

¹⁶Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, 37.

Nondiscrimination Act (ENDA) in 2013 they defined sexual orientation as “‘homosexuality, heterosexuality, or bisexuality,’ and gender identity as ‘the gender-related identity, appearance, or mannerisms or other gender-related characteristics of an individual, with or without regard to the individual’s designated sex at birth.’”¹⁷

According to ENDA, sexual orientation is not clearly defined at birth but includes choice. Anderson goes on to say that “social science research continues to show that sexual orientation, unlike race, color, and ethnicity, is neither a clearly defined concept nor an immutable characteristic of human beings.”¹⁸ Cheng does not engage in addressing the research and distinction between race and sex but writes as if it is a given that gender is an immutable characteristic like race and ethnicity. Cheng does not present any arguments but simply contends that this is logical by focusing on personal experiences.

At the end of the chapter, Cheng writes on the Genealogy of Queer Asian American Theologies. He writes about three themes, the Asian and Asian American church exclusion, critiquing queer racism, and transnational perspectives. In addressing the exclusion of Asian and Asian American churches, Cheng once again focuses on the works of queer Asian American scholars who write about their personal experiences of marginalization. He mentions how Asian American evangelical churches played a key role in passing Proposition 8 in California which opposed SSM. Without further explanation, Cheng simply provides this as an example of how the church has excluded queer Asian Americans. He then immediately turns to the works of Leng Lim who is considered by Cheng as one of the main theologians who has written on this topic. Lim is labeled as a gay Episcopal priest who received his MBA from Harvard Business School and lives in between the United States and Asia. Lim claims that many queer Asian

¹⁷The Heritage Foundation, “ENDA Threatens Fundamental Civil Liberties,” last modified November 1, 2013, <https://www.heritage.org/civil-society/report/enda-threatens-fundamental-civil-liberties>.

¹⁸Public Discourse, “Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Employment Law,” last modified July 25, 2013, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2013/07/10636>.

Americans have been ostracized by Asian American Churches. Lim also specifically believes that the Bible teaches queer Asian Americans to hate themselves. Lim not only accuses Asian American churches of being responsible for the pain queer Asian Americans feel but he specifically criticizes church leaders for not fully accepting queer people in Asia, specifically Anglican churches in Southeast Asia, Oceania, Hong Kong, India, and Japan. The possible intent of mentioning Lim's contribution is that Lim's criticism abroad appears to bring to light the works of queer Asian Americans addressing transnational issues over the past fifteen years.

In Cheng's second thematic feature on queer Asian American theologies he writes that his focus is on "critiquing the racism of the white LGBTIQ community."¹⁹ Cheng has written previously on this theme and yet the examples provided in this chapter are all examples that are self-perceived. He provides no instances of outright abuse whether it be verbal or physical. Two examples are given where the first is from Eric H. F. Law who is labeled as a gay Chinese American Episcopal priest. Law wrote an article about the exclusion he felt when coming out to the gay community. He said, "No one talked to me. No one even looked at me. No one invited me to dance. When another Asian came in, I felt competitive."²⁰ The issue with labeling this as racism or gender discrimination is that the exclusion Law felt cannot be attributed to his race and sexuality unless there was an explicit statement made or action taken against him as a result of his race and sexuality. Everything Law describes is how he personally thought and felt, so he judged others for the actions or inactions of the people around him.

The second example presented is not even a real story but an imaginary dialogue where a queer person of color attended an ecumenical LGBTIQ-affirming

¹⁹Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, 42.

²⁰Eric H.F. Law, "A Spirituality of Creative Marginality," in *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Gary David Comstock and Susan E. Henking (New York: Continuum, 1997), 344, quoted in Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, 42.

conference. This imaginary person says, “I thought that by coming here and being with all the gay and lesbian Christians, I would feel accepted. But judging from what I see, this so-called welcoming community is the same as any white community.”²¹ Once again this makes it impossible to assess the reason why this person is excluded. No clear explanation is given other than personally feeling this way and then judging the white community in the same way that this person felt judged. Even though this is a depiction of what queer-POC experience, the example provided was not an actual person or event that took place but hypothetical. These situations are described by how each person felt subjectively and their feelings of being left out which are self-attributed to their race and sexuality. This is not to discount what queer-POC feel or experience because the question arises as to why they feel this way or what causes them to think in this manner. Although there are external factors that contribute to these feelings of ostracism, Cheng has chosen to focus on stories that are self-perceived rather than provide tangible expressions of racism and marginalization which would have brought greater credibility to his arguments.

Cheng concludes his second thematic section by citing his own published works of biblical scholarship. He references multiple articles but cites two of his biblical interpretations on the book of Judges and Galatians. In his article on Judges 19, Cheng draws similarities between the experiences of the unnamed concubine and the queer Asian American. He argues that both are a “‘radical sexual and geographical outsider,’ and her/his experience of racism is reflected in the narrative” and claims that they “‘experience oppression in the form of erasure as well as sexual objectification.”²² Cheng has done extensive work in drawing parallels from the unnamed concubine to the

²¹Eric H.F. Law, *The Word at the Crossings: Living the Good News in a Multicontextual Community* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 87, quoted in Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, 43.

²²Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, 43.

shaming of queer Asian Americans, but the problem with his interpretation is that it focuses on external and social issues regarding the text rather than the biblical context that was intended by the author when recording the story.

K. Lawson Younger Jr. challenges variant readings of Judges 19 that argue for a hidden patriarchal agenda in exercising control over women's sexuality. Younger states that this "is difficult to sustain from the text" as he explains that the text does not blame the concubine but vilifies the men as evil while portraying the woman as the victim. The text is pointing to the degeneration in Israelite society.²³ It is important to note that exegeting the cultural context of the text is necessary where gender inequality is clearly present but the context of this story's purpose is reflective of the overarching theme in the book of Judges where there is no king and everyone does what is right in their own eyes (Judg 19:1; 21:25). The author's intent is not on gender inequality but to reveal the need for an earthly king which will ultimately lead to a righteous and heavenly king. Cheng uses the same interpretive method not only in Judges but in his commentary on Galatians which is based on a reader response. He argues for an interpretation of Galatians where queer Asian Americans can read it from "the yoke of slavery to the implicit codes of conduct that are imposed by the dominant white queer community."²⁴ A hermeneutical fallacy is committed here by trying to "force an ancient culture to fit into the mold of modern expectations."²⁵ Cheng reads into the text where he is arguing that the dominant white queer community today imposes the same type of slavery found in the first century along with its implicit codes of conduct. These themes in which Cheng extrapolates from the text equating slavery to homosexuality were never intended to be interpreted as such.

The third and final theme in queer Asian American theologies centers on

²³K. Lawson Younger Jr., *The NIV Application Commentary: Judges, Ruth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 361.

²⁴Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, 44.

²⁵Timothy Paul Jones, *How We Got the Bible* (Torrance, CA: Rose Publishing, 2015), 70.

transnational perspectives. The writings of queer Asian American authors who have contributed queer theological works domestically, internationally, and transnationally are also highlighted. Cheng argues that over time these boundaries are becoming more blurred and the separation of theologies between queer Asia and queer Asian America will become more fluid. He also believes that related to the theme of transnational perspectives is the reflections of interfaith experiences. Cheng references Lim here because of his interfaith background where he grew up as a Buddhist Christian who is now turning towards syncretism. Lim proposes that “Asian American Christian leaders can counter the dangers of spiritual abuse with the Bible by drawing upon the twin Buddhist traditions of (1) non-attachment to truth and (2) the practice of mindfulness.”²⁶ The suggestion that when truth becomes relative and utilized pragmatically that it counters the dangers of spiritual abuse with the Bible is simply false. If the Bible is unattached to the truth it loses all authority to say anything and is no longer relevant because it says nothing at all and cannot speak against injustice. Buddhist traditions of non-attachment to truth and practice of mindfulness has not prevented it from spiritual abuse of their sacred texts or countering ethnic and genocidal cleansings.²⁷ The Bible has over two hundred usages of the word “truth” and it is central to the teachings of Jesus who not only speaks the truth but is the truth.²⁸ When Jesus says “I am the truth” (John 14:6), He makes an exclusive truth claim that there is only one way to the Father which is through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

Cheng continues to add to this conversation by mentioning his unpublished

²⁶Leng Leroy Lim, “The Bible tells me to hate myself: The crisis in Asian American spiritual leadership,” in *The Bible in Asia America*, eds. Tat-Siong Benny Liew and Gale A. Yee, *Semeia* 90-91 (2002), 321-22, quoted in Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, 47.

²⁷John P. J. Dussich, “The Ongoing Genocidal Crisis of the Rohingya Minority in Myanmar,” *Journal of Victimology and Victim Justice* 1, no. 1 (2018): 4-24.

²⁸The Hebrew word for truth is אֱמֶת (’ēmet) and is used 127 in the Old Testament. The Greek word for truth is ἀλήθεια (alētheia) and is used 109 times in the New Testament.

work titled *Kuan Yin: Mirror of the Queer Asian Christ*. Cheng reveals in his article on “how the Buddhist bodhisattva Kuan Yin can be viewed as a queer Asian Christ.”²⁹ The belief is that Kuan Yin is queer as a result of his/her gender transformation when transitioning from India to China. Yin then refuses to enter into Nirvana until having brought others into Nirvana first. Cheng paints this connection between Christ and Yin and advocates that by learning from these spiritual traditions that queer Asian Americans, including Christians, can have a closer spiritual connection with God. In drawing these connections, Cheng is not arguing anything new since even before Abraham, the ancestors of Israel, including Abraham’s father Terah worshipped other gods (Josh 24:2). In the Old Testament, the worship of other gods was forbidden as polytheism, henotheism, and monolatry were present. God made it clear and a command that the Israelites were to have no other gods and not to make or worship any idols (Exod 20:3-5). In the New Testament, the apostle Paul makes the rhetorical argument “What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?” (2 Cor 6:15-16). The biblical text is clear that there is to be no form of syncretism or connection to any other god and that there is no other god (Isa 45:5). It was made clear to the Israelites that “the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut 6:5).

In chapter 6, which marks the second half of *Rainbow Theology*, Cheng begins with clarifying that Rainbow theology is not just about the collective experiences of queer-POC but a challenge in the way theology ought to be done. He then goes on to examine the symbol and meaning of the rainbow. The rainbow is defined as being a fluid symbol that exists within “a space where race, sexuality, and spirit converge or come

²⁹Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, 47.

together.”³⁰ Cheng then presents examples where the rainbow has been used by different groups to identify and represent their race, sexuality, and spirit. He references Genesis 9:13-16, Ezekiel 1:28, and Revelation 4:3; 10:1 when interpreting what he believes the rainbow and spirit symbolize. He points out that the rainbow is found in both the Old and New Testaments but then immediately states that the rainbow has been used by other religious traditions as a symbol for the spirit. The argument that Cheng makes is that the rainbow is not an exclusive symbol used by Christianity but has been utilized in many different ways across cultures. The conclusion is that the rainbow, therefore, is an ideal symbol that could be used to construct a queer theology for people of color.

Cheng relates the multiplicity of the rainbow in its different usage throughout history and culture to the co-existing and overlapping identities of queer-POC. He argues that even within the Scriptures there are multiple meanings for the rainbow. For example, in these passages, the rainbow is a symbol of God’s promise and his divine glory which surrounds a throne or angel. He explains how the Hebrew word for rainbow, *qeshet*, also contains different meanings as well as symbolizes a hunter’s bow. The different uses and meanings of the rainbow across religions and cultures are what led Cheng to justify his use of the rainbow to construct a queer theology. The problem with Cheng’s use of the rainbow is that he is redefining its intended use and meaning from the Scriptures. He imposes his own beliefs on what the rainbow symbolizes in order to fit his theology. The source materials Cheng uses are not intended to support a biblical interpretation of the text. Instead, he uses the Scriptures to supplement the religious and historical texts aligned with his theological beliefs.

Biblically, the purpose and meaning of the rainbow was not created by man but was instated by God. The rainbow was not solely created in order for the Israelites to be reminded of God’s Covenant but also reminds God of the covenant He made. God says

³⁰Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, 86.

“When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant...” (Gen 9:6). The biblical understanding of the rainbow is not simply there to be utilized and interpreted in whatever way we please but was created and placed by God to be an everlasting reminder for Him. The Bible is clear on what the rainbow symbolizes and applying God’s covenant to Jesus symbolizing Him as a queer person of color is heretical. Throughout the Bible, the breaking and misuse of God’s covenant result in sickness and death (Gen 34:13-30; Exod 4:24-26; 1 Cor 11:27-31). The Scriptures provide a detailed list of curses for breaking God’s covenant and disobeying His commands. These curses include natural disasters, diseases, pestilence, poverty, famine, drought, infertility, and war (Lev 26:14–39; Deut 28:15–68; 29:1-29). Calling Jesus a queer-POC is no different than using the Lord’s name in vain where a stark warning is given to those who misuse and blaspheme His name (Exod 20:7; Rom 2:24).

In chapter 7 Cheng continues on the theme of multiplicity where he speaks against the monochromatic theme of a single oppressor. The argument is that queer-POC do not simply face a single form of oppression but experience multiple layers of oppression based on their race, sexuality, and religious beliefs. According to Cheng, this is a direct reflection of the Trinity where God experiences multiplicity within the Godhead which is not a closed system but open. He does not explain any further what he means by an open system but one can assume that he is referring to the doctrine of the Trinity being open to interpretations such as the ones he presents. His unorthodox teaching on the Trinity argues that we are created in the image of a queer God and invited into God’s queerness. At the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. an orthodox understanding of the Trinity was affirmed. Despite the debate over these types of heretical interpretations on the Trinity was declared to be closed, Cheng continues to challenge and introduce controversial doctrines that are dangerous for believers and the church.

In chapter 8 Cheng addresses his second theme of Rainbow Theology which is queer-POC caught in-between middle spaces. Cheng believes that queer-POC never fully

belong to their larger communities and are living “between the binary of sexuality on the one hand, and race on the other hand.”³¹ He sees queer-POC as being metaphorically homeless where they are able to look into the divine through these middle spaces. These correlations between God and queer-POC are drawn out of context by connecting the metaphorical homelessness that queer-POC experience with the biblical themes of the stranger and sojourner.³² Although there are similarities between the two in regards to homelessness, Christopher Yuan points out that “there is a significant difference between comparing the sojourner . . . and LGB and SSA people. This distinction is sinful behavior. Specifically, there is no sinful behavior uniquely associated with being a sojourner If sinful, then would God have compassion upon the one engaging in same-sex sexual practice?”³³ Cheng attempts to reconcile this issue of sin by concluding that queer-POC occupy these middle spaces not as a curse or God’s judgment but as a blessing where the queer experience helps to enrich Christian theological reflection as a whole. It’s through this queer lens in which Cheng reinterprets Scripture in order to justify the actions of queer people regardless of whether or not the context of the passage lends itself to be interpreted in such a way. Cheng continues to draw these parallels and conclusions in his third and final theme which is on mediation.

In chapter 9, Cheng explains that mediation is about queer-POC bringing different lives, languages, expressions, and experiences of queer and/or other people together which results in bringing about creative transformation. For example, Cheng

³¹Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, 113.

³²Cheng relates the plight of queer-POC with Noah’s homelessness during the flood, the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, and Jesus’ metaphoric homelessness during His incarnation and when He said “The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9:58, Matt 8:20). The apostle Paul is also mentioned as being homeless where he uses the Greek word *astateo* to describe the disciples having no abode (1 Cor 4:11-13; 5:8).

³³Christopher Yuan, *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: A Qualitative Study of Reducing Marginalization of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Same-Sex Attracted Students at Christian Colleges and Universities* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2016), 24.

supports interfaith mediation where multireligious and multidialogical approaches are used in doing theology. Cheng quotes Renee Hill who argues that “Black Christian theologies should be ‘knocked off-center,’ even if it means calling our ‘theological foundations into question.’”³⁴ Cheng agrees that this ought to be the case for Asian American theologies as he has written on the mediating and “reading of sacred philosophical texts, practicing yoga, or performing sacred drum rituals” which he claims is a form of mediation in diversifying the Body of Christ.³⁵ Mediation is also seen as a key theme in Christian theology where Jesus is considered to be the mediator par excellence. Jesus is referenced as being described as the “eis mesites” who is the mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5). This is the model in which Christians are called to follow in doing the reconciling work of Jesus who became incarnate to mediate between God and man. In this way, Cheng is calling on queer-POC to engage in a similar act of reconciliation by bringing together all races, sexualities, and spiritualities together as one body in Christ while creating spaces that will honor their differences.

The intent that Cheng has is not just to add another way of doing theology or diversifying the foundations of reformed theology but that his intentions are to completely redefine and replace it. The purpose of queer theology is to liberate not just the way that theology is done but the way that it is lived out. Cheng states that this book is about Christian theology written by a Christian theologian from the Christian tradition therefore it is not his intent to disrespect or denigrate other faith traditions or beliefs, yet Cheng accuses the religious right of elevating family values which is idolatry.³⁶ Queer theology is an attempt to completely redefine Christianity, families, and society. Cheng

³⁴Renee Leslie Hill, “Disrupted/Disruptive Movements: Black Theology and Black Power,” in *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone’s Black Theology and Black*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 147, quoted in Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, 137.

³⁵Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, 137.

³⁶Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, 123.

ends his book by providing examples of Rainbow Christology where the final application is a prayer. This prayer is not just a personal and private conversation with God but a public call for a transformation of people and society. Cheng is aware that his theology is accused of syncretism but he does not address this issue. He simply states the problem and then moves on in agreeing with feminist theologian Chung Hyun Kyung who argues that “we must ‘move away from our imposed fear of losing Christian identity’ and focus on what really matters: the survival and liberation of our communities.”³⁷ Despite how much queer theologians purport that their theology is about creating and maintaining a biblical community, this is far from the case as they do not focus on the Word of God. Their theology centers around culture and man. At the heart of queer theology, the Word of God is reinterpreted in order to justify the lifestyle of queer-POC. Queer theology is not about the Christ in whom they worship, but it is a mirror reflection of queer-POC worshipping themselves.

Synopsis of Radical Love

In *Radical Love*, Patrick Cheng presents an introduction to queer theology where Christian theology meets queer theory. Cheng merges secular philosophy together with the Gospel as he claims that Scripture is already inherently queer. He argues early on that radical love is at the heart of Christian theology and queer theory because “it challenges our existing boundaries with respect to sexuality and gender identity (for example, ‘gay’ vs. ‘straight,’ or ‘male’ vs. ‘female’) as social constructions and not essentialist, or fixed, concepts.”³⁸ This theme of challenging boundaries is found throughout the book where God’s radical love does not abolish existing constructs and differing theologies but dissolves and merges them together.

³⁷Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit*, 138.

³⁸Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), 15.

In the first two chapters, Cheng provides an introduction to queer theology where the first chapter defines terms and the second provides a historical and systematic survey of queer theology over the past half-century. Then in chapters three through five, Cheng provides how the framework of ecumenical creeds has been utilized in understanding queer theology. The creeds are separated into three parts which focus on each person of the Trinity. Chapter three is on the doctrine of God (the sending forth of radical love), chapter four is on the doctrine of Jesus Christ (the recovery of radical love), and chapter five is on the Holy Spirit (the return of radical love). Cheng makes clear that the purpose of the book is to help reconcile “LGBT Christians”³⁹ with their faith. At the end of the last chapter, he argues for a queer eschatology on last things and then concludes with a brief summary and purpose for writing *Radical Love*.

Critical Review of Radical Love

Similar to *Rainbow Theology*, Cheng provides a thorough introduction into queer theology with extensive details in defining terms and identifying social constructs categorized by society. In Chapter one, Cheng begins by defining queer theology as queer talk about God.⁴⁰ He then addresses issues with the word queer which has been used historically in a negative way. Although it has been used as a derogatory word, Cheng highlights that it has been used in a neutral or positive way since the 1980s and he presents ways that the word queer has been used constructively. In an attempt to reveal the positive ways in which the word queer has been used in recent theologies, Cheng is acquiescing that historically queer theology has been a troubling term where he attempts to answer questions like “what does theology have to do with ‘queerness’?” or “isn’t

³⁹Cheng does not claim that LGBT are “self-identifying Christians.” He believes that queer persons can be Christians therefore he does not qualify them. He addresses them simply as LGBT Christians.

⁴⁰Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, 8.

‘queer theology’ an oxymoron or an inherent contradiction in terms?”⁴¹ He believes that Scripture is inherently queer therefore he is not queering it. This idea that Scripture is queer is false because historically queerness had nothing to do with theology as queer theology is a modern phenomenon. Although queer theology was built upon queer theory in the 1990s from scholars like Michel Foucault, Gayle Rubin, and Judith Butler, queer theology was not developed until later around the time of queer theory.⁴² *Radical Love* also claims to be the first introductory textbook on the subject of queer theology which was published in 2011. Queer theology was unheard of in the first century when the Scriptures were written and were not inherently queer.

Traditional Christianity has condemned same-sex acts as sinful and Cheng agrees that this has been and continues to be the case but believes that this is changing as more theologians are writing about queer theology from multiple theological sources. According to Cheng, queer theology comes from at least four sources; Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. He teaches that these are not independent of each other but need to be synthesized together. This raises again the issue which Cheng is aware of where he cannot escape the criticism of being syncretistic. Cheng acknowledges the issue but simply moves on and begins by addressing certain passages that have been used to oppress queer people. He claims that these readings are antiquated until recently where alternative readings have reclaimed these homophobic passages for LGBT people. One example Cheng presents is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah from Genesis 19 where he argues that the traditional reading and interpretation of God’s punishment is for same-sex acts but queer biblical scholars have argued that the condemnation of sin was for inhospitality toward strangers. He states that ironically some queer theologians and

⁴¹Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, 2.

⁴²Possibly the earliest published work on queer theology is in 1990 by Michael J. Clark, *A Defiant Celebration: Theological Ethics and Gay Sexuality*.

ethicists have “queered” the story where the men of Sodom were offering the gift of “bodily hospitality.”⁴³ Cheng then continues to say that “Rudy, an openly lesbian ethicist at Duke University, has suggested that nonmonogamous sex acts-including anonymous and communal sex-can be viewed in terms of a progressive ethic of hospitality.”⁴⁴ Cheng appears to accuse these biblical scholars and ethicists of queering the Scriptures but ironically his interpretations are not. By presenting these queer interpretations of Sodom, Cheng is invalidating arguments for God’s punishment of Sodom because of inhospitality. If homosexual acts are understood to be a form of hospitality then what was the reason for God’s punishment of Sodom?

Cheng provides additional examples of queer stories in the Bible by citing Wilson who argues that there are LGBT people in biblical narratives such as “David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, the Roman Centurion, the Ethiopian Eunuch, and Mary, Martha and Lazarus.”⁴⁵ These examples are unorthodox and widely unaccepted today as well as unheard of in the early church. With the recent development of queer theology these subjective readings have been raised. He does not stop here but he continues to provide multiple examples of how queer theology has reclaimed the four sources of queer theology. In the second source on tradition Cheng points out that Christianity was not uniformly homophobic until about the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and that the work of medieval theologians like Peter Damian and Thomas Aquinas invented the theological term “sodomy” out of fear of the erotic state. The argument that Cheng attempts to make is that the early church did not widely condemn homosexual acts which is untrue. Historian Eugene F. Rice states that the Jewish philosopher Philo in the first century wrote about “the Sodomites' sin” and that “God's fiery punishment begin to be

⁴³Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, 12.

⁴⁴Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, 12.

⁴⁵Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, 12.

understood as a well-deserved general condemnation of homosexual tastes and behaviors.”⁴⁶ Rice also claims that the earliest use of the word "sodomite" in a sexual sense may have been in the letters between Saint Jerome and Priest Amandus in 395 C. E.⁴⁷ The idea of sodomy was reasonably clear as early as the sixth century⁴⁸ through the thirteenth century.⁴⁹

In the third source on reason, Cheng argues that same-sex acts and relationships are present in the natural order of creation. One of the arguments he presents is based on animals where hundreds of species engage in same-sex acts or gender-variant behavior. The problem with this argument is that there are fundamental differences between humans and animals where behaviors cannot be applied interchangeably. Whether human interpretations of animal behavior can be determined to be natural as well as ethically moral is questionable. Jerry Coyne who is a professor emeritus in the Department of Ecology and Evolution at the University of Chicago objects on the “use of phenomena in nature to justify human behavior, using traits like same-sex coupling. This is what we call “the naturalistic fallacy”: what is natural is good. Or, in this case, what is natural in nature is natural—and good—in humans We just shouldn’t say that because animals have same-sex behavior, it’s exactly the same thing in humans, and is therefore acceptable and moral.”⁵⁰ Another problem with applying the

⁴⁶Eugene F. Rice, “Sodomy,” *GLTBQ Encyclopedia*, GLTBQ Inc, 2004, 1. *GLTBQ Archives*, accessed April 6, 2020, http://www.glbqtarchive.com/ssh/sodomy_S.pdf.

⁴⁷Rice, “Sodomy,” 1. In the letter between Jerome and Amandus the word sodomite was used when asking for advice in regards to what a woman should do when her husband is caught in adultery.

⁴⁸James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 333. In the early fifth century Augustine wrote *City of God* where he ties together the destruction of Sodom with “lewdness between males.”

⁴⁹Rice, “Sodomy,” 1. Burchard who is the bishop of Worms widely distributed his work known as the *Medicus* or *Corrector* (1025) which mentions how ancient Sodomites fornicated in detail where the male rod is inserted in the male anus. Rice holds that this understanding of sodomite has remained throughout history originating from the Sodom story.

⁵⁰Jerry Coyne, “Gay penguins? Not so fast,” *Why Evolution is True* (blog), August 16, 2019, <https://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/2019/08/16/gay-penguins-not-so-fast>. Coyne is a scholar who is not homophobic as he claims to have no prejudice against gays and even promotes equal rights for gay

sexual acts of animals to humans is justifying other animal behaviors such as infanticide, cannibalism, and rape.⁵¹ The extent to which animal behavior could be explained is that their sexual behavior includes acts that may or may not include reproductive purposes.⁵²

Another claim Cheng makes is that sexuality and gender identity has been socially constructed where society has determined a person's behavior, hairstyle, clothes, and career based on a person's genitalia. According to psychologist Michael Mascolo, a person's sex is not independent of their gender. This idea that gender is socially constructed raises the question on how a person is able to know then what their gender ought to be as Mascolo asserts "if gender is an arbitrary creation of society, how is it possible for gender identity to be an "internal" and "inherent" sense of self? It is not possible for gender to simultaneously be an arbitrary product of culture and an inherent experience of the individual. If gender comes from the culture, how can it also be an inherent property of the individual person?"⁵³ Gender identity cannot be both socially constructed and inherent at the same time. Biblically, gender, and sexuality were first created by God when He made them male and female with distinctive roles to complement each other.

In the fourth and final source on experience, Cheng draws upon an anthology of queer works where theologians and ministers express their personal experience on

couples such as marriage.

⁵¹In the same blog article on "Gay penguins? Not so fast" Coyne disagrees that humans are able to make moral judgments based on other species because then all types of behaviors can be deemed natural. Coyne raises the question, why not kill your new spouse's children like lions or be xenophobic and assault other groups like chimps, or rape like ducks where females are killed as a result of copulation?

⁵²Antonio Pardo, "Aspectos Médicos de la Homosexualidad," *Nuestro Tiempo*, July.-August 1995, 82-89, quoted in Alan Shlemon, "Does Homosexual Behavior in Animals Mean It's Natural for Humans?," *Stand to Reason*, March 8, 2012, <https://www.str.org/w/does-homosexual-behavior-in-animals-mean-it-s-natural-for-humans->. Pardo who is a bioethics professor at the University of Navarre Spain argues that homosexuality in animals does not exist because the reproductive instinct is geared toward the opposite sex. Other instincts in which animals display in their behavior such as dominance could be misinterpreted as homosexual behavior.

⁵³Michael Mascolo, "Time to Move Beyond "Gender Is Socially Constructed: Contradictions of Sex and Gender," *Psychology Today*, July 31, 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/old-school-parenting-modern-day-families/201907/time-move-beyond-gender-is-socially-constructed>.

their queer identity and erotic love for Jesus. The chapter ends by providing SSM as an example of what it would look like to do queer theology by looking at the four sources in support of SSM as a sacrament. Cheng does not present anything new but simply reiterates the same arguments he presented throughout the chapter while applying it to SSM. These sources which support SSM as a sacrament are unorthodox and is a recent phenomenon in an attempt to queer the Scriptures out of context. No matter how hard revisionists attempt to change and reclaim the meaning of marriage, a plain reading of the biblical text reveals that the covenant of marriage is explicitly between one man and one woman.

In the second chapter, Cheng presents four strands of queer theology; apologetic, liberation, relational, and queer. The previous four sources of queer theology transition into the four strands of queer theology which seem to overlap. In apologetic theology, Cheng contradicts himself by presenting Derrick Sherwin Bailey's work on *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*. Bailey concludes that the Western Christian Tradition on homosexuality is "erroneous" and "defective" because the "biological, psychological, or genetical" condition of a person was not taken into account when interpreting homosexuality as a sin. According to Bailey, this is the theory of inversion where a gay sexual orientation is "inherent" and "apparently unalterable" therefore homosexuality is "morally neutral" and should not be considered as "acts of perversion." In the previous chapter, Cheng argued that gender and sexuality are socially constructed but is now presenting arguments that gender is inherent. He does not address the issues that come with making these types of relativistic and contradicting claims which seem to meld together. He declares that he is presenting a new way of doing theology but has not provided how his methodologies differ from being syncretistic. He simply backs his arguments by continually referencing historical examples from queer scholars throughout the chapter in support of his four strands of theology and analysis on future trends in queer theology.

In the remaining three chapters of his book, Cheng delves into the doctrines of queer theology based on the structure of the Nicene and Apostles' Creed. The first section is on the doctrine of God where Cheng begins by addressing the doctrine of revelation in regards to how people come to a knowledge of God. He argues that God's revelation is not only through Scripture and reason but experience. Cheng describes the doctrine of revelation as God's coming out as radical love where it "parallels the self-disclosure that occurs when an LGBT person comes out to someone whom she or he loves about her or his sexuality and/or gender identity."⁵⁴ By God becoming incarnate, not only are humans able to experience God's love but God breaks down the boundaries that divide humans from the divine. God's dissolving of boundaries is compared to the coming out of LGBT persons where there is a boundary-crossing from private into public life. Cheng argues that God comes out of heterosexism by revealing that God is queer, gay, female, grandmother, drag, bisexual, transgendered, and a mystical God who "deflowers' each Israelite male through the act of circumcision" and "engages in a sadomasochistic relationship with humans."⁵⁵ The arguments presented by Cheng in describing God as coming out of the closet is an argument from silence and speculative at best. The Scriptures do not explicitly describe God's sexuality and gender in being queer as these liberal scholars have read into the text.

The difficulty with attributing multiple sexualities and gender identities to God is that Scripture reveals the types of relationships there are in heaven. Jesus says "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matt 22:30). Jesus makes it clear that there are no marital relationships in heaven. Even in the passages on Christ as the bridegroom and the Church as the bride do not present in its biblical context any queer metaphors (Eph 5:24-27; 2 Cor 11:2). These

⁵⁴Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, 45.

⁵⁵Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, 58.

metaphors are directly related to the marriage covenant between a man and a woman and being faithful to each other during the betrothal period. The apostle Paul also reminds believers that “there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). The context of the passage is not saying that there are no longer any ethnic, social, and gender distinctions but the point of Paul’s argument is that these divisions have no standing or prejudice before God.⁵⁶ In his argument, Paul also does not go beyond a binary understanding of gender⁵⁷ as he references only male and female yet Cheng is quick to interpret that Paul’s statement is about dissolving genders by being inclusive of all genders.⁵⁸ Lastly, some interpretations of the Sodom and Gomorrah story hold that God’s judgment was not about same-sex relations with men but having unnatural desires for sarkos heteras (other flesh) which refers to sex with angels (Jude 6-7).⁵⁹ This is in connection with traditional Jewish interpretations that the Sons of God were fallen angels who were punished for having sex with the daughters of men (Gen 6:1-4).⁶⁰ If true that sarkos heteras is attributed to sexual relations with flesh other than humans then God

⁵⁶John F. MacArthur, *Divine Design: God’s Complementary Roles for Men and Women* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2011), 40.

⁵⁷William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 88-89. Webb argues that this verse has no exegetical standing concerning homosexuality. Paul’s understanding is between a biological male and biological female who are both heterosexual.

⁵⁸Thomas R. Schriener, *1, 2 Peter, Jude The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 451. Matthew and Paul are not saying that angels and believers have no sexuality or gender distinctions but Cheng argues that there will be no sexuality and gender in the end therefore angels have no sexuality and gender. Thomas Schreiner contests this idea and argues that the human form of angels is genuine therefore the sexuality of angels when they appear on earth is authentic. Schreiner also claims that there is no biblical evidence that angels reproduce or engage in sexual activity except for in Genesis 6:1-4 which is a historical event that occurred only once where God ensured through the imprisonment of angels that it will never happen again.

⁵⁹Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary 2 Peter, Jude* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 242. Douglas Moo argues that the people of Sodom did not know that Lot’s guests were Angels but thought they were men.

⁶⁰Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation: A Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 70-71. Although traditional Jewish views have interpreted “Sons of God” to be fallen angels, it is not definitive as to what exactly the Sons of God are in reference to. Old Testament scholar Walter Bruggeman in his commentary on Genesis argues that this text lends itself to ancient Near East mythological traditions where the original meaning of this passage is obscured beyond the benefit of attempting to understand it.

having sexual relations with men would be equally condemned. Queer readings cannot reconcile these contradicting interpretations by removing the condemnation of same-sex relations while affirming sexual relations between God and man.

Despite these contradictions, Cheng continues to portray these types of sexual and gender boundary crossings in chapters 4 and 5 as he suggests that each person in the Trinity is in a polyamorous relationship. Cheng believes that the Trinity can be interpreted in many different ways which can apply to multiple types of relationships. He gives the example of Marcella Althaus-Reid who views the Trinity as a three-way sexual relationship known as “omnisexual kenosis” which challenges the way that heterosexual constructions and readings are created from the Scriptures. Reid believes that this “restricted polyfidelity” reflects a closed and faithful relationship within the Godhead.⁶¹ The absurdity of this claim is not only in suggesting there is a sexual nature within the Godhead but the contradictory statement that a closed relationship can be open thus allowing for each person of the Trinity to also have closet lovers. The example provided is Jesus with Mary Magdalene and Lazarus as well as the third person of the Trinity who is involved in the sexual experience between God and man. The Holy Spirit is equated to a GPS system that helps direct and connects people with God. This is illustrated by a gay minister who was having sex on the beach and during his orgasm, he started speaking in tongues believing he was directly communicating with God.⁶² Gary Newton addresses this issue of popular belief that the Spirit’s voice is subjective to a believer’s personal interpretation. He argues that the Word of God “teaches that the Holy Spirit represents an objective manifestation of the truth of God that never contradicts the biblical truth. While the Spirit often expresses himself in subjective ways within an individual, his voice can

⁶¹Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, 58.

⁶²Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, 102.

be tested as to its authenticity by comparing it to the truth from the Word of God.”⁶³

Believers are instructed to test the spirits against the Word of God to see whether or not what they hear is aligned with the truth of God’s Word because there are many false prophets (1 John 4:1). This is how we know whether our convictions from the Spirit are from God because “The Holy Spirit’s teaching never contradicts God’s objective revelation in Scripture.”⁶⁴

In the last chapter, Cheng continues to present these types of contradictory and unorthodox models which deconstruct binary relationships and allows for polyamorous partnerships. Cheng sets forth examples for the church in how to display this type of radical love. He offers churches to open its understanding of sexual relationships beyond marriage by venerating queer saints like Sergius and Bacchus as well as Felicitas and Perpetua who were same-sex martyr couples. Cheng suggests that in order to break through erotic, literary, and social boundaries a theology of sainthood is required by recognizing the works of queer saints. The same argument is championed for reclaiming Christian sacraments which are considered to be fundamentally queer. Cheng focuses on the works of scholars who interpret and hypersexualize the sacraments. For example, the Eucharist is portrayed as “intimate and sacred moments of love making” and the sacrament of reconciliation teaches queer people to “repent of the closet” by coming out and paying penance through the acceptance of their sexuality. Cheng then concludes by sharing his belief on the eschatological erasure of male and female, life and death, and punishment and reward. Cheng states that he believes in order for radical love to triumph that all barriers preventing us from God will need to be removed where even Satan will be saved and everyone will be in heaven.

⁶³Gary C. Newton *Heart-Deep Teaching: Engaging Students for Transformed Lives* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 31.

⁶⁴Michael J. Anthony, *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 126.

Although Cheng does admit that not all queer theologians adhere to his view on the Last Judgement, he is not as transparent in admitting to the difficulties facing queer interpretations of the biblical text. He appears to be aware of these difficulties as he quotes Kittredge Cherry who believes that the portrayal of Christ in this light is “too queer for most churches, but too Christian for most queers.”⁶⁵ Kwok Pui Lan who is one of Cheng’s colleagues and supports his views writes in her review of *Radical Love* that she suspects “many readers will find the portrayal of Jesus crossing gender boundaries even more challenging.”⁶⁶ Lan sees the obstacles Cheng faces in positing his so-called new queer theology yet Cheng does not raise issues with any of the queer interpretations he references and does not provide an assessment on his own views. In an attempt to provide as many queer theological views as possible Cheng runs into problems with opposing views that cannot be reconciled despite his desire to harmonize them.

The Scriptures are replete with exclusive truth claims which oppose Cheng’s claims of inclusivity in regards to homosexual relations and the salvation of unbelievers including Satan. In the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray, Jesus says that God will not forgive those who do not forgive others and He will also deny knowing those who do not do the will of the Father (Matt 6:15; 7:23). Jesus also speaks about the end times and gives three parables where Jesus denies knowing evildoers and throws them into eternal punishment (Matt 25:12, 30, 46). Jesus declares that he will throw the devil and his angels into the eternal fire (Matt 25:41). Jesus mentions hell multiple times and also references Isaiah 66:24 in describing what hell is like. He says that it is a place where “‘the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.’ Everyone will be salted with fire” (Mk 9:48-49). These verses clearly

⁶⁵Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, 77.

⁶⁶Pui Lan Kwok, “Radical Love by Patrick S. Cheng,” Kwok Pui Lan: On Postcolonialism, Theology, and Everything She Cares About (blog), March 13, 2011, <http://kwokpuilan.blogspot.com/2011/03/raical-love-by-patrick-s-cheng.html>.

contradict Cheng's claims that God will forgive everyone and specifically allow for Satan to enter into heaven.

The goal in which Cheng sets for his works is not just about doing theology but applying it to every aspect of life. What Cheng is proposing is not simply a reformation of religion but transforming individual lives, communities, and the laws that dictate social and moral change. He accuses the traditional view of marriage as oppressive and is used to persecute LGBT persons. Cheng argues that under queer biblical interpretations there is no longer any compulsion to procreate since marriage is based on a covenant between two or more persons regardless of gender. His desire is to change the structure of the traditional family which God has created. For example, Mary is seen as someone who dissolves family boundaries. He writes that "the Virgin Mary can be understood as the antithesis of 'family values' insofar as she erases the boundaries between the traditional family categories of parent, spouse, and child."⁶⁷ Mary is therefore seen as the archetype and example for deconstructing gender and family roles. The deconstruction of gender and family roles as described by Cheng is actually not the case when reading the Scriptures on the nativity of Jesus. Joseph and Mary are repeatedly and unequivocally called husband and wife during and after the betrothal period (Matt 1:16-25). Joseph is also called father and Mary as mother, the parents of Jesus who is their son (Luke 2:43, 48, 51). Joseph and Mary have a traditional marriage and family where they consummate their marriage, fulfill traditional religious rites as parents, and have more children (Matt 1:24-25; Mark 6:3; Luke 8:19-21; John 2:12). The Scriptures give no indication that Joseph and Mary have a nontraditional marriage or family where gender and sexuality are put into question.

⁶⁷The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, "How Will Gay Marriage Impact Your Marriage?" last modified August 4, 2014, <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/how-will-gay-marriage-impact-your-marriage>.

The deconstruction of gender and family roles as suggested by Cheng becomes dangerous as it opens the door to redefine marriage and family as anyone pleases. This leaves no structure or foundation of values for society and reverses the order in which God intended for creation. The early church fought against such heresies because the breakdown of God's order opened the door for all different types of perversions.⁶⁸ The apostle Paul warns that "neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9-10). This is not just a battle over religious beliefs on marriage and the family but a matter of life and death with eternal consequences. What is at stake is the truth of Jesus' Words which lead to eternal life and the kingdom of God. Just as the apostle Paul warned the Galatians who were quickly deserting Jesus by turning to a different Gospel, the church needs to warn believers about queer theology and how it leads people astray by perverting the Gospel (Gal 1:6-9).

Conclusion

The claims made by Seow and Cheng which interpret Scripture based on their perceived view of societal injustices against queer persons ignores and contorts the truth that is plainly seen in God's Word. The argument that Christ's radical love means forgiveness while allowing people to continue living in sin is not love but is contrary to the very words that Jesus taught. While Jesus healed and forgave sins, He immediately

⁶⁸David G. Hunter, *Marriage and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018), 177. Irenaeus and Augustine were two prominent voices on the view of sexuality in the early church. Irenaeus wrote *Against Heresies* in order to fight against unorthodox teachings which distorted the apostolic tradition. In their view of sexuality, they both have similar leanings toward chastity as Irenaeus deemed Gnostics to be sexual libertines. Augustine believed that "The result is the bonding of society in children, who are the one honorable fruit, not of the union of male and female, but of sexual intercourse" (177). He considered sexual intercourse not to be a sin as long as there is intent to procreate or nothing is done to prevent from having children.

said afterward to go and sin no more (John 5:14; 8:11). This is how followers of Jesus know they are His disciples and whether they love Him (1 John 5:2-3; John 14:15). Jesus says those who love God and are loved by Him keep His commandments and teach others to obey everything He has commanded (John 14:21; Matt 28:20). By preserving the original teachings of Christ that have been handed down through the apostolic tradition we know we are His disciples and love Him. Jesus shows the world what true love is, it's not only in the giving of His life for the forgiveness of sins but by being the Light that exposes the darkness of men in order for them to repent of their sins (John 3:16-21). True love which is displayed in Christ is for believers to keep His Words by speaking truth with gentleness and respect to those who are caught in sin (1 Pet 3:15-16). This is to be done not just in word but in deeds as we care for queer people and their community by not only telling them to sin no more but by showing them. This is not just a fight against western and eastern theologies or different methods of contextualization but a battle against the authorities and spiritual forces over this present darkness which try to twist the Word of God. Unless we stand up against the heretical teachings of queer theologians the integrity of the Good News will be compromised and distorted, turning people to a different Gospel where they will be accursed for eternity.

CHAPTER 4

BIBLICAL ISSUES

This chapter will examine the primary biblical issues raised by Patrick Cheng in his book *From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ*. In his book, he addresses the historical and theological misinterpretations in the Scriptures surrounding gender and sexuality. Cheng raises two main issues with traditional teachings on homosexuality and then addresses the six main biblical texts that revisionists have edited by removing any homophobic readings from these passages.¹ He accuses traditional Christian teachings of having incorrectly translated and misinterpreted these texts regarding homosexual behavior. Revisionists like Cheng claim that these teachings are outdated and have caused irreparable damages to LGBT persons and communities despite being irrelevant in today's context. The purpose of this chapter is to serve as a corrective against these unorthodox teachings. This chapter is not meant to be an exhaustive argument against these biblical redactions but is intended to present key arguments surrounding these texts.²

¹Patrick S. Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ* (New York: Seabury Books, 2012), 5-6. According to Cheng there are six main texts of terror that continues to oppress queer people and their communities (Gen 19:5-7, Lev 18:22; 20:13, Rom 1:26-27, 1 Cor 6:9-10, and 1Tim 1:10). These revisions can be found in *The Gay Bible* also known as *The Queen James Bible* (QJB) or *The Queen James Version* (QJV). The authors of the QJB/QJV have revised eight verses in the King James Bible in order to prevent homophobic misinterpretations. The authors and publisher of the QJB/QJV are also unknown. No scholarly work is given in regards to how they came to their interpretations other than explaining that homophobic readings of these verses are wrong.

²The sources that will serve as the primary biblical and theological correctives do not come from an Asian perspective but provide a comprehensive work in examining the Scriptures prohibiting homosexuality which can be applied in Asian American contexts.

Objections and Responses

Multiple arguments are presented by Cheng in regard to his claim that the church has historically read the Scriptures with a homophobic lens. Cheng has two primary objections to traditionalist interpretations of six main biblical texts he claims are anti-gay. The first objection he raises is that historically traditionalists misread the Scriptures through a homophobic bias driven by hatred and fear. Cheng explains that his thesis is about the “deep anxiety over the divine collective punishment” of nations as a result of the sin of homosexuality. He believes that this collective responsibility is wrongfully projected and “is what has led to the persecution of people who engage in same-sex and gender-variant acts over the centuries.”³ Second, Cheng argues that homosexuality is a modern phenomenon therefore it is completely different today than what biblical authors historically understood and condemned as same-sex behavior. Cheng raises issues with the word itself as the concept of homosexuality “was not coined until the nineteenth century” and so he believes that “biblical translations that refer to ‘homosexuals’ are anachronistic at best and deceptive at worst.”⁴

Historical Perspective

From a historical perspective, Cheng argues in his book *From Sin to Amazing Grace* that “the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative has been interpreted historically as God’s collective punishment of same-sex acts.”⁵ He acknowledges that historically this has been the church’s interpretation as he provides an extensive list of authors and early texts that have read the biblical account as God’s collective punishment for same-sex acts. Cheng includes in his list the works of Clement of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, the Apostolic Constitutions, Augustine of Hippo in the *City of God*, and in *Confessions*. He references

³Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 42.

⁴Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 50.

⁵Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 47-48.

Peter Damian's treatise in his *Book of Gomorrah* and Mark Jordan's work on Alan of Lillie, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas. He also cites Martin Luther in his *Lectures on Genesis*, John Calvin in his *Commentary on Romans*, and in the twentieth century Reinhold Niebuhr in *The Nature and Destiny of Man*.⁶ The purpose of this list is to reveal how all these authors and texts have historically expressed the same ideology of collective punishment in order to condemn same-sex behavior. Rather than address in detail each argument raised within these texts Cheng groups them all together under a single theme of collective punishment. In doing so he is able to make a strawman argument by attacking the biblical theme of collective punishment which he claims has been used historically to instill fear of divine punishment against LGBT persons and ethnic and racial minorities.

Cheng simply dismisses these historical works by adding anecdotal fallacies. An example of this is when Cheng presents the Christian Roman emperor Justinian as having believed that natural disasters were the result of persons committing same-sex acts and if caught would be executed.⁷ According to Cheng this form of collective punishment reveals how historical interpretations of the text were used to persecute queer persons. Cheng suggests that this example of collective punishment has been used not only to punish and oppress queer people but "has been used historically to subjugate people of color and women. The examples he gives are the enslavement of black people which is the result of Ham's sin against Noah and women who receive second-class treatment as punishment for Eve's sin."⁸ Cheng also believes that Augustine misinterpreted original sin

⁶Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 44-45.

⁷Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 47.

⁸Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 41. David Mark Whitford discusses the American myth of Ham's Curse in his book *The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era: The Bible and the Justifications*. Whitford reveals that the curse of Ham never actually fell on Ham or on any African nation but the curse was on Canaan. He argues that modern scholarship is at fault for these false claims which perpetuated this myth. He reveals that historical records actually show that "while the Hamitic origin of serfdom was widely held in the medieval era, it was not associated with Jewish exegesis of the text or connected to any meaningful way to Africa" (20). Cheng fails to acknowledge the historical faith of protestant evangelical

and suggests his works are difficult to understand by many today. He believes that in our Post-Enlightened era it is difficult to hold a traditional view of sexuality and reproduction.

The problem with Cheng's argument is that he is viewing history through a myopic lens that sees historical events from a biased queer worldview. For example, historically it is questionable as to whether Justinian even attributed disasters such as the bubonic plague solely towards God's divine punishment for same-sex acts as opposed to multiple sins which included homosexual behavior.⁹ Cheng makes hasty generalizations and jumps to conclusions not only historically but biblically as well. He makes the same attempt with the biblical text as he tries to equate the oppression of homosexuals with the historical misinterpretations of the Scriptures promoting slavery and suppressing women's rights. Although the premise is true that biblical misinterpretations have led to slavery and the suppression of women's rights it does not follow and conclude that historical biblical interpretations on homosexuality must be wrong. The agenda set by Cheng along with revisionists is to wrestle with the historical evidence rather than the biblical text itself and in so doing, revisionists draw historical conclusions in order to drive a theological agenda. As a result, the burden of proof still falls on revisionists to make arguments not just based on historical traditions but textual evidence. This is where revisionists like Cheng have fallen short in disputing the historical interpretation of the Scriptures hermeneutically.

Cheng has a wealth of knowledge and analysis of the history of sin and grace. John Anderson commends Cheng in his review of *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, but then criticizes Cheng's "engagement of various theologians" as being "often not deep

Christians who played a key role in the movements that abolished slavery and fought for women's suffrage.

⁹Dionysios Stathakopoulos, *Plague and the End of Antiquity: The Pandemic of 541-750*, ed. Lester K. Little (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 113. Stathakopoulos believes it may be argued that some of Justinian's laws against groups like Jews, Samaritans, pagans, heretics, and homosexuals were connected to infections but there is no actual mention that individuals or groups were persecuted because of their social, ethnic, and religious background having caused the plague.

enough.” Anderson goes on to say that “his chapters read at times like short summaries of one theologian after another . . . it also does not permit enough critical depth to satisfy some scholars.”¹⁰ Despite his criticism, Anderson does defend Cheng by stating that the possible reason for the lack of depth is to make his writing accessible to lay readers. The problem is that this is too common in his writings as Cheng does not dispute in-depth the hermeneutical works of traditionalists in any of his published books. Cheng has a tendency in making an appeal to authority by citing the opinion of other queer authors who have written on the topic as evidence to support his claims. This is not particular to Cheng’s arguments but common in many scholarly works by revisionists who claim to have a high view of Scripture yet fail to interact with the text itself.

In an attempt to redefine the orthodox belief on sin and grace Cheng defines the traditional understanding of sin and grace as a crime-based model that focuses on punishing sin rather than extending grace. Cheng does not see sin as a “fall from an original state of perfection” but redefines sin as being immature. Sin is seen as a part of the journey in arriving to be like God. He believes sin is not a crime that should result in punishment but suggests it is a function necessary for Christian growth. The argument Cheng makes is for an alternate model which he believes is “Christ-centered” where there is no penal judgment for sin. A summary of this view of sin is “the misdirected wanderings of immature human beings-starting with Adam and Eve-who run away from humanity’s final goal of deification by disobeying God.”¹¹ Cheng’s unorthodox view is nothing new as he rejects Augustine’s view on the doctrine of original sin. He acquiesces in the fact that we are all infected with original sin while still holding a Pelagian view that free will enables people to be solely responsible for their own acts of sin.¹² Cheng

¹⁰John J. Anderson, review of *From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ* by Patrick S. Cheng, *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 34, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2014): 241-43.

¹¹Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 54.

¹²Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 17-21. Cheng proposes multiple ways of thinking about sin. One way of looking at sin is through the theory of evolution where sin is genetically passed down by

acknowledges that Pelagius has been deemed a heretic by Rome but uses this as an example of how the church has historically abused their power to unjustly punish individuals, groups, and entire communities.

The concern that Cheng posits is that if this continues to go unchecked it could have horrific consequences by triggering entire communities to be punished. Cheng makes a pejorative statement that the authority of the church has historically gone unchecked but this is far from the case as church councils like the Council of Carthage in 418 AD were gathered in order to discuss and address doctrines such as original sin and grace. Not only was Pelagianism declared heretical that year but was condemned again by the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD and Semi-Pelagianism was denounced at the Council of Orange in 529 AD. Pelagianism has been rejected multiple times throughout history and still today because it contradicts what is plainly seen in Scripture (Ps 51:5; Ez 18:20; Rom 5:12-19; 6:23; Eph 2:1-9; Titus 3:3-8). Cheng clearly holds the same views as Pelagius where salvation is understood as a moral compass guiding the natural outworking of human progression from sinful behavior towards holy living. This results not only in pagans entering into the Kingdom of God through their good works but according to Cheng everyone has eternal salvation as a loving and gracious God would never allow for anyone to experience eternal damnation in hell.

Modern Phenomenon

Cheng argues that homosexuality in the Scriptures is not the same as we know it today. He argues that out of 31,000+ verses only about half a dozen allegedly condemn same-sex behavior and that out of these few verses “it is not clear whether such

natural selection. Cheng also contests seeing homosexuality as a disorder. He proposes that the idea of homosexuality being a disorder can be made for heterosexuality as well. Cheng claims that heterosexuality and family values can become an idol where heterosexual intercourse and procreation is necessary to the point that it overshadows the Gospel. His main argument in regards to sin is against a penal interpretation of Scripture where there is communal punishment of the whole for the sins of a few which is unjust.

prohibitions would actually apply to those people whom we identify as LGBT today.”¹³ The argument that revisionists like Cheng presents is that homosexuality today is radically different than what was believed and known in biblical times. He further explains that “many biblical scholars have argued that such prohibitions occurred in the context of rape and other non-consensual situations (for example, sex with slaves).”¹⁴ He protests that this is not applicable in today’s context of same-sex behavior which is based on consensual long-term monogamous relationships. Cheng then raises the question “how can we risk punishing people-either in the religious or civil spheres-if we are not sure that we are even talking about the same thing? This is akin to executing a person who has been accused of a crime but is innocent of such crime because the crime was fundamentally ill-defined in the first place.”¹⁵ If this is the case, then in order to move forward it is necessary to understand the etymology of homosexuality.

Cheng’s argument on the historical definition of homosexuality can be best explained by Harald Patzer’s review of Halperin’s work on the etymology of “Homosexuality.” Patzer states that “Chaddock is credited – wrongly, no doubt – by the Oxford English Dictionary with having introduced “homo-sexuality” into the English language in 1892.... Homosexuality, for better or for worse, has been with us ever since.”¹⁶ The word “homosexuality” itself was not defined until 1892 and it would take another half-century or more for it to be included in the daily vernacular of society. What this means is that homosexuality was not intentionally kept out of the Bible prior to 1946 but it is not present because the word itself did not exist. Now just because the word did not exist does not mean that homosexuality never existed prior to 1892. Halperin affirms

¹³Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 41.

¹⁴Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 41.

¹⁵Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 50.

¹⁶Harald Patzer, review of *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love*, by David Halperin, *JSTOR* 16, no. 2 (Summer, 1986): 34-45.

this by saying that, “it is not exactly my intention to argue that homosexuality, as we commonly understand it today, didn’t exist before 1892. How, indeed, could it have failed to exist? The very word displays a most workmanlike and scientific indifference to cultural and environmental factors, looking only to the gender of the persons engaged in the sexual act.”¹⁷

What Halperin is saying is that even though the word itself is a modern phenomenon, as he admits that the concept of homosexuality is different today than what it was in the past, it does not mean that they had absolutely no understanding or concept of homosexuality as we understand it today. N.T. Wright who is a renowned New Testament Scholar and Anglican Bishop affirms this in an interview with the National Catholic Reporter.

As a classicist, I have to say that when I read Plato’s Symposium, or when I read the accounts from the early Roman empire of the practice of homosexuality, then it seems to me they knew just as much about it as we do. In particular, a point which is often missed, they knew a great deal about what people today would regard as longer-term, reasonably stable relations between two people of the same gender.¹⁸

Halperin as well as many other historians and scholars would agree with NT Wright in saying that homosexuality was practiced in the early Roman Empire and that the practice of homosexuality was not completely different than what it is today. Even though we find this historically to be true this is what revisionists like Cheng argue against. Revisionists believe that homosexuality as we know it today is “not that kind of homosexuality” as it was understood in the past.

The main argument against the traditional understanding of homosexuality is that in the past same-sex relationships were systemically pederastic while homosexuality today is two consenting adults committed to a long-term monogamous relationship.

¹⁷David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 17.

¹⁸National Catholic Reporter, “Interview with Anglican Bishop N.T. Wright of Durham, England,” last modified May 28, 2004, <https://www.nationalcatholicreporter.org/word/wright.htm>.

Kevin Deyoung states that this is the key argument revisionists claim, that homosexuality today is not what it used to be where “the issue was not consensual same-sex sexual intimacy, but gang rape, power imbalances, and systemic oppression.”¹⁹ Though there were these systemic and oppressive practices in the past it does not mean that committed long-term consensual same-sex intimacy was not present and understood. These types of same-sex relationships which were condemned in the past are historically recorded.

Preston Sprinkle writes that monogamous long-term relationships between two committed and consenting adults were evident in ancient Greece and Rome. He writes,

While Jewish writers often condemned pederasty, they also prohibited same-sex relations categorically. Plus, we should at least acknowledge . . . that the types of same-sex relations that existed in the Greco-Roman period were somewhat diverse. While pederasty and other exploitative relations . . . were the most common, we do see evidence of adult consenting relations, especially among women prior to, during, and after the first-century A.D.²⁰

The two points we find from Sprinkle are that early Jewish writers condemned consensual same-sex intimacy and there is evidence for consensual same-sex intimacy in first century AD.²¹ Sprinkle provides a list of early Greco-Roman novelists to scholarly works from early Jewish writers which supports his claim. He does this to show that even though homosexuality is not the same as it is defined today, it is clear that they had an understanding of homosexuality as it is practiced today. Stanley James Grenz also explains that in ancient Greece “same-sex unions were sometimes formalized through wedding ceremonies” and that it is possible same-sex marriages were trending in the first century especially among wealthy families in Rome. He gives an example of how Nero

¹⁹Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 80.

²⁰Preston Sprinkle, “Jesus was a Jew: Understanding Jesus and Same-Sex Marriages in His 1st Century Jewish (Not our 21st Century Western) Context,” Preston Sprinkle (blog), November, 2015, <https://www.prestonsprinkle.com/blog/2015/11/jesus-was-a-jew-understanding-jesus-and-same-sex-marriages-in-his-1st-century-jewish-not-our-21st-century-western-context>.

²¹Preston Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 38-40.

had been involved potentially in two same-sex weddings where he played the role of the groom in one ceremony and the bride in the other.²² Grenz argues that even though same-sex marriage was not a norm in ancient society, it is false to believe that it was completely unknown. The answer to the question of whether homosexuality as we know it today is a modern phenomenon is complex. Even though the word itself is a modern development the concept and understanding of homosexuality have always been present as Halperin puts it very succinctly, “if homosexuality didn’t exist before 1892, heterosexuality couldn’t have existed either.”²³

Cheng not only claims homosexuality is a modern phenomenon but that traditionalists are grasping at straws with a limited number of homophobic verses. The argument from textual silence “cannot be equated with neutrality or openness, let alone support, without grossly distorting history.”²⁴ The problem with this argument is that frequency is often confused with importance. For example, the Bible does not often mention other forms of sexual misconduct like bestiality and prostitution but the lack of frequency does not mean that these sins are any less significant.²⁵ When the Scriptures

²²Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming*, 137.

²³Halperin, *One Hundred Years*, 17.

²⁴Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 437.

²⁵Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 433. Gagnon cites 1 Corinthians 5 as an example where if the situation of incest within Corinth never happened then there would never be any text in the New Testament that forbids incest. The lack of frequency of incest in the New Testament does not mean that it is any less of a detestable sin as Paul is explicit in describing how detestable it is. See Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1963), 137, quoted in P. Michael Ukleja, “Homosexuality and the Old Testament,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 140, no. 559 (1983): 259-66. Kidner contests D. Sherwin Bailey’s denial that the verb “know” in Genesis 19:5 and Judges 19:22 is sexual because of frequency. Bailey points to the fact that the word “know” is used fifteen times sexually while in its primary sense is used over nine-hundred times. Kidner replies by stating that “Statistics are no substitute for contextual evidence (otherwise the rarer sense of the word would never seem probable), and in both these passages the demand to ‘know’ is used in its sexual sense (Gn. 19:8; Jdg. 19:25). Even apart from this verbal conjunction it would be grotesquely inconsequent that Lot should reply to a demand for credentials by an offer of daughters” (261). Ukleja supports Kidner’s argument by showing that ten out of twelve times when the word “know” is used in Genesis it means “sexual intercourse.” Frequency does not necessarily determine the meaning of a word as the context matters on how the word ought to be translated and understood.

combine universal silence regarding homosexual relations together with the texts that do explicitly prohibit it, this reveals a resounding agreement on the condemnation of same-sex and gender variant acts.²⁶ Revisionists also miss the fact that central to the Bible is the theme of marriage and sexuality as God intended from the very beginning of creation to the end. Scripture as a whole has a biblical worldview of affirming only one type of sexual union which is marriage between a man and woman. The biblical text is replete with laws and boundaries pertaining to heterosexual unions but there are no biblical prescriptions for homosexual unions. New Testament only has proscriptions for homosexual behavior where Scriptures do not become less restrictive on teachings of sexuality but reinforces the understanding of marriage to be exclusively between one man and one woman.²⁷

Genesis 19

Cheng highlights the crime-based model starting with the story of God's judgment against Sodom. He explains that his thesis is about the condemnation of same-sex and variant acts that may stem from "ancient anxieties about collective punishment—especially as described in the Sodom narrative in Genesis 19— and how permitting such acts could lead to divine punishment of the larger society."²⁸ Historians like Philo connected same-sex acts with collective punishment but Cheng argues that "prior to Philo, most references to Sodom's sin involved the inhospitality of its inhabitants and their failure to help the poor and needy."²⁹ Cheng references Ezekiel 16:49 as a proof text

²⁶Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 439.

²⁷Jesus has a very strict sexual ethic where He teaches that if you even look at a woman lustfully you are committing adultery (Matt 5:27-32). Jesus also teaches on marriage and divorce where He points back to Genesis that marriage is between a man and a woman. The only other option Jesus presents is celibacy (Matt 19:1-12). Paul teaches as well that marriage is exclusively between one man and one woman pointing to Genesis (Eph 5:22-33).

²⁸Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 44.

²⁹Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 44.

to show that the guilt of Sodom was not against same-sex acts but “pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.” The fact that there is no mention in the text about same-sex or variant acts resulting in Sodom’s judgment is contextually and exegetically incorrect.³⁰ One needs to simply look at the following verse in Ezekiel 16:50 where the same Hebrew word for abomination is used as in Leviticus 18:22 which explicitly warns and states that the abomination is in lying with a male as you would with a female.³¹

Central to the text in Ezekiel 16 is the theme of marital and sexual deviance where Israel is depicted as an unfaithful bride. The word “whore” and “whoring” is used 17 times within the chapter and the imagery and use of the word prostitute is prominent in the text. A graphic illustration is found in verse 25 where Israel’s unfaithfulness is depicted as “offering yourself to any passerby” which literally translates in Hebrew as “spreading your legs.” Brian Peterson shows how “it is exegetically impossible to separate the sexual component of Sodom’s sin from Ezekiel’s argument.” Peterson continues in arguing that “Ezekiel not only employs the Sodom narrative in one of the most sexually graphic chapters of the Bible for rhetorical purposes, but he also highlights the sexually deviant sins of Sodom as a foil for the sexually deviant sins of YHWH’s

³⁰DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach*, 35-36. The word abomination translated from the Hebrew word to’ebah is used in both verses 47 and 50 which is the same word used in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Ezekiel’s use of to’ebah with reference to Sodom shows the connection he is making to the two verses in Leviticus.

³¹See Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 1096. Grudem points to the linguistic parallel of Genesis 19 and Ezekiel 16:50 where the sin of homosexuality would have been brought to the minds of Ezekiel’s readers and hearers. See Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 80-81. Gagnon argues that the same word for abomination תועבה is used in Leviticus which prohibits homosexual intercourse therefore it is not only possible that Ezekiel is alluding to the prohibition of same-sex behavior but the context in Ezekiel supports this interpretation.

bride, Jerusalem . . .”³² The text clearly reveals that Ezekiel is connecting together same-sex and gender-variant behaviors with the Sin of Sodom.³³

In addition to the collective punishment argument by Cheng is that the sin of Sodom is not so much a sexual issue as it is a social issue. Revisionists like Cheng proclaim that the real sin of Sodom is inhospitality. Cheng claims that “many biblical scholars have debated whether the true crime of Sodom was inhospitality . . .”³⁴ Cheng accuses traditionalists as the ones who are actually committing the sin of Sodom which is the inhospitality of queer people.³⁵ Walter Brueggemann also argues that inhospitality is the sin of Sodom as he writes in his commentary on Genesis that the judgment Sodom faced was not because of homosexuality but as a result of “a general abuse of justice.” He concedes that “sexual disorder is one aspect of a general disorder” but then quickly dismisses this fact by making the modern phenomenon argument where this is “scarcely pertinent to contemporary discussions of homosexuality.”³⁶ Even Brueggemann is not able to escape the fact that same-sex and gender-variant behavior is inclusive of the general disorder that Sodom was indicted with. Robert Gagnon believes that this is taken to an extreme when arguing that the sin of Sodom does not have anything to do with

³²Brian Neil Peterson, “Identifying the Sin of Sodom in Ezekiel 16:49–50,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61, no. 2 (2018): 307–20.

³³Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, in vol. 28 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 244. Leslie Allen draws the connection in regards to the abomination of homosexuality between the text in Ezekiel and Sodom as he argues that “the sketch of Sodom’s (and Samaria’s) sins in v 45bα leads the reader to expect a denunciation on sexual lines, as in Gen 19:1–11. Certainly Yahweh’s getting rid of Sodom ‘when he saw’ their behavior (v 50) appears to echo Gen 18:21. Moreover, Sodom’s shocking or abominable conduct in v 50 may well be a reflection of homosexuality” (244).

³⁴Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 43.

³⁵Huffington Post, “What Was the Real Sin of Sodom?,” last modified May 25, 2011, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-was-the-real-sin-of_b_543996. Cheng argues that the actual sin of Sodom has nothing to do with homosexuality but that the Sodomites were punished for a far greater sin which is the sin of inhospitality. He includes in this list of sins; attempted gang rape, mob violence, and turning their backs on strangers in need. Cheng charges homophobic Christians as being the guiltiest in committing the sin of inhospitality.

³⁶Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, 164.

homosexual practice. He cites Phyllis Bird who qualifies the work of Richard Hays by stating that even though she insists that the connection with homosexuality in the story of Sodom “does not address the cases under consideration today” yet she does not believe that “it can be dismissed as testimony to the OT’s attitude toward homosexual activity.”³⁷

Another point of contention Cheng makes in the story of Sodom is that the abomination was not the desire for homosexual intercourse but in having sex with angels. Cheng’s argument is a bit of a reach as there is no indication in the text that the inhabitants of Sodom were aware that the visitors were angels or wanted to have sex with angels.³⁸ What is agreed upon in Jude is that the sin of Sodom is the result of “licentious conduct of the lawless.”³⁹ What this means is that the punishment of Sodom according to Jude was not solely a social justice issue of inhospitality but was the result of a connection to sexual immorality. Gagnon argues that even if the Scriptures were construed in making no reference to homosexual acts that it is inconceivable that any of the biblical authors, especially Ezekiel and Jude who were more orthodox and conservative than the other biblical authors, would have a more liberal stance on homosexual practice.⁴⁰ Thomas Schreiner also disputes this claim made by Richard Bauckham that the sin the Sodomites attempted to commit was not homosexual in nature because the visitors were angels. Bauckham’s argument is that the pursuit after unnatural lust in the Greek language does not have the meaning for same-sex desires but rather lusting after “strange flesh” which would then refer to the angels as seen in Genesis 19:1.

³⁷Phyllis A. Bird, *The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation concerning Homosexuality: Old Testament Contributions*, 147, quoted in Robert A.J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 71. Richard Hays is a biblical scholar who believes that the Scriptures are univocal against homosexual activity and yet Phyllis Bird who affirms homosexual behavior agrees with Hays on the OT’s attitude towards homosexuality.

³⁸DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach*, 38.

³⁹Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 90.

⁴⁰Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 90.

The sin of Sodom is then believed to be the lusting after angels. Schreiner contends that “this objection fails to convince since the inhabitants of Sodom did not know they were angels but thought they were men.”⁴¹ Schreiner disputes the claims of revisionists who argue that the sin of Sodom is gang rape or that it was just a general disorder. Schreiner makes his case from Jude 7 which further explains the sin of Sodom.

Jude 7 confirms this interpretation, for Sodom and Gomorrah are described as ‘departing after other flesh’. Jude does not concentrate on the attempted homosexual rape but the desire to engage in sexual relations with those of the same sex and the letter identifies such as an evil deserving God’s judgment.⁴²

In Genesis 19:8 the desire the Sodomites had was clearly not for angels as Lot refers to the guest as men. In addition to this when Lot offered his daughters, they rejected them. The desire is not solely rape, but specifically in sexually knowing these men through same-sex acts as they also threatened to do to Lot worse than what they planned to do to these men in verse 9. The sin of Sodom is inclusive of rape, pederasty, and social disorder but more significantly, homosexual rape.

The intentions of Lot are not clear from the text in regards to how much of it came from protecting his own self-interest, the devaluation of women in ancient culture, or revulsion against same-sex eroticism. What is clearly known in the text is that the story of Sodom is used “to legitimate God’s decision to wipe these two cities off the face of the map” therefore it is likely that the sin of Sodom cannot just be about inhospitality or an attempt to rape a guest but rather a greater perversion that is to the degree seen in the Flood.⁴³ According to Gagnon the “illicit copulation . . . contributed to the earlier cataclysm of the great flood in Genesis 6” and as such the offense of Sodom must be unnatural to the degree where homosexual rape would be considered as “a key

⁴¹Schreiner, “A New Testament Perspective,” 64.

⁴²Schreiner, “A New Testament Perspective,” 64.

⁴³Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 75.

contributing factor in the cataclysmic destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.”⁴⁴ James A. Loader believes that the inhospitality in Sodom was compounded by the intent and nature of sexual abuse which resulted in communal punishment. Loader argues that “the sin here is not just a private homosexual act, but homosexual mob rape” which would require judgment that is communal in nature.⁴⁵ The text is pointing to the fact in a “very emphatic insistence that ‘the whole population,’ ‘young and old,’ were involved in this crime” therefore no one is undeserving of God’s punishment.⁴⁶ Although the overarching theme in the Sodom story may be inhospitality what makes this social injustice so reprehensible “is the specific form in which the inhospitality manifests itself: homosexual rape.”⁴⁷

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

The heart of the matter for revisionists in regards to queer theology is the need for a more robust theology of sin and grace. According to Cheng sin is not just simply a debate over rights for LGBT persons but it is a matter of life and death. Cheng claims that the religious right continues to label homosexual acts as sinful which has resulted in hate crimes and violent acts against queer communities. Cheng cites an example where a murderer believed that God told him to “hunt down and kill gays, ‘just like it says in

⁴⁴Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 75. See Gordon J. Wenham, "Method in Pentateuchal Source Criticism." *Vetus Testamentum* 41, no. 1 (1991): 84-109. Gordon Wenham draws parallels between the Flood and Sodom narratives in Genesis 6 and 19. Wenham presents a number of thematic and structural parallels which reveals that these two stories cannot be coincidental as the “number suggests that the parallels between the flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are being deliberately exploited by the author of Genesis. And this observation must inform both the interpretation of the narrative and the discussion of its unity” (109).

⁴⁵James Alfred Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities: Sodom and Gomorrah in the Old Testament, Early Jewish and Early Christian Traditions* (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Publishing House, 1990), 47.

⁴⁶Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, in vol. 2 of *Word Biblical Commentary*, eds. David A. Hubbard et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 55; Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 47. Loader also points to the fact that the text stresses that no one was absent from the city where there is a strong emphasis on all men being present.

⁴⁷Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 76.

Leviticus’ and because ‘[s]exual perverts deserve to die, period.’”⁴⁸ Revisionists argue that these so-called texts of terror are interpreted by homophobic Christians as prescriptions for punishing same-sex acts. The assertion is that when Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are interpreted together they prescribe the death penalty for any homosexual activity.⁴⁹ Cheng argues that this interpretation is outdated and does not apply today because “Leviticus actually refers to ritual laws and such prohibitions were culturally specific to the ancient Israelites.”⁵⁰

The Levitical laws do pertain to ritual laws that were culturally specific to ancient Israel but not all the Levitical laws were categorically the same. The argument that Christians pick and choose which of the Levitical laws to obey and disobey is simply misunderstood. Why Christians follow certain laws and no longer follow others is because there is a clear distinction between moral, civil, and ceremonial laws written in Leviticus. An important note to make is that though there are distinctions for believers under the New Covenant that these distinctions for Old Covenant Jews are not as clear. Jesus came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it therefore Christians are no longer under the old law but under the new law of grace. This means that certain dietary and sacrificial systems are set aside through Christ’s fulfillment of the law (Matt 5:17-20; Rom 8:3-5; Eph 2:15; Acts 10:12-15) where dietary laws like eating shellfish or sacrificing animals do not apply to Christians while commands like “thou shall not commit adultery” is still in effect.⁵¹ In regards to those who are under the Old Covenant, there is little distinction

⁴⁸Stephen V. Sprinkle, *Unfinished Lives: Reviving the Memory of LGBTQ Hate Crimes Victims* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2011), 39, quoted in Patrick Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ* (New York: Seabury Books, 2012), 6.

⁴⁹Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 42.

⁵⁰Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 42.

⁵¹Voddie Baucham Jr., *Expository Apologetics: Answering Objections with the Power of the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 126-28. Baucham explains how the law is threefold where there are moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws. The moral law is the continuous perfect rule written in our hearts while Christians are no longer under the other laws. The ceremonial laws are fulfilled in Christ’s finished work and judicial laws expire when the state of the people changes or no longer exists. He presents four arguments for choosing which laws to obey where first, Christians are not the only ones to pick and choose

between the different categorical laws as “it was a matter of the utmost moral consequences whether they kept the ceremonial laws.”⁵² For example, Daniel and his friends refrained from eating the same foods as the Babylonians. For Daniel and his friends, keeping their dietary laws was not only a ceremonial issue but a moral one. It was of utmost importance for them to distinguish themselves in this way as God had commanded for the Israelites to set themselves apart from other idol-worshipping nations.⁵³

The fact that many of the Levitical Laws are no longer followed does not mean that the principle for these laws are done away with as “it would be a mistake to regard the statutes in the Holiness Code as consisting of largely irrelevant purity regulations.”⁵⁴ Many of the purity laws are not necessarily separate or antithetical from moral laws but are closely tied together.⁵⁵ For example, Leviticus 18-20 is an expansion stemming from the Ten Commandments which are fundamentally moral laws that do not change according to time and culture. Christians cannot completely ignore the Levitical Laws deeming them irrelevant because it belongs to the Holiness Code but must see that “the same God who gave the laws of the Mosaic dispensation continues to regulate conduct

which laws to obey, it is something everyone does. Second is the threefold division of the law. Third is that the law is interpreted according to progressive revelation. Fourth is that the law is not the end in itself and points to something greater.

⁵²R.C. Sproul, “Which Laws Apply?” last modified May 1, 2017, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/which-laws-apply>.

⁵³Sproul, “Which Laws Apply?”

⁵⁴Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 121.

⁵⁵Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 142-43. Gagnon argues that the character of the prohibitions in the Holiness Code poses a fundamental problem of distorting God’s created order. The issue is not based on status inversion but on gender inversion which is closely related but not identical. This is evidenced not only anatomically where men and women complement one another sexually but biblically as God never intended for a man or woman to lie with someone of the same gender as they would with the opposite gender.

through the Spirit in believers.”⁵⁶ Although Christians are no longer required to follow certain Levitical Laws the moral foundation for these laws is still active and present.⁵⁷

The most compelling argument for the traditional interpretation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 is the use of the word “abomination” in Leviticus and Ezekiel.⁵⁸ All the practices mentioned in Leviticus 18:26-27, 29-30 are described and categorized together in the plural as “abominations” while in the preceding list in 18:6-23 when referring only to same-sex male intercourse is the word used in the singular as “an abomination.”⁵⁹ When looking at the entire Holiness Code, it is striking that “only homosexual intercourse is singled out for special mention within the list as “an abomination” (18:22 and 20:13).”⁶⁰ The same argument is made for Ezekiel 18:10-13 where all the preceding acts are labeled together as “abominations” but just like in Leviticus there is one practice which is labeled differently from other sexual sins and that is homosexual intercourse. The phrase in Lev 20:13 is nearly identical with Ezekiel 18:12 in stating that “they committed an abomination.”⁶¹

⁵⁶Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 121.

⁵⁷Charles C. Ryrie, "The End of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124, no. 495 (1967): 246, quoted in Ukleja, "Homosexuality and the Old Testament," 265. Even though the entire Mosaic Law has been done away with as a code, there are aspects of the law which are still present in the new law in Christ as “many of the individual commands within that law are new, but some are not. Some of the ones which are old were also found in the Mosaic law and they are now incorporated completely and [are] forever done away. As part of the law of Christ they are binding on the believer today” (265).

⁵⁸See James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, in vol. 38A of *Word Biblical Commentary*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 65. According to Dunn, homosexuality was common in the Greco-Roman world as he shows through the Biblical text and extrabiblical writings how it was viewed as an abomination. Dunn reveals how this was the case in both Greek and Jewish thought as he argues that the “Jewish reaction to [homosexuality] as a perversion, a pagan abomination, is consistent throughout the OT (Lev 18:22; 20:13; 1 Kgs 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kgs 23:7), with the sin of Sodom often recalled as a terrible warning (e.g., Gen 19:1–28; Deut 23:18; Isa 1:9–10; 3:9; Jer 23:14; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:43–58)” (65). Dunn goes to show that this was not only the case in early Judaism where it was a reaction against Greek sexual ethics but the “abhorrence of homosexuality” is found “also in the most influenced by Greek thought (Wisdom Sol 14:26; Ep. Arist. 152; Philo, Abr. 135–37; Spec. Leg. 3.37–42; Sib. Or. 3:184–86,764; Ps. Phoc. 3, 190–92, 213–14; Josephus, Ap. 2.273–75); note also the sustained polemic against sexual promiscuity and homosexuality in T. 12 Patr. (particularly T. Lev.. 14.6; 17.11; T. Naph. 4.1) and in Sib. Or. (e.g., 3.185–87,594–600, 763)” (65).

⁵⁹DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach*, 44-45.

⁶⁰Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 83.

⁶¹Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 83. The vice lists in Ezekiel 18 has strong

1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy

The homosexual debate surrounding 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 centers on the Greek words “μαλακοὶ” (malakoi) and “ἀρσενικοῖται” (arsenokoitai). Revisionists like Cheng argue that these texts are not condemning all homosexual activity but that Paul is condemning a specific type of homosexuality. In an attempt to justify homosexual relations Cheng argues that “the terms in First Corinthians and First Timothy do not refer to consensual or mutual sex acts, but rather relationships that exploit one of the parties.”⁶² In Cheng’s lecture on 1 Corinthians 6 and 7, he references Dale Martin’s book on *Sex and the Single Savior* where Martin traces over 400 years of how this word “malakoi” is translated in the English Bible. Cheng comments how fascinating it is that after 400 years there is no clear definition and “nobody seems to know how to translate this word”⁶³ Cheng makes the same argument for “arsenokoitai” in tracing the English translation for over 600 years that there is no one definition which is agreed upon.

The word “malakoi” has a broad range of meaning and varies upon interpreters but this vice is placed “alongside a list of offenses that lead to exclusion from the kingdom [which] suggests he refers to an offense more serious than simply a ‘limp wrist.’”⁶⁴ Such a serious punishment cannot be the result of a simple display of effeminacy. For example, Paul does not suggest in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 to this degree of

connections to the Holiness Code where the singular and plural use of the word abomination refers to sexual sins. This evidence shows that the singular use of abomination in Ezek 16:50 points to the sexual immorality described at Sodom which is likely in regards to the attempted act of homosexual intercourse.

⁶²Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 42. Cheng states that he will not explore these arguments in depth but wants to acknowledge that this is an area of contested scholarship.

⁶³Patrick Cheng, "The First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, Chapters 6 and 7," online theology class video (Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue, May 3, 2020). https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/play/6ZMqf7r6qjk3T4KVsqSDBvd9W428Kf6s1ikb_ftczBnkUiYEFZFL3ZbEQZeTkZ3jofgCDO7ZDvPEkEUvX?startTime=1588514574000&_x_zm_rtaid=f0bk0mArT5Ctr4siSiTMQ.1593013141262.6cc5e912a7f869557904cdee04944722&_x_zm_rhtaid=164.

⁶⁴Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 307-08. Gagnon contests Dale Martin’s interpretation of malakoi carrying the broad sense of being effeminate which pertains not only to passive homosexual males but heterosexual males who display effeminate traits. Martin argues that the meaning of the word is too broad to be taken seriously in today’s context.

penalty for men having long hair or women having short hair or women not wearing a veil while praying. Deyoung argues that all the major modern English translations with the exception of the King James Version “explicitly link arsenokoitai to homosexual behavior (which is what the KJV was getting at, too). The other word in question, malakoi, is not treated as uniformly, but just from looking at the major English translations we can see it is some kind of sin related to homosexuality.”⁶⁵ The significance of these English translations is that they are almost always correct and accurate as possible in their translations especially when they are in agreement.

When looking at the etymology of the Greek word “arsenokoitai” it appears to have been coined and used by Paul historically for the first time.⁶⁶ Deyoung describes how Paul created the word arsenokoitai from Leviticus by showing what it looks like in the Septuagint. “Meta *arsenos* ou koimēthēsē *koitēn* gynaikos (Lev 18:22). Hos an koimēthē meta *arsenos* *koitēn* gynaikos (Lev 20:13).”⁶⁷ As seen in both texts it is self-evident that Paul’s use of arsenokoitai directly came from the Holiness Code in Leviticus.⁶⁸ Cheng does not dispute this as he confirms that arsenokoitai was invented by Paul and that it is derived from Leviticus but Cheng teaches in his lectures on Corinthians that Paul’s use of the word is in reference to an economic sin. Cheng contends that whenever arsenokoitai is used it is within a list of vices stemming from a form of economic oppression whether it was homosexual or heterosexual.⁶⁹ Gagnon contests this

⁶⁵DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach*, 60-61. Deyoung lists nine major translations (ESV, HCSB, KJV, NAB, NASB, NIV (2011), NKJV, NLT, and NRSV). In eight out of the nine translations the words “homosexual, homosexuality, men who have sex with men, and male prostitutes” are stated.

⁶⁶DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach*, 44. According to DeYoung even revisionist scholars agree that Paul coined the term from Leviticus.

⁶⁷DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach*, 64.

⁶⁸DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach*, 64, It is particularly evident especially in Leviticus 20:13 that arsenokoitai was taken directly from the Holiness Code.

⁶⁹Cheng references Dale B. Martin’s book on *Sex and the Single Savior* in his lecture on 1 Corinthians 6 and 7. He quotes Martin who argues that arsenokoitein refers to a type of economic

idea on the possibility that arsenokoitai relates to heterosexuality as “in every instance where the arsenokoit- word group occurs in a context that offers clues as to its meaning (i.e., beyond mere inclusion in a vice list) it denotes homosexual intercourse.”⁷⁰

Pederasty as a means of economic exploitation through prostitution was only one of the reasons why it was wrong. The criminal act of pederasty goes beyond economic exploitation as the act of penetration is not only an act of adultery but a minor boy is robbed of his masculinity as he is treated like a female.⁷¹ What Cheng does not realize is that Martin is suggesting that rape and not homosexual penetration is the issue where the only type of crime being committed and condemned here is adultery involving deception or coercion.⁷² What was abhorrent to first-century Jews was not just the economic exploitations of same-sex intercourse but the distortion of male sexuality through same-sex acts whether or not it was exploitative.⁷³ If Paul was solely addressing the issue of economic exploitation of pederasty then he could have used the Greek word *paidēastes* instead.⁷⁴ George W. Knight contends in his commentary on 1 Timothy 1:10 that Paul’s attitude towards homosexuality in this passage along with other passages such as 1 Cor. 6:9–11 and Rom 1:24 is viewed as a “perversion of the God-ordained orientation of sex and reflects the OT condemnation of homosexuality The word

exploitation that is related to sexual means and not homosexual behavior.

⁷⁰Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 316-17. Wright has studied and produced the most evidence on this but Martin has disputed Wright’s work. Martin has limited his study to the five earliest discussions after the New Testament but Gagnon disputes Martins work by addressing five other texts Martin has left out in his work.

⁷¹Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 317.

⁷²Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 319.

⁷³Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 335. 1 Timothy would introduce sins pertaining to homosexuality as breaking the eighth commandment which is against stealing. The idea was that those committing homosexual acts were “men stealers” robbing or kidnapping males of their marital rights. It was also considered an act of forcing males to change their gender role and identity. Homosexuality was also see as breaking the seventh commandment which is committing adultery.

⁷⁴Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 325; DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach*, 65.

does not refer, as some writers have alleged, only to sex with young boys or to male homosexual prostitutes, but simply to homosexuality itself.”⁷⁵ Paul’s use of “arsenokoitai” in 1 Timothy 1:10 also reinforces Paul’s stance in teaching against same-sex behavior into the early years of post-Pauline churches. Not only does 1 Timothy 1:10 show consistency in Paul’s stance against homosexual behavior but it is even clearer in 1:8-9 when describing the vice list as having come from the law.⁷⁶

Paul chose to use the Mosaic law in creating a new word for the purpose of condemning not only exploitative forms of homosexuality but all forms of same-sex intercourse. Deyoung rightly raises the question of whether the vices listed in 1 Corinthians 5-6 opposed only exploitative forms of incest, adultery, fornication, and prostitution. Paul was clearly and logically not only warning Christians to flee from exploitative forms of sexual immorality but all types of sexual perversions.⁷⁷ When glancing over 1 Corinthians 5-6 and 11 it could appear as if Cheng assumes that the whole list of vices is generally exploitative when grouped together but he ignores that the list is sectioned into different categories.⁷⁸ All four vices in 6:9 “constitute forms of sexual intercourse that occur outside of the context of marriage between a man and a woman. In that case the terms malakoi and arsenokoitai are meant to signify, at least as representative types, all who participate in same-sex intercourse.”⁷⁹ The words “malakoi” and “arsenokoitai” are correctly understood in our contemporary context because Paul is

⁷⁵George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 85.

⁷⁶Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 334-46. Scroggs argues that the law in which Paul refers to cannot be determined whether it comes from the civil law or Mosaic law. Gagnon refutes this by presenting 4 considerations as to why Paul is referencing the Mosaic law.

⁷⁷DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach*, 44-45. Deyoung contests that Paul was only opposed to exploitative forms of incest or admonishing Christians to flee from only exploitative forms of sexual immorality. Paul was condemning all types of licentiousness whether it be exploitative or consensual forms of adultery, fornication, and prostitution.

⁷⁸Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 316.

⁷⁹Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 330.

referring to every type of same-sex intercourse. The reason that a “first-century Jew or Christian would regard the prohibitions in Lev 18:22 and 20:13 as absolute and affecting any male-to-male sexual intercourse, even if the primary example of his/her culture were confined to pederastic models”⁸⁰ is because the sole concern for these laws was for purity. An important observation of this Levitical law is that it does not take into account what is “‘good’ or ‘just’ or ‘loving’ who the males might be, how old they are, what their relationship, whether there has been mutual consent. It matters only that one of them will be physically polluted by taking the part of a female and will thus defile the act itself and his partner.”⁸¹ The primary emphasis of the Holiness Code in being clean and undefiled is the reason why the prohibition against same-sex intercourse is absolute and unqualified therefore proscribing against all same-sex relations.

Romans 1

The question of collective punishment found in Romans 1 is raised and challenged by Cheng. He argues on whether the debate over Paul’s interlocutor in “Romans was merely a rhetorical trap by Paul to show the Jewish Christians that they were actually no better than the Gentile Christians.”⁸² Paul’s argument has two parts. The first part is the idea that Paul is not making a moral judgment based on his personal beliefs but providing arbitrary examples for the sake of argument. If this actually is the case then it cannot be definitively known whether or not Paul believed in what he wrote to be morally wrong. The idea that Paul was not making a moral argument is contested since Paul “gives no indication, either in 1:18-32 or in 2:1-3:20, that his assessment of

⁸⁰Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 330.

⁸¹Victor Paul Furnish, “The Bible and Homosexuality: Reading the Texts in Context,” in *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, ed. Jeffrey S. Siker (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 20.

⁸²Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 43.

same-sex intercourse in 1:26-27 was little more than a piece of rhetorical exaggeration.”⁸³ The fact that Paul was setting a rhetorical trap does not mean that Paul did not believe in what he was saying.

Paul was not presenting morally neutral practices but was intentionally comparing vice lists to virtue lists in order to teach believers how to live holy lives. Paul’s use of vice lists is found in four texts (Rom 1:29-31; Gal 5:19-21; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 2 Cor 12:20-21) which all point back to the moral tradition found in the Old Testament. This is argued by Mark Hall’s study on the historical and hermeneutical approach to Paul’s vice-lists. Hall discovers that “Paul’s epistolary vice lists reflect instructions the apostle gives to the Church, by which he establishes a moral framework based on the Old Testament upon which he commands believers to live righteously.”⁸⁴ In three of these four vice lists, Paul condemns homosexual behavior.⁸⁵ To make the argument that Paul did not view same-sex intercourse as sin is difficult if not impossible. If this were the case then it would mean that in his list the only vice Paul did not believe to be a sin was homosexuality. This is highly doubtful and difficult to prove historically as well as hermeneutically.

The second part of this argument is that the penalty for same-sex intercourse in the Scriptures is extreme therefore outdated today.⁸⁶ This is simply not true as the

⁸³Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 269.

⁸⁴Mark R. Hall, “A Historical and Hermeneutical Approach to the Vice-Lists A Pauline Perspective Concerning Homosexuality and the Holy Spirit,” *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 3, no. 1 (2018): 32.

⁸⁵DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach*, 74. Deyoung reveals that in the New Testament there are at least eight vice lists where every single verse deals with sexual immorality (Mark 7:21–22; Rom. 1:24–31; 13:13; 1 Cor. 6:9–10; Gal. 5:19–21; Col. 3:5–9; 1Tim. 1:9–10; Rev. 21:8). In these vice lists either multiple sexual immoralities are mentioned or a type of sexual immorality is prominent within these lists.

⁸⁶Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*, 43. According to Cheng, Paul references the holiness code in Romans 1:32 where punishment for homosexuality is death. Such a righteous decree from God that anyone who practices homosexuality deserves to die is an extremity especially as a means of collective punishment.

punishment does fit the crime because “homoeroticism constitutes an extreme expression of human revolt against the divinely ordained natural order and not just a subversion of customary gender roles.”⁸⁷ This is a strange argument when considering laws against adultery and incest since these laws do not suddenly become irrelevant guides for sexual ethics because they no longer carry the death penalty as found in the Scriptures. Why these texts are still relevant today is because there is a shift from the Old to New Covenant where the penalty for abhorrent offenses changed from capital punishment to ex-communication. Two examples of this are found first in Paul’s exhortation for Corinthian believers to expel the man engaged in incest instead of demanding his execution (1 Cor 5). The second is Jesus preventing the public execution of the woman caught in adultery. Although Jesus removes the capital punishment for her actions, He does not dismiss the moral responsibility and weight of her sexual misconduct as He commands her to “sin no more” (John 8:1-11).⁸⁸ The law of grace is revealed in the New Covenant where the extreme punishment of execution is put aside and ex-communication is put in place in order to bring the sinner to repentance.

Revisionist thinking on Paul’s argument in Romans 1 is backward as Paul’s argument is not focusing on the heinous sin of exploitation of non-consensual relationships but on the abomination of consensual forms of same-sex intercourse. In the case of same-sex consensual intercourse, both parties are guilty because there is mutual consent therefore, both are without excuse.⁸⁹ The same-sex relationship Paul describes in verse 27 is not exploitative but is mutually consensual as both participants are “consumed with passion for one another.” James Dunn contests any suggestion that Paul solely or particularly has pederasty in view. He argues that the entire phrase “committing

⁸⁷Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 368.

⁸⁸Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 114-5.

⁸⁹Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 329.

shameless acts” in verse 27 is a clear indication “that not merely homosexual tendency or desire is in view, but the genital act itself” is an indictment that “include[s] all kinds of homosexual practice, female as well as male, and was not directed against one kind of homosexual practice in distinction from another.”⁹⁰ Paul further exhibits homosexual relationships as being mutually consensual as he mentions lesbianism in verse 26. Same-sex intercourse between women does not have the same issues of dominance and submission or social hierarchy as same-sex intercourse between men because there is no penile penetration.⁹¹ The male and female genitalia are anatomical clues revealing God’s intended creation of gendered bodies for the purpose of opposite-gender pairings.⁹² The complaint that Paul makes is not so much about God’s design for conjugal marriage or procreation but the exchanging of what is contrary to nature which is a rebellion against God and His laws.⁹³

Lastly, central to Cheng’s argument is that Paul’s admonishment is not in reference to homosexuality and gender-variant behavior but idol worship. Cheng claims that in Romans “same-sex and gender-variant behavior is actually described as God’s *punishment* for idolatry” and that God punishes “those who engaged in idol-worship and served the creature instead of the Creator.”⁹⁴ According to Paul same-sex and gender-variant behavior is the consequence for idolatry but that does not mean that Paul is condemning idolatry as the reason for homosexuality as Cheng might suggest. Cheng

⁹⁰Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 65.

⁹¹Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 363.

⁹²Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 365.

⁹³See Gwen B. Saylor, "Beyond the Biblical Impasse: Homosexuality Through the Lens of Theological Anthropology," *Dialog* 44, no. 1 (2005): 81-89. Saylor believes that from a theological anthropological view of Scripture that the Holiness Code prohibits homosexual intercourse not based on the act itself but because it is a mixing of gender roles which is considered an abomination. Paul condemns same-sex sexual intercourse as “unnatural” because what is at stake is proper gender role distinction according to a hierarchical theological anthropology. Men are defined as those who actively penetrate and women are defined as those who are passively penetrated.

⁹⁴Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 43.

makes the mistake of assuming that the close relationship between idolatry and sexual immorality meant that Jews believed homosexuality was only wrong because it was associated with foreign idol worship.⁹⁵ Idolatry and homosexual behavior are not just in succession but are in parallel as both sins willfully suppress the truth about the nature of God's design.⁹⁶ Even though they are closely tied together Paul still separates and singles out same-sex intercourse from idolatry as they are both "particularly clear and revolting examples of the suppression of the truth about God accessible to pagans in creation and nature."⁹⁷ The point that Paul is trying to make is that societies and cultures which do not worship the true and living God but worship lifeless man-made idols will be handed over to their own pre-existing desires.⁹⁸

When Paul states that God hands them over to the lusts of their hearts and their dishonorable passions, he is not only referring to idolatry but is alluding to the fall of Adam. Deyoung draws this obvious allusion in Romans 1 which parallel the creation account in Genesis.⁹⁹ These allusions to creation are the foundation of Paul's writing in regard to nature. Deyoung contends that the creation account is actually in the forefront

⁹⁵Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 305-306. Gagnon points to other vice lists by Paul where sexual immorality is prominent but do not have any mention of idolatry (Rom 13:13; 1 Cor 5:10; 2 Cor 12:20-21).

⁹⁶Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 286; Evan Lenow, "Exchanging the Natural for the Unnatural," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 49, no. 1 (2006): 33-36. Lenow acknowledges that the larger context of Romans 1 is idolatry but disagrees that Paul is describing homosexuality as an effect caused by idolatry. Idolatry and homosexuality are not described by Paul as having a cause and effect relationship but are portrayed as comparable distortions of proper worship. Lenow reveals that the heart of the problem is rebellion where idolatry and homosexuality are both a manifestation of defiance against God.

⁹⁷Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 337.

⁹⁸See Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 337; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 64. According to Dunn the handing over to their "disgraceful passions" is not the reason for God's wrath but the result of it. Failing to honor God is the dishonoring of oneself by not recognizing that "only God has authority as Creator to order and dispose of that which is created."

⁹⁹DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach*, 54-55. Deyoung shows the parallels between Romans 1 and the creation account. Paul displays the creation of the world in verse 20 and the creator in verse 25. He also parallels the language of animals in verse 23 reflecting that of Genesis 1:30. Lastly verse 23 in the Greek uses language that mirrors Genesis 1:26 verbatim in the Septuagint.

of Paul's writings where "'nature' must mean more than 'prevailing customs and social norms.'"¹⁰⁰ This means that the influence of foreign cults and idol worship is not the only reason for Paul's judgment against same-sex behavior since "the full range of sinful passions and the behavior preceded the worship of idols for Paul."¹⁰¹ Paul is fully aware that the vices he listed in 1:29-31 are not pertaining to only Jews but also to nonbelievers who did not worship idols literally. Paul acknowledges this truth in 1:28 when he includes those who "did not see fit to acknowledge God" which refers to non-believers.¹⁰² As a result, the Deutero-Pauline texts reveal that God unequivocally rejected same-sex behavior for believers and unbelievers not solely because of idolatry but because it was against nature.

Conclusion

The Word of God has always been questioned ever since the beginning of creation by Satan starting with Adam and Eve leading up to the temptation of Jesus Christ. The Apostles and the early church also fought to dispel false teachings that perverted the Gospel (Matt 7:15-20; Acts 20:28-30; Gal 1:6-8; 2 Cor 11:4; 1 Tim 6:3-5; Titus 1:10-16; 2 Peter 2). The church today continues to fight against revisionists like Cheng who desire to do more than simply remove homophobic readings from the biblical text. The desire is to bring forth a new reformation by revising Scripture to prescribe not only consensual monogamous same-sex relationships but to allow all types of sexual perversions. Revisionists attempt to reinterpret Scripture by using historical arguments to

¹⁰⁰DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach*, 55.

¹⁰¹Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 337.

¹⁰²Saylor, "Beyond the Biblical Impasse," 84. Saylor points to the fact that Paul's "language of impurity, particularly situated as it is here in the context of condemnation of pagan idolatry, harkens back to the language and concerns of Leviticus 18. . . . Here Paul condemns same-sex intercourse as the unnatural act of people who previously have turned away from God" (84). The explanation for why God abandons the Gentiles is because of their idolatrous behavior which is displayed through their same-sex sexual relations.

drive a theological agenda as they are not able to provide sufficient evidence to build a hermeneutical argument from the text. Instead of presenting their case from the text, they appeal to emotions to win people over to their cause. Despite attempts to historically dismiss traditional interpretations early Jewish and Christian literature demonstrates clearly that homosexual acts were considered a sin. Even though pederasty was the most common form of same-sex relations in the Greco-Roman era this did not mean that consensual same-sex monogamous relationships were not present.¹⁰³ Over the centuries the church has acknowledged that all same-sex behavior is a sin as it is self-evident from a plain reading of the text that same-sex acts are deemed categorically sinful. This truth is not morally relative according to culture, space, or time but is an absolute truth of the imago Dei ever since the creation of man and woman.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 38-41. For Jewish scholars like Philo and Josephus the problem with pederasty was not simply the age of the boys but because of their gender which was male.

¹⁰⁴John R. W. Stott and John Wyatt, *Issues Facing Christians Today: 4th Edition*, ed. Roy McCloughry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 473. Stott argues that homosexuality is not a condition from the created order but is a result of the fallen disorder.

CHAPTER 5

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The final chapter in this thesis considers the theoretical implications of applying plausibility structures as a solution for reducing the marginalization of LGBT self-identifying Christians in the Asian American Church. When it comes to Christians and the church¹ there is a plausibility problem where previous teachings on same-sex attraction (SSA) and gender dysphoria (GD) are no longer considered viable today.² In the past decade, there has been a major shift in churches affirming same-sex marriages and transgender identities therefore the church needs to learn how to faithfully minister in a winsome and compelling manner that is relevant in today's context while honoring the Lord. Being a faithful witness means learning how to speak truth that does not add to the burden LGBT self-identifying Christians already carry and to be clear about how change is possible.³ This chapter will begin by briefly addressing some of the issues with the current plausibility structures the church has for addressing SSA and GD. After viewing the current models that are in place, we will explore how the church can be “welcoming and mutually transforming”⁴ by creating redemptive spaces in four areas: language,

¹When addressing “church” it will be in reference to Asian American Evangelical Churches.

²Same-sex attraction is a description of a sexual feeling or desire for the same gender. When referring to same-sex attraction it will simply be SSA. Gender dysphoria is the dissonance a person experiences between their biological gender and the gender the person identifies as. When referring to gender dysphoria it will simply be GD.

³Denny Burk and Heath Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality: What the Bible says about Sexual Orientation and Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 64.

⁴Missio Alliance, “The Welcoming and Mutually Transforming Community Among the LGBTQ: An Example and Some Questions,” last modified August 30, 2010, <https://www.missioalliance.org/the-welcoming-and-mutually-transforming-community-among-the-lgbtq-an-example-and-some-questions>. David Fitch offers an alternative for the church's use of welcoming but not affirming which carries a negative connotation. Fitch uses and suggests using a positive label such as “welcoming and mutually transforming.”

identity, family/friendship, and marriage. The goal is that through these four plausibility structures churches will learn how to be welcoming and mutually transforming in order to reduce the marginalization of LGBT self-identifying Christian in the Asian American Church. In addition, the hope is that this change in the church will help attract and retain friends and family members of LGBT self-identifying Christians.

Plausibility Structures

The question for the church today is not whether those who have SSA or GD should be welcomed but how the church should welcome them while being faithful to God's Word. In past discussions on sexual orientation and gender identity, there have been two main approaches. On one end of the spectrum, the focus has either been on change and transformation while the other approach has been to accept and affirm a person's sexual orientation and gender identity.⁵ Neither of the two opposing views on gender and sexuality is completely misguided as the desire for both sides is to help those who are struggling with SSA and GD. On the other hand, there are areas in which both sides of the spectrum have been an obstacle for LGBT self-identifying Christians who are trying to work out their sexuality and gender with their faith. The question is, "How can the church resolve this?" By simply asking this question the church can begin to engage this question by removing obstacles that prevent people who experience SSA and GD from coming to Christ.⁶ Grenz argues that "God's primary goal is not the transformation of one's sexual preference Rather, God is primarily concerned about how we live in the midst of the fallenness of this present age."⁷ The primary person we need to look to as

⁵Ed Shaw, *Same-Sex Attraction and the Church: The Surprising Plausibility of the Celibate Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 26-28. There is another title for the book which is printed in the UK and titled *The Plausibility Problem: The Church and Same-Sex Attraction*. Shaw addresses in his book the 9 missteps that Christians and churches make when attempting to address the issue of homosexuality.

⁶Mark A. Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Parents, Pastors, and Friends* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2010), 102.

⁷Stanely J. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality*

Christians are not ourselves but look to Jesus and consider how He treated sexual outcasts and welcomed them into the body of Christ. When churches are able to implement “this kind of community [it] avoids “arrogant optimism” and replaces it with “realistic biblical hope.”⁸

Mark Yarhouse believes that there are essentially two different models when the church attempts to be missional. The first model focuses on being missional inwardly by communicating within the church what it means to be a faithful witness in regard to sexuality and gender. The criticism with this model is that it is not being missional at all as the church is not directed towards welcoming outsiders. The second model focuses on being missional outwardly where the church’s emphasis is on being inviting to the local community. The criticism with this model is that the church has a tendency to lower its biblical standards in order to be welcoming to the point where they no longer become a distinct witness to the world. In the past few years, there has been an emergence of a third model or way in which the church is attempting to accommodate both sides of the debate on gender and sexuality. An attempt on a biblical view of this model comes from Paul’s discussion on disputable matters within the church. The claim is that a third way “departs from the ‘open and affirming’ and the ‘love the sinner, hate the sin’ approach” and they look at “how the biblical prohibitions apply in the case of monogamous gay relationships as a ‘disputable matter’ in the Romans 14-15 sense.”⁹ The question that is raised is whether or not the church can come to an agreement on this matter without separating from each other and firmly hold their respective positions according to their conscience. A third-way church chooses “not to treat this matter as something we have to hold in

(Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 135.

⁸Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 99.

⁹Ken Wilson, *A Letter to My Congregation: An Evangelical Pastor’s Path to Embracing People who are Gay, Lesbian and Transgender in the Company of Jesus* (Canton, MI: Read the Spirit Books, 2014), 112.

common order to share a true unity of the Spirit.”¹⁰ New City Church of Los Angeles (NCCLA) which is a multi-ethnic church plant from an immigrant Korean Church is an example of a third-way model. The reason why NCCLA adopted the third-way model is because many do not have a sense of satisfaction at an affirming church. Members comment that the focus is on their sexuality where their teachings feel watered down and do not sense a high view of the Scriptures. In light of this “they want to come to a church where there is spiritual vitality without condemnation.”¹¹ The church has struggled in figuring out how to reach out to these groups. This decision was very difficult for the church as they decided to be inclusive of both sides A and B while rejecting side X.¹² They acknowledge that they are not able to fully satisfy both sides but the leadership was able to come to a consensus for the sake of the church’s unity.¹³ Many applaud New City’s efforts in engaging with this issue in this way but still, the third way is not really another way at all. With its policies and practices, it is still an affirming church as it revises the biblical and traditional interpretation of homosexuality as being a disputable matter.¹⁴ This issue on gender and sexuality is considered to be the single most divisive

¹⁰Wilson, *A Letter to My Congregation*, 113.

¹¹Kevin Haah, *Starting Missional Churches: Life with God in the Neighborhood*, ed. Mark Branson and Nicholas Warnes (Downers Grove, IL: InterVaristy Press, 2014), 100.

¹²Side A is affirming of same-sex behavior and marriage while B is non-affirming of same-sex behavior and marriage. Side X rejects a gay identity and prescribes heterosexuality. For further clarification Side A, B, C and X is defined in the following section of this chapter on “Redeeming Language.”

¹³New City Church of Los Angeles, “New City Church of LA LGBTQ Statement and Policy,” last modified February 28, 2020, <http://newcitychurchla.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/New-City-Church-of-LA-LGBTQ-Statement-and-Policy.pdf>. An example from their policy where they were able to accommodate both sides and come to a consensus is in regards to their membership and leadership: “(1) We accept into membership everyone who puts their faith in Jesus, is baptized, and signs the membership covenant, regardless of their sexual orientation; (2) LGBTQ Christians may fully participate in the life of the church and may be called to serve in any leadership position, except that (3) New City pastors may not officiate same-sex weddings but may provide marriage counseling services.”

¹⁴See a review by R. D. McClenagan, “A Letter to My Congregation: An Evangelical’s Pastor’s Path to Embracing People Who are Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender into the Company of Jesus,” *Themelios: An International Journal for Students of Theological and Religious Studies* 40, no. 2 (2015): 568-70. See D.A. Carson, “On Disputable Matters,” *Themelios: An International Journal for Students of Theological and Religious Studies* 40, no. 3 (2015): 383-88. Carson argues from the biblical texts that just because something is disputable, it does not make it a disputable matter.

issue facing the church today therefore the church cannot avoid it by being accommodating and compromising God's Word but must find a way in which Christ addressed these types of issues in truth and in love.

Redeeming Language

For over a century the discussion on gender and sexuality has centered on theories of nature and nurture.¹⁵ As a result, the cultural mores on gender and sexuality have been determined by science and sociology. The discussion on gender and sexuality is heavily centered around labels that have been dictated by the culture. The predicament that the church faces is in going against the cultural labels that have already been established in society. In order for the church to help LGBT self-identifying Christians, the church must begin by engaging the cultural labels that are influencing and shaping the views of believers. Christians cannot speak the truth in love without knowing the language that surrounds the debate.¹⁶ There are a lot of terminologies that believers are unfamiliar with and so the church needs to begin by introducing and defining these terms. It is necessary to educate the church so that there is less confusion when talking about gender and sexuality. The church needs to start within the leadership and make clear statements, policies, procedures, and practices with proper language and terminology that would be sensitive yet faithful to the Word of God.¹⁷

¹⁵See Jack Drescher, "Out of DSM: Depathologizing Homosexuality" *Behavioral Sciences* 5, no. 4 (2015): 565-75. In the first edition of the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-I) was categorized as a disorder. In the 1960's there started to be a shift in the idea that homosexual orientation was no longer a mental illness. In 1968 the second edition of the DSM-II still listed homosexuality as a disorder but in 1973 the APA voted to remove the diagnosis of "homosexuality" as a mental disorder and by 1974 it was removed.

¹⁶According to New Testament Scriptures believers are called to be good stewards with their tongue (Matt 12:36-37; Eph 4:15; Col 4:6; Js 3:1-12).

¹⁷See The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, "Nashville Statement," accessed August 18, 2020, <https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement>; Evangelical Free Church of America, "A Church Statement on Human Sexuality: Homosexuality and Same-Sex 'Marriage,'" last modified May, 2013, https://www.efca.org/sites/default/files/resources/docs/2013/05/a_church_statement_on_human_sexuality_3.pdf. The policy provided by EFCA is not an official document but to be used as a resource provided by the Spiritual Heritage Committee. See also Christopher Yuan, *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: A Qualitative Study of Reducing Marginalization of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Same-Sex Attracted Students*

In the discussion on homosexuality, there is a three-tier distinction between SSA, homosexual orientation, and gay identity. These terms are not the same as people often collapse the three-tiers into one category assuming that someone who has SSA is homosexually oriented or has a gay identity. This is also true for people experiencing GD where it is assumed that they are transgendered or homosexual which is not always the case. According to Yarhouse, the first tier is “SSA” which is “the most descriptive way people can talk about their feelings. This is the part of the equation they can’t control. . . . This fact doesn’t say anything about either their identity or their behavior.” The second Tier is “Homosexual Orientation” which is a person who experiences “SSA that is strong enough, durable enough, and persistent enough for them to feel that they are oriented toward the same sex The person is simply describing the amount and persistence of their own attraction, which is based on what they perceive attraction to be.”¹⁸ The third tier is “Gay Identity” which is “the most prescriptive. It is a sociocultural label that people use to describe themselves, and it is a label that is imbued with meaning in our culture.”¹⁹

After distinguishing the different levels of sexuality it is necessary to know the different sides of the debate. The four sides are labeled as Side A, B, C, and X which can be defined as follows:

Side A refers to gay Christians who believe that same-sex sexual relationships can be morally permissible, whereas Side B refers to gay Christians who view same-sex sexual relationships as morally impermissible. Side C has referred to those who are either undecided or in tension around these conclusions. Side X refers to those who believe Christians should disidentify with gay identity and pursue heterosexuality.²⁰

at Christian Colleges and Universities (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 103-31. Yuan provides clear ideas and action steps for policies and practices at an institutional level. This can be helpful for churches as a resource to adapt and implement accordingly.

¹⁸Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 58-59.

¹⁹Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 58-59.

²⁰Mark Yarhouse et al., *Listening to Sexual Minorities: A Study of Faith and Sexual Identity on Christian College Campuses* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 34. According to Yarhouse

It is necessary to make these distinctions as it brings clarity in describing what a person is feeling. These distinctions create an intellectual space that helps people sort out their sexual identity. Yarhouse gives an example of how this three-tier distinction helped a young man named Todd create “just enough room for him to be able to ask and answer questions about what his attractions meant to him, how they fit into his overall sense of identity, and how they might relate to his personal faith as a follower of Christ.”²¹

In the discussion on transgenderism, it is helpful to begin by looking at the broader context of sex and gender by differentiating biological sex and gender identity.²² Biological sex refers to male and female chromosomes, hormones, reproductive anatomy, and genitalia while gender is the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of being male and female.²³ Biological sex is not the same as gender identity and roles. Gender identity deals with personal experiences, such as feelings of masculinity and femininity. Gender role is the learned behavior and adoption of cultural norms and expectations for males and females.²⁴ It is important to know that there are multiple labels in understanding the spectrum of gender identities but the primary distinction that needs to be made is between GD and transgender.²⁵ The term “GD” is defined as “the experience of distress associated with the incongruence wherein one’s psychological and emotional gender identity does not match one’s biological sex” whereas “transgender” is “an umbrella term for the many

these terms originated from Bridges Across the Divide Project and utilized by the Gay Christian Network.

²¹Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 54-55.

²²For an analysis on how gender identity came to the forefront in the discussion on social justice issues see Andrew T. Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say About Gender Identity?* (Surrey, UK: The Good Book Company, 2017), 19-27.

²³Biological sex has primary and secondary sex characteristics. Primary characteristics pertain to parts of the reproductive system like the penis, testes, scrotum, ovaries, uterus and vagina. Secondary characteristics pertain to nonreproductive traits like growth in muscles, facial hair, breasts and hips.

²⁴Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 18.

²⁵See Appendix 1 for a glossary of gender identities.

ways in which people might experience and/or present and express (or live out) their gender identities differently from people whose sense of gender identity is congruent with their biological sex.”²⁶

Many people struggle in trying to understand whether gender dysphoria is a biological or mental disorder or simply imagined.²⁷ Despite the ongoing debate on the diagnosis of GD, many gender dysphoric people suffer real distress with impaired functioning as a result of psychological incongruence with their experienced or expressed gender.²⁸ Andrew Walker describes GD as a real experience where “it feels like their biological body is lying. A person in this situation really thinks that he or she is, should be, or would feel better as, the gender that is opposite to their biological sex, or no gender at all.”²⁹ Walker goes on to describe the compassionate posture in which the church needs to have in understanding that “Gender dysphoria is not chosen; it is ‘a deep, painful struggle, causing pain, anguish and tears.’”³⁰ This does not mean that we simply acquiesce what culture has defined and deemed as morally right and acceptable. For us as believers the answer to these questions on gender dysphoria is located in the “authority, knowledge, and trust where it can find a firm, stable, fulfilling foundation-in the crucified Creator.”³¹ From this foundation the church can answer practical questions on how to

²⁶Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 25.

²⁷The American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed the term “gender identity disorder” from their DSM-5 manual in 2012 and changed it to “gender dysphoria.” The new definition refers to an emotional distress as a result of “a strong desire to be rid of one’s primary and/or secondary sex characteristics because of a marked incongruence with one’s experienced/expressed gender” (452-3). American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013, quoted in Zowie Davy and Michael Toze. “What Is Gender Dysphoria? A Critical Systematic Narrative Review,” *Transgender Health* 3, no. 1 (2018): 159-69.

²⁸Davy and Toze, “What Is Gender Dysphoria?,” 160. Davy and Toze question the change in diagnosis for GD in light of the fact that not all trans and intersex people suffer stress or impaired functioning. They argue that the manual clearly states that not everyone experiences distress because of incongruence.

²⁹Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, 32.

³⁰Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, 83.

³¹Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, 45.

think, speak, and love friends and family members who are experiencing gender dysphoria.³²

The church needs to not only know how to respond to questions about SSA and GD but learn how to speak with convictional kindness. Many times, traditional churches lose committed and faithful members because of insensitive words that are spoken whether intentional or not. Travis Collins shares stories of how families have left traditional churches for affirming ones because parents feel their child is treated as second class. Judgmental and hurtful comments that are condescending causes hurt to the degree that families have no choice other than to leave the church. Although this is not the case for every traditional church, what “parents of gay sons and daughters need [are] friends, not judges. They need invitations to dinner, but not evenings full of advice.”³³ The church needs to educate its members on how to season their words with grace in order to help reframe this perception that believers are Bible bashers and homophobes. In order to combat against the perception that believers are homophobes begins with correcting the stereotype that there is such a thing as homophobia. The sheer definition of homophobia does not fit the category of phobia at all as it is not an irrational fear like claustrophobia or agoraphobia. Currently the “use of the word as a pejorative designation for anyone who questions the morality of homosexual relationships and same-sex intercourse is nonproductive. Rightly understood, homophobia is a prejudice.”³⁴

In order to fight against any hatred or devaluation of people simply because they have SSA need to first admit and confess any personal prejudices they have against LGBT self-identifying Christians and then repent of those sins.³⁵ Grenz gives an example

³²See Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, 121-31.

³³Travis Collins, *What Does It Mean To Be Welcoming?: Navigating LGBT Questions in Your Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic Press, 2018), 32.

³⁴Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming*, 149.

³⁵Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming*, 129. Grenz gives suggestions on what we can confess

of a married couple named Jerry and Rosie who confessed to their pastor Don Baker that despite Jerry being married struggled with SSA. Upon hearing this Don confessed his own sins of prejudice against homosexuals and so the three of them knelt down to pray. He asked God for forgiveness and grace for the trap that each of them was caught up in. They wept together and shared about the helplessness they all felt. Don then goes on to describe that this was not just about a husband who wanted to be free from his sexual desires or a wife who wanted her husband to change but it was also about a pastor seeking freedom from a prejudice that prevented God from using him in this type of redemptive ministry.³⁶

Countless testimonies have been written by believers who are trying to walk faithfully in obedience to the Word of God while experiencing GD and SSA. The church needs to hear these types of stories that are being ignored and deemed by society as hateful and hurtful. The idea that sexual orientation cannot change is a false narrative as a major study reveals that a shift in sexual orientation and identity is possible. This longitudinal study examined ninety-eight candidates who attempted a religiously mediated sexual orientation change for over a span of six to seven years. It was reported that over half of the participants had successful general outcomes that were categorized as meaningful changes.³⁷ Stanton Jones and Yarhouse concluded that “the findings of this

in regards to our prejudices against LGBT self-identifying Christians.

³⁶Don Baker, *Beyond Rejection: The Church, Homosexuality, and Hope* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1985), 56, quoted in Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming*, 149. Through counseling and discipleship Jerry’s homosexual encounters ceased and the temptation to sin drastically diminished over time. Don writes that some have experienced genuine, complete, and immediate deliverance from homosexuality but this was not the case for Jerry as the process would be long, enduring, and painful. For many this journey comes with a lot of failures but there is hope as change is visible even if it be ever so slightly.

³⁷Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse “A Longitudinal Study of Attempted Religiously Mediated Sexual Orientation Change,” *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 37, no. 5 (2011): 404. It is important to note that this study is not proof that sexual change is possible for everyone but that there appears to be meaningful and real changes of sexual orientation and identity for some. The study also observed that there did not seem to be an average increase of psychological distress for those who participated in the study.

study appear to contradict the commonly expressed view that sexual orientation is not changeable and that the attempt to change is highly likely to result in harm for those who make such an attempt.”³⁸ The purpose of this study is not intended as a prescription for change nor should the church use it as such. It is highly recommended instead that the church help people in sorting out their own sexual and gender identity rather than presuppose that their identity has already been formed by their desires and attractions. It is important for leaders and members of the church not to impose their own personal ideas of gender and sexuality onto others but it is necessary to be prepared to ask questions and have a response to the core questions that are most commonly asked.

According to Andrew Marin the core questions typically are always the same so it is necessary to be prepared to ask these questions and have a response that will continue the conversation. The most common questions that are asked is: “Do you think that gays and lesbians are born that way? Do you think homosexuality is a sin? Can a GLBT person change? Do you think that someone can be gay and Christian? Are GLBT people going to hell?”³⁹ These types of questions are loaded and closed-ended where the immediate response in saying yes or no can prevent the discussion from continuing any further. The suggestion given by Marin is to reframe these questions in such a way that would create further dialogue rather than giving a quick answer that stops the conversation. For example, the question “do you think homosexuality is a sin?” can be reframed as “how do you relate to a God whose standards are so unachievable?” or “how do you deal with the moral vulnerability we all have to live with?”⁴⁰ Another example is

³⁸Jones and Yarhouse “A Longitudinal Study,” 422-23. The study found evidence that fifty-three percent were categorized as successful outcomes where twenty-three percent reported successful heterosexual adjustment and an additional thirty percent reported in being able to have a stable behavioral chastity where they no longer identify themselves by their sexual orientation.

³⁹Andrew Marin, *Love Is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 178.

⁴⁰Marin, *Love is an Orientation*, 183.

“can a GLBT person change their sexual orientation?” which can be reframed by asking “what do you think is changing in your life as a result of where you’re at in relation to God?” or “where do you think God wants to move you on your own personal continuum of change?”⁴¹ This is how Jesus constantly responded when asked a question. He would reframe the question and then ask the question back. In doing so Jesus was able to get to the point of why the question was asked and then address the actual problem.⁴² It is helpful to learn how to ask open-ended questions and then walk through the Scriptures with believers in order to hear what God has to say about who they are in Christ Jesus.

Redeeming Identity

A key issue that the church faces when engaging with SSA and GD is prescribing heterosexuality and gender normative behavior as the first and primary solution rather than Christlikeness. For those who associate their sexual behavior with their identity hear an underlying message from the church saying God hates you so you need to change. Phrases like “hate the sin but love the sinner” becomes hurtful because their behavior has become for them “their defining characteristic, and as such, their same-sex sexual behavior equals their identity.”⁴³ It is necessary therefore to address the issue of attaching desire and behavior with one's identity since the person may be unaware of having done so.⁴⁴ A right standard for success is by finding one’s identity in Christ first and then evaluating one’s gender and sexual behavior against the archetype that is found in Scripture. Yarhouse argues that “the traditional Christian sexual ethic does not hinge

⁴¹Marin, *Love is an Orientation*, 184. Marin provides a reframing of all five questions.

⁴²Martin B. Copenhaver, *Jesus Is the Question: The 307 Questions Jesus Asked and the 3 He Answered* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), 20. Copenhaver investigates the 307 questions Jesus asks in the Gospels and the 183 questions He is asked.

⁴³Marin, *Love is an Orientation*, 38.

⁴⁴See The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, “Nashville Statement,” Article VII. I am in agreement with what Article VII affirms and denies in regards to the self-conception of gender and sexuality.

on the causes of sexual attraction or orientation” and it also “does not hinge on whether or not sexual orientation can change.”⁴⁵ What the church can offer is a vision for what it means to be like Christ because “what matters is Christlikeness, regardless of whether sexual attractions change significantly.”⁴⁶ The desire after Christlikeness is not just for those struggling with SSA and GD but for all believers who are in the process of being sanctified.⁴⁷ This subtle shift in language changes the focus where the discussion is no longer solely on LGBT self-identifying Christians as a separate group of people trying to live faithfully before the Lord. By identifying that the aim is Christlikeness brings LGBT self-identifying Christians into the family of God where everyone is striving after the same goal of being like Christ. This is counter to the message of revisionists who contend that the body of Christ is queer because the church composes of people who are LGBT therefore the church needs to accept them just as they are.

Accepting same-sex behavior and transgender identity does not solve the distress believers experience with SSA and GD. According to a study on Christian college students who experience SSA researchers found that “many Christians have chosen not to let their attractions determine their identity.”⁴⁸ For Christians who did not adopt a gay identity label chose instead to align their identity and behavior according to their beliefs and values. Their belief is that adopting “a gay identity would not reflect true authenticity to them.”⁴⁹ This is a major reason why there is debate over the term gay or trans Christian where one’s identity in Christ is qualified with their gender and/or

⁴⁵Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 238.

⁴⁶Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 165.

⁴⁷Yarhouse provides in more detail what the sanctification process looks like for LGBT self-identifying Christians in practicing a curriculum of Christlikeness. 167-69.

⁴⁸Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 50. Yarhouse cites a study that he and his colleagues conducted on Christian college students who are SSA. See Mark A. Yarhouse et al., “Listening to Sexual Minorities on Christian College Campuses,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 37, no. 2 (2009): 96-113.

⁴⁹Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 51.

sexuality. Even within Side B, there are disagreements as Wesley Hill identifies as a “gay Christian”⁵⁰ while Christopher Yuan does not label himself in this way.⁵¹ He identifies himself as “a child of the living God.”⁵² Yuan realized that before he was a believer, his identity was placed in the wrong thing. He writes that “the world tells those of us with same-sex attractions that our sexuality is the core of who we are. But God’s Word paints quite a different picture.” Yuan goes on to explain that according to Genesis 1:27 that everyone is created in God’s image and that the apostle Paul says “in Christ ‘we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28). Thus, my identity is not gay, ex-gay, or even straight. My true *identity* is in Jesus Christ alone.”⁵³

The heart of the matter for the church should not be primarily centered on sexual orientation but identity. Statistically, the number of believers who are categorized as completely changing their sexual orientation is low compared to those who see meaningful change in their orientation.⁵⁴ The primary focus of the church is not to administer change in sexual orientation as this is best left to medical professionals and therapists. The focus that the church needs to shift towards is the type of change that the church can provide and is attainable for everyone. That area of change which is possible is where a person chooses to place their identity in. Believers who struggle with SSA and

⁵⁰Wesley Hill, “Once More: On the Label ‘Gay Christian,’” First Things (blog), February 1, 2013, <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2013/02/once-more-on-the-label-gay-christian>. Hill explains his use of the phrase “gay Christian” which he rarely uses without adding another adjective, “celibate.” He calls himself a “celibate gay Christian” for the purpose of linking the hope he has in this life not to his sexual orientation. See Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 52. Yarhouse explains that Christians who adopt a gay identity do so by transforming the meaning of the word gay.

⁵¹Once a believer, our identity is in Jesus and there is no need for overidentification. Adding the word “gay” can be a misidentification of affirming same-sex behavior.

⁵²Christopher Yuan and Angela Yuan, *Out of a Far Country: A Gay Son's Journey to God. A Broken Mother's Search* (Colorado Springs, CO: Water Brook Press, 2011), 187.

⁵³Christopher Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God's Grand Story* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2018), 3.

⁵⁴Jones and Yarhouse, “A Longitudinal Study,” 424. Some may argue against the definition of success in this study but the research was done according to the definition given by Exodus. Even if a successful outcome was rigorously construed, then according to these standards nine percent of the sample attained success versus meaningful change which was over fifty percent.

GD have the ability to choose whether or not to integrate their feelings into a gay or trans identity. This is the area in which “the church can help people with-regardless of whether orientation changes-is identity.”⁵⁵ The church is able to provide hope for change through “alternative scripts that are anchored in biblical truth and centered in the person and work of Christ.”⁵⁶ A way to do this is by presenting a script that is based on an identity in Christ that competes and counters society’s script on gay and transgender identities.⁵⁷ The most compelling part of the identity in Christ script is that it centers on personhood where “one’s identity [is] in Christ, a central and defining aspect of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.”⁵⁸

From a ministry point of view, the church needs to not only communicate the worth of LGBT self-identifying Christians in Christ but develop a curriculum that will walk with them in helping to reduce their shame. This can be done by considering key factors that lead to shame and then looking at what it means to redeem shame for Christians. An example of this is when shame leads to a progression of these thoughts: “I am flawed (deficiencies as core to identity) → I am bad (global attribution) → I will be rejected (fear of rejection by others) → Painful emotion of shame.”⁵⁹ Counter to these thoughts is redeeming shame through a lived experience in the knowledge and confession of these truths: “Identity in Christ → Guilt before a gracious, merciful God → Jesus will

⁵⁵Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 54-55.

⁵⁶Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 55. Yarhouse discusses the importance of focusing on an identity that is positive such as “in Christ” rather than a negative identity in removing the gay label. Being in Christ reinforces a purpose and a community that is centered on the same thing. This is also the case when talking about what the church affirms rather than what they are against. For example, churches have been identified as non-affirming but rather than being labeled with a negative prefix the church needs to identify itself as positively affirming of God’s Word.

⁵⁷See Appendix 2 for gay, transgender, and in Christ scripts.

⁵⁸Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 51.

⁵⁹Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Sexual Identity: A Resource for Youth Ministry* (Zondervan, 2013), 100.

never abandon me → Also painful at times.”⁶⁰ This reality cannot be experienced alone but needs to be a journey taken with fellow believers who are willing to go through the process together. Redeeming shame does not mean that the integration process will be pain free but in the midst of pain there is hope. The promise is twofold where on one-hand “shame can be reduced when it is countered by these basic truths and they are imbedded into a person’s understanding and lived experience.”⁶¹ On the other hand, God does not promise that our feelings of SSA or GD will completely go away but Christ can fulfill the longing for congruence in our sexual attractions with our faith and “to feel wholeness, rather than dysphoria” which is what “the gospel promises-not by us seeking to transition from one sex to another . . . but by living faithfully and patiently, even though it’s painful, until one day there will be transformation.”⁶² In the Christian waiting, we find this promise that one day we will hear these words from our Savior.

Well done. I know it’s been so hard. It’s over now. I love you so much that I have brought you to a place where who you feel you are, and who you truly are, are completely enmeshed. There will be no more pain or crying for you anymore. What you longed for—to feel like, look like, and be the same person—is reality. I know it’s been painful. It won’t be now. Well done, faithful follower.⁶³

In providing a space where LGBT self-identifying Christians can openly speak and even confess their sins without fear of judgment can open the door to receive forgiveness and bring a sense of freedom.⁶⁴ This redemptive work cannot happen apart from a community of believers who are fully committed as a family united together through the embodiment of Christ’s mercy, grace, and love.

⁶⁰Yarhouse, *Understanding Sexual Identity*, 100.

⁶¹Yarhouse, *Understanding Sexual Identity*, 101.

⁶²Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, 87.

⁶³Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, 88.

⁶⁴Yuan, *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless*, 99. Yuan observed that respondents to several research studies felt it necessary to hide their sexuality which was in line with research from secular and Christian colleges and universities.

Redeeming Friendship and Family

In a display of great vulnerability, Hill shares what he fears the most in choosing to be celibate as a result of his faith and convictions on homosexuality. He is terrified of being doomed to a life of loneliness and without love. He shares that despite being gay, as a teenager he had “often daydreamed about what it would be like to be married, to have a house and children, to have a home of the sort I had growing up, to know that I belonged somewhere” but as a result of his Christian convictions the reoccurring picture of himself would now be “coming home to an empty apartment, having lived all of my adulthood as a single man.”⁶⁵ Loneliness and rejection from friends and family are one of the greatest fears that LGBT self-identifying Christians have as to why they do not come out in sharing about their SSA or GD.⁶⁶ Studies show that between 20% and 45% of homeless youth and young adults identify as LGBTQ.⁶⁷ The primary reason for homelessness among LGBTQ youth according to providers and their reported history is because of family rejection. They were forced out of their homes or ran away because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.⁶⁸ The fear of losing friends and family is real especially for believers who are convicted to live a life of celibacy. In choosing to be single for life one has to cope with the loss of never being able to experience marriage or have kids. The experience of utter brokenness is real and

⁶⁵Wesley Hill, *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015), 28.

⁶⁶Pew Research Center, “Chapter 3: The Coming Out Experience,” last modified June 13, 2013, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/06/13/chapter-3-the-coming-out-experience>. LGBT respondents shared that the two main reasons why they did not tell their parents about their sexual orientation or gender identity is because they thought it was “not important to tell their parent or that the subject never came up” and second “they assumed their parent would not be accepting or understanding of this, or they worried about how it would affect their relationship with their parent.”

⁶⁷Laura Baams, Bianca D.M. Wilson, and Stephen T. Russell, “LGBTQ Youth in Unstable Housing and Foster Care,” *Pediatrics* 143, no. 3 (2019): 2017-4211.

⁶⁸Soon Kyu Choi et al., “Serving Our Youth 2015: The Needs and Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth Experiencing Homelessness,” *UCLA: The Williams Institute* (June 2015), <https://truecolorsunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Serving-Our-Youth-June-2015.pdf>.

the church must somehow provide an alternative script that is able to help redeem this loss. Unless the church provides faithful and viable alternatives, the church will continue to lose family members and friends who are struggling with SSA and GD.

An alternative script in redeeming the loss of friendship and family is found in the promise that Jesus gives to those who follow Him. When Jesus was informed by a crowd that His family was outside looking for Him, He replied by posing a rhetorical question, “who are my mother and my brothers?” Jesus then explains that His brother, sister, and mother are those who do the will of God (Mark 3:32-35). Jesus fulfills here the law of familial status where the responsibility of being our brother’s keeper is no longer biological but spiritual. Jesus displays this further when He is on the cross and entrusts his mother to His beloved disciple to take care and look after her rather than His half-brothers. Could it be that John is illustrating here the provision that Christ gives for those bereaved from the loss of a family member? The half-brother of Jesus might possibly be reflecting on this as well when he declared that “religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (Jas 1:27).

There is a possibility that the disciples, having left everything behind, including their biological kin, social status, and identity, might have viewed these things in a negative light. Hill contemplates this possibility as the disciples had to learn to see from a positive perspective that their choice of loss was now considered as gain. Hill gives the example of when Peter reflects on having left everything to follow Jesus but Jesus quickly reminds Peter that anyone who has left their home and family for His sake and the Gospel will “receive a hundredfold in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life (Mark 10:29–30).”⁶⁹ The promise that Jesus gives in following after Him is not a loss of

⁶⁹Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 47.

friends and family but a broadening of our understanding of what this truly means.

In regards to family, Jesus also says that He did not come to bring peace but a sword in Matthew 10:34-36. Jesus said He has set “a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household.” Jesus continues on to explain in verses 34-38 that anyone who loves their family more than Christ is not worthy of being His disciple. The division of family is caused by a radical and dangerous call to follow Jesus above all else. Jesus points to a type of cutting off from family ties where one’s new family in Christ takes precedence over the old.⁷⁰ Apostle Paul also points to our new family in Christ where he has forsaken all things in his former life for the sake of Christ (Phil 3:7-9). Then in verse 13, Paul addresses those who are in Christ as his “brothers and sisters” indicating that his biological ties are secondary to his spiritual family. Paul’s use of “brothers and sisters” is intentional as it is used to “elevate the new spiritual siblinghood that he understood the death and resurrection of Jesus to have created.”⁷¹ This language of “brothers and sisters” is used “to characterize the relationships that all the baptized enjoyed with one another (Gal 3:26-29; 1 Cor 12:13).⁷²

In redeeming friendship and family, the church needs to help dispel the notion that LGBT self-identifying Christians have this constant lust after same-sex relations. LGBT self-identifying Christians have a deep longing for intimate relationships that is plutonic. It is essential therefore when discussing about spiritual friendship a distinction is made between the connection with same-sex sexual desires and the desire for same-sex

⁷⁰John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 441. Jesus asserts here that he is not conforming to traditional expectations of the family but “insists on such a fierceness of loyalty to himself that the significance of normal bonds and commitments, and specifically family ones, is undercut. The ties that bind are relativized in favour of a newly found, more fundamental tie” (441).

⁷¹Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 48.

⁷²Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 48.

companionship. What makes same-sex behavior sinful is not just the act itself but the object of the desire which is known as concupiscence. For example, “if you desire something good, then the desire itself is good. If you desire something evil, then the desire itself is evil (i.e., “lustful”).”⁷³ Concupiscence also pertains to unintentional and unwanted desires that transgress the law of God. In the case of SSA, if the desire is sexual then there is a need for those attractions to enter into a sanctification process. Spiritual friendship and God-honoring “bonds can be cultivated only when we recognize that the desire for sinful sex can never be the foundation for holy friendships.”⁷⁴ It is also important to recognize that for LGBT self-identifying Christians “to hear the very presence of this temptation . . . is *itself* a sin to be repented of might easily crush an already very tender believer.”⁷⁵ There is a need for caution when speaking about the sinful nature of SSA and GD where the leadership in each church should discuss and decide on a stance with great wisdom and discernment.⁷⁶

What LGBT self-identifying Christians ultimately need from the church is not to be seen simply as a project or problem that needs to be fixed. They need more than just another program where they can hang out with others, “ultimately, what is needed is a type of ‘friendship ties to shade into and perhaps even overlap with our ties of brotherhood and sisterhood, of marriage and kinship.’”⁷⁷ Hill gives the church a glimpse of how this is possible through his own personal examples displayed in his writings. In his commitment to be celibate, Hill vowed to make it part of his vocation to try to love

⁷³Burk and Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality*, 46.

⁷⁴Burk and Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality*, 35.

⁷⁵Sam Alberry, *Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-Sex Attraction* (Surrey, UK: The Good Book Company), 64.

⁷⁶Hill and Yuan do not believe that attraction for the same-sex is a sin. Yuan distinguishes temptation from desire but argues that it is difficult to distinguish between attraction, desire and lust. See Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel*, 53-63. Burk and Lambert also distinguish temptation from desire but argues that SSA is sinful. See Burk and Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality*, 39-60.

⁷⁷Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 39.

his male friends even if they did not love him back. Inspired by the line in a poem by Auden, “if equal affection cannot be, / let the more loving one be me,” Hill set out to invite people into his home for dinner. In the beginning, he invited mainly singles but eventually married couples with kids began to fill his home where they “developed the kind of bonds that one gay man described like this: ‘I have a blood family, but I have an extended family . . . my friends.’”⁷⁸ Hill describes what it is like living with Aidan and Melanie, the married couple that he shares a house with where he spent his childhood dreaming about the kind of family he wanted as a husband and father. Rather than having the type of family, he envisioned he was given a different family. Before Aidan and Melanie had their own children, they shared a home with another married couple. Aidan and Melanie eventually became the godparents for this couple’s son and were with their friends when their baby was baptized. They all made the same commitment to raise the child in the admonition of the Lord. Not long after, Hill would be standing next to Aidan and Melanie as their daughter Felicity was being baptized and they would all make the same promise. Hill sums up this experience as a site for biological and marital kinship that became a place where “deeper, sacramental kinship would flourish, tying us all to one another not only by the well-known forms of conjugal and parental love but also by the sometimes less-celebrated form of voluntary devotion. We were, we felt, proving Jesus’s words true.”⁷⁹

Two years later Hill would attend Aidan’s first Sunday as a priest in his new parish. During the announcements, Aidan pointed to his family and asked them to stand up including Hill. Aidan introduced Hill as their family friend who lives with them in community as Felicity’s godfather.⁸⁰ This was a public declaration for the church to see

⁷⁸Wesley Hill, “Love Again: On a Celibate Breakup and What Happened After,” last modified May 10, 2018, <https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/love-again>.

⁷⁹Wesley Hill, “Love Again.”

⁸⁰Wesley Hill, “We All Belong Together,” Spiritual Friendship (blog), May 13, 2019,

what it is able to offer in terms of what it means to be the body of Christ. Hill is a testament to the fact that one can flourish without romance which counters the affirming narrative that equates celibacy with loneliness. Although this may not be the conviction and calling for every believer but the church needs to encourage its members to be a community that embodies a type of unconditional love for brothers and sisters such as these. It begins with taking small steps such as asking someone you may know who is SSA or GD to meet up and talk. The point would be to get to “know” them and not to “no” them as a means for bridge-building which is not evangelism. It is a way to build “sustainable friendship, a relationship, a bond, camaraderie, closeness, and strong confidence. Truly knowing a gay or lesbian person is learning to discover their social and spiritual selves through mutual respect and trust.”⁸¹ It’s through the relationship process which opens the door for the Holy Spirit to work and convict the hearts and lives of believers. When the church begins to sincerely open itself up in this way by welcoming those who struggle with SSA and GD then there is hope for redeeming friends and families who have left the church. One research suggests that despite feelings of alienation from the church “76% of LGBT people are open to returning to their religious community and its practices.”⁸² This is not only a cause for hope but a wakeup call for the church to prove the words of Jesus to be true.

Redeeming Marriage

Historically the church has provided multiple ways of dealing with same-sex attraction to a varying degree. Each of these methods has progressed over time and

<https://spiritualfriendship.org/2019/05/13/we-all-belong-together>.

⁸¹Marin, *Love is an Orientation*, 170.

⁸²Andrew Marin, *Us Versus Us: The Untold Story of Religion and the LGBT Community* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2016), 65. Marin contests the research by Barna Group which suggests that only 9 percent are open to returning to the faith as his research suggests that a large percentage, nearly 8 million LGBT people are willing to come back.

presents a way for those who struggle with SSA and GD to find congruence with their faith and sexuality. The idea that there is no means for LGBT self-identifying Christians to find congruence with their faith other than affirming their sexual orientation and assuming a gay or trans identity is false. LGBT self-identifying Christians have multiple choices in helping them find congruence with their faith and sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBT self-identifying Christians are not condemned to a life of loneliness as there are four different plausibility structures for LGBT self-identifying Christians to live a life that is faithful to the Scriptures and the traditional teachings of the church. The four plausibility structures are: celibacy, change (immediate/miraculous or meaningful), therapy (integrative or reparative/conversion), and marriage (mixed-orientation or same-orientation).

Celibacy. In the debate over homosexuality, celibacy has been placed in the forefront as the primary solution for believers who experience SSA. Celibacy as a solution has caused a widespread belief that this is the only solution for LGBT self-identifying Christians. Celibacy has been put in a negative light as it is seen as an eternal sentence to loneliness. This is simply not true as people who have taken a vow of celibacy historically were committed “to a very particular communal setting, shared life and prayer, and even (in a very real sense) renunciation of personal identity.”⁸³ Celibacy was not practiced alone but always in community. Apostle Paul viewed his celibacy not as a curse but as a blessing and a gift from God. He actually commends this way of life as he states celibacy as a concession and not a command as he says “I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another” (1 Cor 7:7). It is not that Paul is unaware of the loneliness in being celibate but he was able to view both the advantages and disadvantages of being married and single. The reason

⁸³Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 44.

Paul promotes singleness is the desire for believers to be free from concern so that their focus can be on serving the Lord. Paul goes on to explain that those who are married have divided interests. Those who are married are anxious about worldly things such as how to please their spouse while the unmarried is only anxious about the things pertaining to the Lord like how to be holy. Paul concludes by saying that the reason he is promoting celibacy is “for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord” (1 Cor 7:33-35). Paul is not dismissing or discouraging the pursuit of marriage. He sees marriage as a good thing but views “he who refrains from marriage will do even better” (1 Cor 7:38) in light of the present and impending persecution of believers (1 Cor 7:26).

Heterosexuality is not the ultimate solution for homosexuality just as marriage is not the solution for loneliness. Marriage has multiple aspects that help address issues of loneliness by being physically, emotionally, and spiritually intimate but this is not the terminal reason for why God instituted marriage. Human marriage is ultimately a reflection of Christ’s marriage to the church. The husband and wife becoming one flesh is a picture of Jesus and the church coming together as one body and so is celibacy a marriage vow to Christ. Paul makes the connection that marriage is a profound mystery pointing to Christ and the church (Eph 5:31-32). Sprinkle illustrates this marriage mystery of celibacy through his friend Tim who could have married another man to solve his problems with loneliness but instead “he realized that he was already married to a relationally intimate Bride.”⁸⁴ Tim shares about how he felt as if he was living in a cave and then suddenly came out to the surface and saw the light for the first time. Tim is now living in a new space where he is married to Christ and “disagree[s] with the way that affirming Christians equate celibacy with loneliness and lack of relational intimacy.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 96.

⁸⁵Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 97.

Tim is not the only example of LGBT self-identifying Christians who live a fulfilled life of celibacy but there are many who are celibate and testify that they are living an abundant life in the body of Christ.⁸⁶

Change. The controversy that surrounds the question of whether homosexual orientation can change is based upon the definition of change. Opponents of change or the ex-gay movement⁸⁷ claim that there is no evidence for complete and definitive transformation for LGBT self-identifying Christians who undergo therapeutic change. The argument is that there is change but only in areas of character or personality where people naturally change over time. The belief is that there is little to no evidence of change in sexual orientation therefore any attempt to change one's sexual orientation is considered harmful and is a suppression of one's natural and genuine desires. Proponents of change and the ex-gay movement claim that there is complete and definitive change but according to one's own definition of what it means and looks like to them. For some, it means simply minimizing sexual and emotional desire for the same-sex or increasing their emotional and sexual desire for the opposite sex. For others, it is simply being content with their manhood or womanhood.

Change can also be seen as a spectrum where there are different levels of healing from their sexual brokenness. The expectation is not in a definitive change but "a conversion process that has no endpoint, and they acknowledge that change encompasses

⁸⁶Christopher Yuan, Wesley Hill, Sam Allberry, Ed Shaw, and Becket Cook are just a few examples of notable celibate believers. For more personal testimonies from believers who experience SSA and are celibate see livingout.org and revoice.us. Living Out is a UK charity organization with trustees who are advised by a wider support group of same-sex attracted Christians and other friends. Revoice is an evangelical organization that supports and encourages SSA people who adhere to historic Christian teachings on marriage and sexuality. An important distinction between both organizations is that Living Out does not identify or use the label "gay Christian" while Revoice supports the choice in using the term as a matter of wisdom and liberty that should not be divided over (2 Tim. 2:14).

⁸⁷The contemporary ex-gay movement began in the early 1970's where people and organizations formed to help LGBT self-identifying Christians with unwanted same-sex desires and to discourage them from engaging in same-sex relations. These groups also formed to combat against pro-gay advocates and their testimonies about the ineffectiveness and damage therapeutic remedies cause.

desires, behavior, and identities that do not always align neatly or remain fixed. Even the label ‘ex-gay’ represents their sense of flux between identities.”⁸⁸ This type of change is labeled as “Transformational/Meaningful,” where change happens over time through spiritual and/or therapeutic means. There is also a significant number of believers who experience a change that is “Immediate/ Miraculous” either through prayer, repentance, or a conversion experience to the faith which brings about a transformation in having emotional and sexual desires for the opposite sex. This is not experienced through a program or therapy but through an encounter or revelation from God where they are convicted to change their lifestyle. The experience brings about a diminishing desire for same-sex relations emotionally and sexually. A degree of same-sex desire is still present but is minimal or has been dissipated. Change in sexual orientation is not guaranteed as many do not experience this type of significant change but this does not discount the countless testimonies of LGBT self-identifying Christians who have personally experienced “Transformational/ Meaningful” and “Immediate/Miraculous” change. These stories of LGBT self-identifying Christians who have experienced change chose either to be celibate, remain in a traditional marriage, divorce their same-sex partner, or enter into a traditional marriage.⁸⁹

Therapy. The suggestion that a person can change their sexual orientation has been viewed by society as a form of religious intolerance and hate against LGBT people and their community. Any form of therapy that changes a person’s sexual orientation,

⁸⁸Tanya Erzen, *Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-Gay Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 3.

⁸⁹Some notable Christians who have experienced either a Transformational/Meaningful Change or Immediate/Miraculous Change are Rosaria Butterfield, Jackie Hill-Perry, Ann Paulk, Sy Rogers, Matt Moore and Kegan Wesley. Ken Williams and Elizabeth Woning also publicly share their story on how they left their gay identity and founded a movement called Changed where they actively gather stories from people who have left the homosexual and transgender lifestyle. They created a book with thirty-seven testimonies from LGBT self-identifying Christians who came out of their transgender, drag, and homosexual lifestyles after coming to Christ. See www.changedmovement.com/stories/.

therefore, has been deemed by society as a dangerous practice founded upon pseudoscience.⁹⁰ Society has misconstrued the church's solution for homosexual orientation as either praying the gay away or promoting reparative therapy, also known as conversion therapy.⁹¹ The debate over reparative therapy appeared to have ended when Alan Chambers, the president of the largest ex-gay organization, had renounced their practice of reparative therapy and closed its doors.⁹² It seemed as if Christians were beginning to admit that change in sexual orientation is not possible and abandon reparative therapy. The problem is that reparative therapy is not the same as what is practiced in many ex-gay ministries therefore to "assume that all efforts to help homosexuals change are equivalent . . . is in error."⁹³ Reparative therapy is not a Christian method of changing people's sexual orientation, in fact, it "is a counseling approach developed by secular psychologists to help people turn away from their struggles with homosexuality."⁹⁴ Many Christian ministries have denounced the use of reparative therapy and have never practiced it. Most ex-gay ministries focus on what they call "Transformational Ministry" where the purpose is in helping a person find their

⁹⁰Some organizations have been accused of using immoral techniques such as shaming, coercion, nudity, pornography, aversion and abusive tactics in attempting to change a person's sexual orientation. Examples such as Nicolosi's lecture on *Gay Pornography as a Therapeutic Tool* and naked group sessions practiced by Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing (JONAH) are unbiblical.

⁹¹Reparative Therapy was created by Dr. Joseph Nicolosi Sr. and is a very specific genre of therapy. Most ministries do not and cannot practice reparative therapy unless they have been licensed directly by the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH).

⁹²Justin Lee, host, "Ep 20: Alan Chambers: Can Gay People Become Straight?" Geeky Justin (podcast), July 3, 2019, accessed June 29, 2020, <https://geekyjustin.com/ep-20-alan-chambers-can-gay-people-become-straight>. In an interview with Justin Lee, Alan Chambers states that "Exodus [International] did not make gay people straight." He then makes an overreaching assumption by unequivocally stating that "there was never a time when any one person, organization, therapy, support group, prayer meeting made gay people straight." See also Melissa Steffan, "Alan Chambers Apologizes to Gay Community, Exodus International to Shut Down," Christianity Today, June 21, 2013, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2013/june/alan-chambers-apologizes-to-gay-community-exodus.html>.

⁹³Heath Lambert, "Oil and Water: The Impossible Relationship between Evangelicalism and Reparative Therapy," Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, accessed June 22, 2020, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resources/acbc-essays/oil-and-water-the-impossible-relationship-between-evangelical-and-reparative-therapy>.

⁹⁴Lambert, "Oil and Water."

identity in Christ rather than in their gender and sexual orientation.

Many LGBT self-identifying Christians who seek to get rid of unwanted sexual desires turn to the church for help. The hope is that through the church a discipleship process in community with pastoral and professional counseling will have a Christ-centered life-changing experience for LGBT self-identifying Christians.⁹⁵ The focus is not so much on changing a person's sexual orientation as it is in focusing on a person's identity in Christ. Although reparative therapy has been repudiated by some religious leaders there is evidence that argues against the unequivocal dismissal of reparative therapy.⁹⁶ The Royal College of Psychiatrists recognizes the need for exploring therapeutic options for those who are not happy about their sexual orientation. There are valid reasons to help people who are struggling with their sexual orientation whether they are heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual "to live more comfortably with it, reduce their distress and reach a greater degree of acceptance of their sexual orientation."⁹⁷ Believers who do not find a conflict with integrating secular methods of counseling with a biblical approach can consider either reparative therapy or reintegrative therapy.⁹⁸

⁹⁵The Restored Hope Network provides resources and transformational testimonies where multiple ex-gay ministries can be found.

⁹⁶Jones and Yarhouse's longitudinal study on ex-gays reveal that the practice of conversion therapy produced meaningful change. Also, in Lambert's article on "Oil and Water," Lambert acknowledges that scholars like Robert Gagnon have suggested the fact that many Christians have made adjustments to conversion therapy in order to make it more biblical. Their debate over reparative therapy took place at the Evangelical Theological Society in November of 2015 in Atlanta Georgia. Gagnon's rebuttal in support of reparative therapy as "one valid tool" for Christians has been transcribed. See Robert Gagnon, "Why Christians Should Not Throw Reparative Therapy Under the Bus," Joseph Nicolosi, accessed July 6, 2020, <https://www.josephnicolosi.com/collection/robert-a-j-gagnon>.

⁹⁷Royal College of Psychiatrists, "Royal College of Psychiatrists' Statement on Sexual Orientation," last modified April, 2014, https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/PS02_2014.pdf, 2.

⁹⁸Reintegrative Therapy is different from conversion therapy in that it uses methods to directly treat trauma and addiction regardless of the client's sexual orientation or gender. It is also important to note that Dr. Nicolosi Jr. is the founder of the Reintegrative Therapy Association (RTA). RTA claims that by treating these issues with standard treatment protocols, sexuality can sometimes change on its own. According to RTA, conversion therapy is different as it has no official guideline, educational requirement, and oversight over the practice of conversion therapy. It is also unclear as to whether RTA makes a distinction between conversion therapy and reparative therapy.

Marriage. The belief that traditional marriage and family is not an option for LGBT self-identifying Christians is false. Traditional marriage has two types of models that LGBT self-identifying Christians can faithfully enter into. The two types of traditional marriage models are called Mixed Orientation Marriage (MOM) and Same Orientation Marriage (SOM).⁹⁹ MOM is a marriage between a man and a woman where their sexual orientation is different from each other. An example of this is when one spouse is heterosexual while the other is homosexual. SOM is a marriage between two LGBT self-identifying Christians where both the man and woman have the same sexual orientation. An example of this is when the married couple is opposite gender but are both homosexuals. Christians who enter into a MOM or SOM are not forced into this type of relationship by family, friends, or the church but willingly enter into it. An empirical study on Mixed Orientation Couples revealed that the reason why couples got married was primarily because “it felt natural to do so” and “they were in love.” What is surprising from the study is that the couples “were less likely to report feeling pressured by family or from their future spouse than individuals critical of such marriages might have assumed.”¹⁰⁰ The marriages were also “characterized by satisfaction and positive feelings about the future of the marriage.”¹⁰¹ SSA spouses reported on average a “more positive satisfaction and a more positive view of the future of their marriage These findings are consistent with what has been reported in other studies of mixed-orientation couples.”¹⁰²

Couples who are able to be open and honest about their feelings of gender and

⁹⁹When referring to Mixed Orientation Marriage it will simply be MOM and when referring to Same Orientation Marriage it will simply be SOM.

¹⁰⁰Mark A. Yarhouse et al., “Characteristics of Mixed Orientation Couples: An Empirical Study,” *Edification: The Transdisciplinary Journal of Christian Psychology* 4, no. 2 (2011): 54.

¹⁰¹Yarhouse, “Characteristics of Mixed Orientation Couples,” 54.

¹⁰²Yarhouse, “Characteristics of Mixed Orientation Couples,” 54. It is important to note that when looking at the data, there is a range of experiences reported which is not only positive but negative.

sexuality prior to and during marriage may have a healthier relationship. The longitudinal study on MOM revealed that communication was the most frequently cited theme for those who experience SSA as a coping mechanism. For heterosexual spouses one of the most difficult aspect about their relationship was trust. Another significant finding from this study is that “many individuals cited their faith and religious coping activities as important factors in their relationship.” Faith is a key factor for many of these couples as to why they continue to stay committed in their marriage relationship. An example of this comes from the testimony of a wife who is in a MOM. She shared that when she got engaged that her fiancé did not expect her to be miraculously delivered from her struggle but trusted that her relationship with Jesus would be the foundation for her love for him. She writes “ultimately, I wasn’t choosing between Mike and women, I was choosing between God and women. I committed my heart, body, and spirit to Jesus, and that included my sexuality.”¹⁰³ MOM and SOM are viable options for LGBT self-identifying Christians as many stories of successful marriages are being written and told.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

The greatest problem the church faces today is not issues surrounding gender and sexuality or the church becoming culturally irrelevant and losing its prophetic voice. The real issue is whether the church will compromise the authority of the Scriptures to

¹⁰³Tammy Perlmutter, “My ‘Mixed-Orientation’ Marriage,” HarvestUSA, accessed July 12, 2020, <https://harvestusa.org/mixed-orientation-marriage/#.XzdGOuhKjb0>.

¹⁰⁴Some examples of MOM as mentioned in the section on “Change” are Sy and Karen Rogers, Rosaria and Kent Butterfield, and Jackie Hill-Perry and Preston Perry. In regards to SOM, it is not as uncommon as some may think. An example of a SOM is John and Anne Paulk who co-authored a book about being ex-gay and married. Together they would start an ex-gay ministry but years later they would get divorced. More examples of SOM are in Asia as gay males and lesbian females enter into “cooperative marriages” for the sake of saving face and having grandchildren to pass on the family name. See Ning Xuan, Cheung Chau Kiu, and Guo Sijia, “Negotiations Between Chinese Gay Men and Lesbians and Their Parents About Marriage,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 18, no. 1-10 (2019). In America a similar type of partnership occurs where those who have SSA or gender identity conflicts cohabitate with one another and officially register as domestic partners. See Christopher Carpenter and Gary J. Gates, “Gay and Lesbian Partnership: Evidence from California,” *Demography* 45, no. 3 (2008): 573-90.

win the current cultural debate. The pink reformation as described by Theo Hobson has divided the church in half but the church is no longer expected to be divided as it becomes increasingly acceptable of the practices and identities of LGBT self-identifying Christians. In an effort to reach the lost by contextualizing the Scriptures, engaging with the culture, and finding plausibility structures the church cannot lose its own identity founded upon the Word of God. In Albert Mohler's review of Hobson's assessment of the church's present credibility crisis, he agrees with his arguments that "this is an issue that shuns compromise. It has a stark "either/or" quality. Either homosexuality is a fully valid alternative to heterosexuality or it is not. There is no room for compromise, no third way."¹⁰⁵ Mohler believes that Hobson is precisely right that "everything hinges on that assessment. If it is accepted as normal, those who consider it sinful will be seen as repressive, hateful, and dangerous to the good of society."¹⁰⁶ Hobson argues that this is where the church currently stands but Mohler diverges here with Hobson's assessment that the church will surrender to this moral revolution. Mohler concludes that the church might lose this cultural debate and suffer the loss of credibility from society but he contends that under no circumstance can the church "abandon the Scriptures or deny its Lord. Scriptural credibility is infinitely more important than cultural credibility."¹⁰⁷

An admonishment for the church is that it will never compromise the Gospel for relevance as it engages with the current cultural crisis on gender and sexuality. In providing biblical correctives and practical applications to reach those who are struggling with SSA and GD the church must never forget that it is through the power of the Gospel that people are being transformed and saved. Salvation does not come by our works but

¹⁰⁵Albert Mohler, "A Pink Reformation? Sexuality, Credibility, and the Church," Albert Mohler, last modified February 12, 2007, <https://albertmohler.com/2007/02/12/a-pink-reformation-sexuality-credibility-and-the-church>.

¹⁰⁶Mohler, "A Pink Reformation?"

¹⁰⁷Mohler, "A Pink Reformation?"

by faith in the work of Christ on the cross as we hold onto the promise that we are adopted into the family of God. We are His sons and daughters in whom God will never leave nor forsake us. On the night before Jesus was betrayed and crucified, He lifted a high priestly prayer that just as the Father, Son and Spirit are one that we will be one, so when the world sees us, they will believe that Jesus Christ is Lord. This is my prayer and charge for the church, that we would make true these Words of Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX 1

A GLOSSARY FOR GENDER IDENTITY

The definition for thirty-one of the most common terms is provided here to help understand the language that surrounds the discussion on gender identity.¹

Agender — A term for people who consider themselves to be without a gender (‘a-’ meaning “without”). Sometimes referred to as genderless, genderfree, non-gendered, or ungendered person.

Androphilia — A term used to refer to sexual attraction to men or masculinity that can be used as an alternative to a gender binary heterosexual or homosexual orientation. (See also: gynephilia.)

Bigender — A person who has two gender identities or expressions, either at the same time, at different times, or in different social situations. (See also: genderfluid.)

Binary — A term for people who associate with typical male or female behaviors. The opposite of non-binary or genderqueer. (See also: cisgender.)

Bisexual — A person who is attracted to two sexes or two genders, but not necessarily simultaneously or equally. Although the term used to be defined as a person who is attracted to both genders or both sexes, that has been replaced by the number two (2) since the LGBT community believes there are not only two sexes or two genders but multiple gender identities. Within the LGBTQ community, a person who is sexually attracted to more than two biological sexes or gender identities is often referred to as pansexual or omnisexual.

Butch — A term used by the LGBTQ community to refer to masculine gender expression or gender identity. A nonbinary butch is a person who holds a nonbinary gender identity and a butch gender expression, or claiming butch as an identity outside of the gender binary. (See also: femme.)

¹Reformed Youth Ministries has made this list, provided by Joe Carter, into a booklet that can be downloaded. The Gospel Coalition, “From Agender to Ze: A Glossary for the Gender Identity Revolution,” last modified May 13, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/from-agender-to-ze-a-glossary-for-the-gender-identity-revolution/>, quoted in Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, 165-71.

Cisgender — A term used to refer to people who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their personal identity. Cisgender is often used within the LGBTQ community to refer to people who are not transgender. (In general, Christians should avoid using this term since it implies that cisgender and transgender are equally normative, i.e., the opposite of “heteronormative.”)

Femme — A term used by the LGBTQ community to refer to feminine gender expression or gender identity. A nonbinary femme is a person who holds a nonbinary gender identity and a femme gender expression, or claiming femme as an identity outside of the gender binary. (See also: butch.)

Gay — Until the mid-20th century, the term gay was originally used to refer to feelings of being “carefree,” “happy,” or “bright and showy,” though it also added, in the late 17th century, the meaning “addicted to pleasures and dissipations” implying a that a person was uninhibited by moral constraints. In the 1960s, the term began to be used in reference to people attracted to members of the same sex who often found the term “homosexual” to be too clinical or critical. Currently, the term “gay” is used to refer to men attracted to people who identify as men, though it is also used colloquially as an umbrella term to include all LGBTQ people. (The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation considers the term “homosexual” to be offensive and recommends that journalists use the term “gay.”)

Gender identity — A term used to refer to an individual’s personal sense of identity as masculine or feminine, or some combination of each. The LGBTQ community and their allies (e.g., the Obama administration) consider gender to be a trait that exists along a continuum and is not inherently rooted in biology or physical expressions.

Genderfluid — A term used for people who prefer to be flexible about their gender identity. They may fluctuate between genders (a man one minute, a woman the next, a third sex later in the day) or express multiple gender identities at the same time.

Genderqueer — An umbrella term for gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine. Sometimes referred to as non-binary, gender-expansive, pangender, polygender). (See also: Bigender, Trigender.)

Gynephilia— A term used to refer to sexual attraction to women or femininity that can be used as an alternative to a gender binary homosexual or heterosexual orientation.

Heteronormative — Popularized in the early 1990s in Queer Theory, the term refers to lifestyle norms that hold that people fall into distinct and complementary genders (man and woman) based on biology with natural roles in life that may or may not be socially constructed. Heteronormativity presumes that heterosexual behavior is the norm for sexual practices and that sexual and marital relations are only fitting between a man and a woman. (The Christian worldview is “heteronormative.” The Bible clearly presents gender and heterosexual sex within the bounds of marriage as part of the goodness of God’s created order.)

Intergender — A term for people who have a gender identity in the middle between the binary genders of female and male, and may be a mix of both.

Intersex — Intersex is a general term for a variety of physical conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. The variations in sex characteristics may include chromosomes, gonads, or genitals that do not allow an individual to be distinctly identified as male or female. Intersex is a physical condition while transgender is a psychological condition. The vast majority of people with intersex conditions identify as male or female rather than transgender or transsexual. (The term “hermaphrodite” is now considered outdated, inaccurate, and offensive as a reference to people who are intersex.)

Lesbian — The term most widely used in the English language to describe sexual and romantic attraction between people who identify as females. The word is derived from the name of the Greek island of Lesbos, home to Sappho (6th-century BC), a female poet that proclaimed her love for girls. The term “gay and lesbian” became more popular in 1970s as a way of acknowledging the two broad sexual-political communities that were part of the gay liberation movement.

LGBTQ — An initialism that collectively refers to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and Queer communities. In use since the 1990s, the term is an adaptation of the initialism LGB, which itself started replacing the phrase gay community beginning in the mid-to-late 1980s. The initialism has become mainstream as a self-designation and has been adopted by the majority of sexuality and gender identity-based community centers and media in the United States. Along with LGBTQ, other letters are sometimes added. Other variants include: An extra Q for “questioning”; “U” for “unsure”; “C” for “curious”; an “I” for “intersex” another “T” for “transsexual” or “transvestite”; another “T”, “TS”, or “2” for “Two-Spirit” persons; an “A” or “SA” for “straight allies”; or an “A” for “asexual”; “P” for “pansexual” or “polyamorous”; “H” for “HIV-affected”; and “O” for “other.”

Queer — An umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities that are not heterosexual, heteronormative, or gender-binary. The term is still controversial, even within the LGBTQ community, because it was once used as a homosexual slur until it was re-appropriated in the 1990s. The range of what “queer” includes varies, though in addition to referring to LGBT-identifying people, it can also encompass: pansexual, pomosexual, intersexual, genderqueer, asexual, and autosexual people, and even gender normative heterosexuals whose sexual orientations or activities place them outside the heterosexual-defined mainstream, e.g., BDSM practitioners, or polyamorous persons. (In academia, the term “queer” and its verbal use, “queering,” indicate the study of literature, academic fields, and other social and cultural areas from a non-heteronormative perspective.)

Man/Woman — In LGBT parlance, terms that refer to a person's chosen gender identity, regardless of biological characteristics.

Non-binary — See “genderqueer.”

Sex — The term was previously used to distinguish between the physical identification assigned as at birth (e.g., male, female, or intersex). It's now used by LGBT groups and their allies (such as the Obama administration) as synonymous with a self-chosen gender identity.

Third gender — A concept in which individuals are categorized, either by themselves or by society, as neither man nor woman (though not necessarily intersex). Sometimes also called “third sex” or othergender. (See also: Queer.)

Transgenderism — An umbrella term for the state or condition of identifying or expressing a gender identity that does not match a person's physical/genetic sex. Transgender is independent of sexual orientation, and those who self-identify as transgender may consider themselves to be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, polysexual, or asexual. Approximately 700,000 individuals in the United States identify as transgender.

Trans man — A transgender person who was born a female but claims the gender identity of a man (i.e., a biological female who identifies as a male).

Transsexual — A narrower term used to refer to people who identify as the opposite of their birth gender designation, regardless of whether they have undergone or intend to undergo hormone replacement therapy and/or sex reassignment surgery.

Trans woman — A transgender person who was born a male but who claims the gender identity of a woman (i.e., a biological man who identifies as a woman).

Transvestite — A person who cross-dresses, or dresses in clothes of the opposite sex, though they may not identify with or want to be the opposite gender. (All transsexuals are transgender, but transvestites do not necessarily fall into either of the other categories.)

Trigender — A term for a non-binary (i.e., genderqueer) gender identity in which one shifts between or among the behaviors of three genders. These genders may include male, female, and third gender (e.g., genderless, non-gender, polygender, etc.).

Two-spirit — A term used by some Native American LGBT activists for people who possess qualities of both binary genders.

Ze — A gender-neutral pronoun used to replace he/she. (Sometimes spelled as Xe.)

APPENDIX 2

GAY, TRANSGENDER, AND IN CHRIST SCRIPTS

The scripts provided are what Mark Yarhouse thinks a gay and transgender script looks like. Yarhouse provides alternative scripts for believers who experience same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria.

Gay Script¹

- Same-sex attractions signal a naturally occurring or “intended by God” distinction between homosexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality.
- Same-sex attractions are the way you know who you “really are” as a person (emphasis on discovery).
- Same-sex attractions are at the core of who you are as a person. Same-sex behavior is an extension of that core.
- Self-actualization (behavior that matches who you “really are”) of your sexual identity is crucial for your fulfillment.

Identity in Christ Script²

- Same-sex attraction does not signal a categorical distinction among types of person, but is one of many human experiences that are “not the way it’s supposed to be.”
- Same-sex attractions may be part of your experience, but they are not the defining element of your identity.
- You can choose to integrate your experiences of attraction to the same sex into a gay identity.
- On the other hand, you can choose to center your identity around other aspects of your experience, including your biological sex, gender identity, and so on.
- The most compelling aspect of personhood for the Christian is one’s identity in Christ, a central and defining aspect of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

¹Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 49.

²Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 51.

Transgender Script³

- Gender dysphoria reflects a naturally occurring difference among types of people (transgender rather than cisgender).
- Your gender dysphoria as gender incongruence suggests who you are (“who I am”) rather than how you are (“how I am”).
- Gender dysphoria points to a community of others who experience a similar phenomenon (“I am part of the transgender community”).
- Your gender incongruence points to something at the core of who you are, something that is central to your identity.

Local Conservative Community of Faith Script⁴

- This is a spiritual matter; this is sinful.
- Fulfillment comes from adopting a traditional gender role that corresponds with your biological sex.
- The failure to find worth and purpose and meaning in traditional gender roles and expressions is a mark of willful disobedience.
- Cross-gender behaviors and roles are unacceptable as they undermine the truth about who you have been made to be.

Alternative Faith Script⁵

- Experiences of gender dysphoria are part of my reality (that is, “how I am”).
- I did not choose to experience gender dysphoria or gender incongruence, and I honestly do not know the cause.
- Perhaps being transgender is part of my identity; however, I am a complex person and am more than gender dysphoric.
- I do not know how I came to experience gender dysphoria, but I can consider what it means to me today and where I go from here.
- There are probably a dozen different directions for any experience of gender dysphoria, and I plan to consider many of them, and may select some of them, considering the least invasive steps when possible.

³Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 131-32.

⁴Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 133-34.

⁵Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 135.

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ABSTRACT

ADDRESSING ISSUES RELATED TO LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER (LGBT) SELF-IDENTIFYING CHRISTIANS IN THE ASIAN AMERICAN CHURCH

Anthony Young Chon, DEdMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Andrew T. Walker

In the past two decades, a significant number of revisionist literature has been published by queer Asian theologians challenging orthodox teachings on homosexuality and gender identity. The issue that the Asian American church faces today is pressure from society and culture to contextualize the Scriptures in order to affirm same-sex relations and reject gender normative behavior. This thesis seeks to analyze and critique queer revisionist writings, provide biblical correctives and plausibility structures for the Asian American church.

The purpose of criticizing the works of queer Asian theologians and providing biblical correctives is to prevent unorthodox teachings from permeating the church and leading believers astray. The reason for providing plausibility structures is to help the church learn how to reduce the marginalization of those who experience same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria as well as to help retain friends and family members of LGBT self-identifying Christians in the Asian American Church. As the Asian American Church engages LGBT self-identifying Christians with convictional kindness and love the church is urged to remain faithful to the Word of God.

VITA

Anthony Young Chon

EDUCATION

BS, Northeastern Illinois University, 2003

MDiv, Moody Theological Seminary, 2007

Certificate in Christian Apologetics, Biola University, 2010

ORGANIZATIONS

Evangelical Church Alliance, 2009–

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Youth Director, Hahna Korean Presbyterian Church, Des Plaines, Illinois,
2004-2005

Youth Pastor, Exodus Community Church, Buffalo Grove, Illinois, 2005-2007

English Pastor, Tainan Holiness Church, Tainan, Taiwan, 2007-2008

Assistant Pastor, Binnerri Church, Richardson, Texas, 2008-2010

Pastor, Living Water Evangelical Church, Naperville, Illinois, 2011-2019