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Gays and God Can Commune Together

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Trinity College

Undergraduate Thesis

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Introduction

The Church¹ has had a long-standing tradition of directly or indirectly affecting policy making in governments spanning the globe. From its earliest onset, the Church has been influential, if not solely responsible, for determining morality and creating and changing laws to govern people in accordance with the Church's moral way.

One issue in particular that has gained international attention over the last forty years is the issue of homosexuality and the rights of LGBTQQIA-identified² people. The issues surrounding the members of this community exploded in 1969 with the Stonewall Riots in New York City. The Stonewall Riots occurred because members of the New York City Police Department would conduct raids at a bar called The Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street in the West Village. These raids targeted members of the gay community, specifically drag queens and other closeted men who went to the bar to commiserate with other patrons. These men were arrested and often beaten with clubs. Their pictures were taken and they were publically humiliated. The police department's Public Morals Squad sanctioned this kind of action and involved them selves in carrying out the raids.

¹ In this case, I am referring to the Catholic Church and a few Protestant denominations, namely the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ (UCC), and the Assemblies of God church.

² The politically correct acronym that is inclusive of all gender and sexual orientation minorities; it stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Ally. Throughout the paper, the phrase "LGBT Community" will replace this long acronym.

There are two implications here for the Church. The first is that the squad responsible was called the Public Morals Squad. Who determines what the Public's Morals are? The behaviors exhibited by the patrons at the Stonewall were not done in public. Rather, they were done behind closed doors in an establishment that made allowance for those actions to happen.

The second implication is one that we, meaning humanity, are still facing today. The Stonewall Riots began the Gay Liberation Movement. The Gay Liberation Movement set into motion a series of revolutions beginning with a sexual revolution and, now, a movement for marriage and adoption equality, equal protection under the law, and equal recognition by the government in regards to insurance and tax benefits.

What does all of this have to do with the Church? Well, the Catholic and Evangelical churches' influence on the laws of our land have made these aspirations difficult, and even close to impossible, to attain in some areas of the United States and around the world. For the most part, the Catholic and Evangelical churches' theology surrounding homosexuality³ does not allow for these kinds of rights and privileges to exist. These rights include, but are not limited to, the right to marry, the right to adopt children, the right to donate blood, and the right of hospital visitation. Thus, they fight against such movements and influence policy to prevent them from coming to fruition.

³ This is a term that will be explored in a following chapter. I do not like this term, but it is the term the Church often uses and a term they claim is Biblical. For them, it is a label for that encompasses certain members of society.

This thesis will examine the Catholic and Evangelical churches' arguments justifying its detestable treatment of the LGBT community; how the Church's position, based on the aforementioned arguments, on homosexuality has evolved in different denominations over the centuries;⁴ and the implications involved in the continuation of this kind of mindset.

⁴ It should be noted that not all Protestant denominations agree on the issue of homosexuality. The denominations fall in different places on the spectrum of acceptance....some are completely open to members of the LGBTQ community, others are not.

What the Bible Really Says, or Does Not Say

In order to begin this examination, we must first go right to the source where the Catholic and Evangelical churches get their moral code: The Bible. To the Evangelical traditions, often called Fundamentalist, the Bible is entirely, or at least mostly, inerrant. That is, it is the inspired Word of God and it is without error. The Catholic Church's view on inerrancy is a bit more ambiguous than the Fundamentalist view. The Catholic Catechism states:

The inspired books teach truth. 'Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth...⁵

This statement might not be an argument for the Catholic Church's standpoint on Biblical inerrancy, but it certainly lends itself to the assumption that the Catholic Church takes Biblical concepts as truth. The Bible is the source from which people who are ideologically and theologically opposed to homosexuality get their arguments.

Perhaps the most common quote from the Bible people use to attack members of the LGBT community, in particular gay men, comes from Leviticus 18:22: "you shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination."⁶ In the original Hebrew, the word translated as "lie" is *tishkav*. According to *The Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament*, this word appears eleven

⁵ The Catholic Church, "Part One: The Profession of Faith, Section One I Believe-We Believe, Chapter God Comes to Meet Man," *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, line 107.

⁶ Lev. 18:22 (NRSV)

times in the Old Testament. Each time it is mentioned, it is in the context of sleeping.⁷ For example, it is used in Job 11:18 and translated as such: “And you will have confidence, because there is hope; you will be protected and take your rest in safety.”⁸ Here, *tishkav* is translated as “rest.” Zophar, one of Job’s friends, uses this word. He tells Job that he must repent of a secret sin because it is the only way God will save him from the despair he is in. And thus, Job will be able to sleep safely; not safely have sex. This word is again used in 2 Samuel 12:3:

But the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to heat of his meager fare, and drink of his cup, and lie in his bosom, it was like a daughter to him.⁹

Clearly, in this passage, if the word *tishkav* was translated with some sexual meaning, this poor man would have been having sex with his sheep; and that, simply, is not the case. As previously stated, it is a stretch to translate this word with a sexual connotation. Its usage in context in other verses gives a completely different meaning.

Something else that is often overlooked in the debate about LGBT acceptance in the Catholic and Evangelical church communities is the amount of Levitical Laws that are not followed, or even dismissed in both the New Testament and in today’s society. Leviticus chapter 11 gives the laws regarding what kinds of food are acceptable to eat. Most famously, the foods that are forbidden are meats that come from animals that do not have a cloven hoof and do not chew a cud. It also forbids

⁷ George V. Wigram, *The Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament*, “*tishkav*.”

⁸ Job 11:18 (NRSV)

⁹ 2 Sam. 12:3 (NRSV)

the eating of creatures from the sea that do not have both scales and fins. It also forbids animals that swarm.¹⁰ However, in the New Testament, Peter becomes hungry and has a vision. In his vision, a cloth is laid out before him with reptiles, birds, and other creatures the Old Testament forbids. A voice commands him to eat. After Peter refuses, on the grounds of kosher law, the voice says to Peter, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane."¹¹ Apparently, God has changed the rules about what is acceptable to eat and what is not acceptable to eat. In fact, Peter is chastised for citing a Law and calling the food God gave him "profane." Today, Christians enjoy pork, shellfish, chicken, and turkey without any regard for the Old Testament law that forbids those foods because God changed His mind. While there is no specific passage that cites God changing His mind about this perceived law regarding homosexuality, this example lends itself to the notion that God has, in the past, contradicted laws in Leviticus. Also in Leviticus, God gave Moses specific instructions regarding the cleanliness of a woman who is menstruating or who gives birth. She must undergo a purification ritual, which could take over a month, during which time she is considered unclean.¹² Leviticus chapter 15 also states that everything the woman touches is considered unclean and when a man ejaculates, everything his semen touches is considered unclean.¹³ In the days in which these laws were written, if something was unclean, that meant it was to be avoided to prevent contamination. Repeatedly in Leviticus, there exist warnings that coming in contact with something that is unclean or someone who is unclean would make that

¹⁰ Lev. 11:1-46 (NRSV)

¹¹ Acts 10:9-16 (NRSV)

¹² Lev. 12:1-8 (NRSV)

¹³ Lev. 15:1-32 (NRSV)

person unclean. In today's society, we strive to ensure that it is not known when women are menstruating. So, we do not avoid contact with them when they are unclean, and, if we happen to sit in the same seat as a menstruating woman, we do not consider ourselves unclean and we do not perform a ceremonial cleansing ritual. This is in direct violation of almost three chapters of laws in the Book of Leviticus. Again, this begs the question of why we do not follow these rules.

Another word often used for homosexuality is "sodomy." The term "sodomy" has been assigned as a synonym for homosexuality, or more specifically, anally penetrative sex. This connection clearly references the sins of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. It has become commonplace to think that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of sexual immorality. Ezekiel 16:49-50 does, however, provide a much better reason for those two cities' destruction:

This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before there; therefore I removed them when I saw it.¹⁴

In Matthew chapter 10, Jesus sends out his disciples into the world to preach the Good News. He even mentions Sodom and Gomorrah:

If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.¹⁵

Jesus makes the implication here that Sodom and Gomorrah were guilty of being inhospitable in relating it to the possible treatment His disciples would receive

¹⁴ Ezek. 16:49-50 (NRSV)

¹⁵ Matt. 10:14-15 (NRSV)

when preaching. Jesus makes no mention of any kind of sexual immorality in this statement and there is nothing even inferred here about sex. According to Jesus Himself, the sin Sodom and Gomorrah were guilty of was inhospitality. So, all this understood, it is wrong to use the word “sodomy” as a synonym for homosexuality. In essence, it would be more appropriate to make up a word to use as a synonym such as “San Francisco-y” or “Provincetown-y” for homosexuality. At the very least, those two cities are known internationally for their strong LGBT culture.

Those who oppose members of the LGBT community also use Romans 1:26-27 as justification for their discrimination:

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.¹⁶

The term that is essential to the meaning of this passage is the term “natural.” It appears twice and then in its antithesis form “unnatural.” In the Greek, the word used here for “natural” is *physikos*, and for the word used for “unnatural” is *para physikos* with *para* meaning “against.”¹⁷ In Greek, the root of *physikos* is *physis*.¹⁸ *Physis* is a word, defined by Strong’s, as:

1) nature

a) the nature of things, the force, laws, order of nature

1) as opposed to what is monstrous, abnormal, perverse

¹⁶ Rom. 1:26-27 (NRSV)

¹⁷ James Strong, *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, G5446.

¹⁸ Ibid. G5449.

- 2) as opposed what has been produced by the art of man: the natural branches, i.e. branches by the operation of nature
- b) birth, physical origin
 - c) a mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature
 - d) the sum of innate properties and powers by which one person differs from others, distinctive native peculiarities, natural characteristics: the natural strength, ferocity, and intractability of beasts¹⁹

This definition seems to imply something more like one's character than something procreation-based. This verse clearly references the sin in acting against one's natural inclinations. That is, if a person is naturally inclined to engage in heterosexual behavior, then it would be sinful to engage in homosexual behavior. The converse also is true: if one is inclined to homosexual desires, than it is sinful to act against those. Neil Elliott, who contributed commentary to the Oxford NRSV Bible, makes the suggestion that "unnatural" in the time of Paul meant to overindulge in sexual activity, thus causing weakness in body.²⁰ An examination of the Greek words and an understanding of Roman culture casts certain doubt over the context of this verse to mean that homosexual behavior is sinful. On the contrary, Richard B. Hays, in his essay "Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies: The Witness of Scripture Concerning Homosexuality," contends that homosexuality is not a singled out sin here by Paul, rather, the widespread practice of homosexuality is simply evidence of humanity's rebellion against God.²¹ He believes that practicing homosexuality is one of the ways which humans defy God's natural order and that

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Rom. 1:26-27 (NRSV) commentary.

²¹ Siker, pg. 8.

its prevalence is evidence of God giving up on humanity. But he is careful to note that homosexuality is not the only sin listed in this section by Paul and that homosexuality is not in any ways called a worse sin than the others. While this interpretation supports the claim that homosexuality could be a sin, it is not definitive in its prescription. These two perspectives offer great insight into the contemporary debate on the attitudes different churches take on homosexuality. Elliot's commentary lends itself to a more liberal perspective on the issue. That is, Elliot leaves the text open to criticism and different interpretations depending on the angle one looks at the Scriptures with. Hays, on the other hand, tries to redeem the stance of the more Evangelical or Fundamentalist churches by using homosexuality as an example of man's rebellion against God. These two authors, both authoritative, look at the same text in different ways and interpret the text to advance their own positions.

One of the most popular²² translations of the Bible is called the New Living Translation, or NLT. The NLT was translated from the Masoretic texts for the Old Testament with texts such as The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Latin Vulgate as a guide; and the New Testament was translated using two different Greek New Testaments.²³In the NLT, the term "homosexuality" is used to describe a list of people who will not be granted entrance into Heaven. This can be found in Paul's first epistle to the church at Corinth:

²² This is according to the Christian Booksellers Association. The NLT is the third most sold translation of the Bible after the New International Version (NIV) and the King James Version (KJV). The CBA caters to the Evangelical market.

²³ The New Living Translation, FAQ page.

Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God.²⁴

This translation, which is widely read, is a gross misinterpretation of the verse. The term “homosexual” was not coined until the late 19th Century.²⁵ In fact, in Greek, the language Paul wrote these epistles in, there is no word that translates to “homosexual” or “homosexuality.” The Greeks did not make distinctions like that.

The words used in Greek are the words *malakos* and *arsenokoites*. The term *malakos* is translated to mean “soft one.”²⁶ This is in reference to a male prostitute.

The sin here is not necessarily referring to the sexual orientation of the people involved. If translated as “male prostitute,” or the submissive partner, the sin here is the act of goods exchanged for sexual favors. The term *arsenokoites* is defined literally as “one who abuses his or her self with mankind,” or the dominant partner.²⁷ As Elliott explains with the term *physis* from Romans 1:26-27, it can be deduced here that Paul is referring to the weakening or the abuse of the body as the sin. Even though it is not explicitly clear in this passage that the sins are being either the submissive or dominant partner in homosexual sex acts, those who wish to take away the rights of members of the LGBT community within the Catholic and Evangelical churches use this verse as justification for their actions. Hayes also offers some contrary insight here: he states that *malakos* is an offensive slang for a

²⁴ 1 Cor. 6:9-11 (NLT)

²⁵ Brent Pickett, “Homosexuality,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2011.

²⁶ Strong, G3120.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, G733.

passive partner and that *arsenokoites* is a Septuagint translation of *mishkav zakur*, which means, “lying with male.”²⁸ He claims this is an idiom for homosexual that the people in Paul’s time were aware of. Hayes is, of course, not completely certain of the correlation, so there is no way to say for sure if this is true.

Suppose though, that Paul did intend for his epistles to mean “homosexual” or “homosexuality” as we understand those words to mean today. Paul does not exactly define what those terms mean, so it is not clear whom exactly he is targeting. In our world today, people identify in all sorts of ways. Paul seems to impose these sanctions on those who identify as “homosexuals.” But there does exist a population of people who occasionally perform homosexually but who do not identify as homosexuals. Daniel DeNoon, a WebMD news correspondent, reported in 2006 that 10% of the men who identify as “straight,” or “heterosexual,” have sex exclusively with men.²⁹ By their own admissions, these men do not fall identify as homosexuals. “Homosexual,” in modern context, denotes a certain kind of lifestyle and mannerism. Paul implies that “homosexual” is more of a gender expression than a sex act. That is, it seems that according to Paul, the sin is not the sex itself, but the form of gender expression implied with a sexual role. These men have sex with other men, but they do not identify as homosexual in the sense that they take on a more patriarchal feminine role. These men would, instead, be considered “queer.” “Queer” is a term that is used now by many people who choose not to identify within a certain group, especially a sexual sub-group. The Bible, specifically the Pauline epistles, does not make any mention of people who live this kind of lifestyle. This begs the question of

²⁸ Siker, p.7.

²⁹ Daniel J. DeNoon, “Many Straight Men Have Gay Sex,” WebMD Health News, 2006.

whether or not the punishment is the same for them as it is for those who identify within the confines of the language Paul uses, or rather that has been interpreted as Paul using.

What people use today as Biblical justification for the discrimination of LGBT people is based on casual, flawed interpretations and some churches' willingness to choose which rules to follow and which rules not to follow. Perhaps the reason behind this is that the laws in Leviticus are so strict that most people would either fail to or not be willing to adhere to them. Leviticus provides a long list of practices that are forbidden. Today, some churches choose which of those rules and interprets them incorrectly. Often times, this is based on an argument that the Old Testament was a time when people lived under the Law and the New Testament ushered in a new period where people live under grace. And grace, somehow, nullifies many of these laws.

These arguments I have presented are the most used arguments the Catholic and Evangelical churches employs when fighting against those who wish for equal rights for the LGBT community. It is apparent that these arguments, once a bit of scrutiny is added, are not as concrete as some churches need them to be. That is, these arguments seem to lack the gravitas with which they are believed once someone more thoroughly examines the language and theology behind them.

The History of Gays and the Church

With the Catholic and Evangelical churches' arguments against homosexuality now presented, a look at how these rules were implemented in the form of civil laws from the time of the Roman Empire will give insight into how the issue of homosexuality gained importance over time.

The foundations of medieval Europe were set by the Roman Empire. The most telling piece of information that conveys the attitude the Romans had towards homosexuality is that there is not a word in Latin that is equivalent to the English term "homosexuality." Also, there does not exist a Latin term that translates to the English word "heterosexuality." This understanding of language is pertinent to understanding the attitudes the Romans had towards people who were of the homosexual persuasion. In Latin, words like *cinaedus*³⁰ and *pathicus*³¹ are used to describe homosexual men. In looking at their definition however, they seem to be violations of gender normativity than of sexual deviance.

Furthermore, in Ancient Roman culture, the concept of *virtus*³² was enacted, partially, through sexual conquest.³³ Rome was an imperialistic society and its virtues, at least for the male citizens,³⁴ were exemplified through sexual actions.

³⁰ Craig Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

Latin word for a man who is anally penetrated.

³¹ Ibid. Latinized Greek word meaning "to submit to."

³² Latin word for "valor."

³³ Eva Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*. Yale University Press, 1992, 2002, originally published 1988 in Italian. p. xii.

³⁴ Citizen denotes a male who is not a slave and was born in a territory under the rule of the Roman Empire.

These conquests embodied the Roman notion of absolute power. Men were encouraged to perform these acts as a means of acting out their masculinity. The converse, of course, is also true: a man who was conquered, that is he was the receiving or penetrated partner, was dishonorable for taking on that role. This, however, does not make homosexual sex a bad or dishonorable action, but the role that one took on.

In Roman Society, all of the emperors prior to Claudius were blatant bisexuals.³⁵ Nero, a Roman emperor, married two men.³⁶ Perhaps the most famous gay power couple in the entire history of Rome is Hadrian and Antonius. Hadrian, arguably the greatest of all of the Roman emperors, is thought to be exclusively gay.³⁷ Hadrian was so in love with Antonius that when Antonius died, Hadrian had him deified, he had monuments built in his honor, and named festivals in his honor.³⁸ This serves to show that homosexual relationships were commonplace in the ancient world. The people understood the relationships and did not think less of them than they did heterosexual relationships.

John Boswell, a gay historian from Yale University, extensively studied the history of the Church and its treatment of gay people. He contends that:

The transformation of the almost limitless tolerance of Roman mores into the narrowness which characterized, for example, Visigothic Spain – a nation racked by violence and hostility against Jews, heretics, political dissidents, gay people, and other non-conformists – must have been caused, one is left to

³⁵ John Boswell. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. The University of Chicago Press. 1980. p. 83.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Boswell. p. 84.

³⁸ Boswell. p. 85.

infer, either by the total disappearance of the Roman population or by the advent of one or both of the two forces which replaced hegemony, Christianity and the barbarians.³⁹

This statement Boswell makes is most profound in that it attributes an entire ideological shift to an influx of a people group and their religious ideas, rather than a purely political shift.

With the decline of cities like Rome, a decline in visibility of gay subculture was seen in the Middle Ages.⁴⁰ Male prostitution, which was taxed in the Eastern Roman Empire, was no longer taxed and it was banned in the Western Roman Empire.⁴¹ In AD 342, the Emperor Constantius II issued a decree in which he stated that if a man decides to enter into a marriage with a man dressed as a woman, he would be put to death.⁴² It is interesting to note here though that, again, the emphasis seems to be on a violation of a gender role and not on the act of homosexuality itself. In 533, however, laws were passed making homosexual behavior illegal.⁴³ Interestingly enough, Christianity had already been the official religion of the Byzantine Empire for over two hundred years. The Christian church, at the time, had held the views that homosexuality was a sin similar to adultery for many years prior to that.⁴⁴ That being said, I think it is safe to assume that the Christian church did not actively petition the government to outlaw homosexuality for a long time. Boswell goes on to argue that the oppression of homosexuals only

³⁹ Boswell. p. 91.

⁴⁰ Boswell, pg. 169.

⁴¹ Boswell, pg. 170.

⁴² Theodosian Code 9.7.3.

⁴³ Boswell, pg. 171.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

got worse in the Renaissance with the rise in the power of the Catholic Church. The punishment for being caught in homosexual acts would be death.⁴⁵ Boswell did incur quite a bit of criticism though. Firstly, Pierre Payer, in his book *Sex and the Penitentials*, argues that Boswell ignored several hundred years of laws regarding homosexuality.⁴⁶ Boswell also is accused of ignoring the writings of such theologians like Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas, in his work *Summa Theologica*, speaks about the validity of using Natural Law as justification for homosexual behavior. In Article Four, he discusses the issue of the universality of natural inclination and states that not all natural inclination is correct behavior.⁴⁷ It can be said that Boswell ignored Aquinas' critique of this argument and his opposition to homosexuality when he wrote that the Catholic Church was not as opposed to homosexuality as it is commonly thought to have been. Boswell is also criticized for his claim that the early Christian practice of *Adelphopoesis*, Greek for "brother making," was an act of the Catholic church sanctioning same-sex marriage.⁴⁸ Historians such as John McGuckin have argued that Boswell did not take the entire practice into account, but rather he started with the ceremony and misinterpreted the purpose of the ceremony.⁴⁹ However, Phillip Lyndon Reynolds conceded that

⁴⁵ Boswell, pg. 293.

⁴⁶ Pierre J. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials*, University of Toronto Press, 1984, pp. 135-139.

⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Article 4.

⁴⁸ John Boswell, *Same Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe*, Villard Books, 1994.

⁴⁹ John McGuckin, "RE: Critique of John Boswell," September 4, 2012, Email.

this ceremony could be easily used to cover up same-sex relations during the time which *adelphopoesis* was practiced.⁵⁰

Homosexuality began to appear more and more in the laws until 1791 when France decriminalized homosexuality in civil law.⁵¹ Even though homosexuality had been decriminalized, the Nazis took advantage of Paragraph 175 in the German Penal Code to persecute homosexuals during the Holocaust. Today, Europe still struggles with some equal rights issues stemming from the civil laws passed during the Renaissance by the strong influence of the Catholic Church.

The story is not much different in the United States.⁵² The moral fibers of American society are set often, but not always, by the peoples' religious values. The Puritanical influence on American laws and morality still exist in today's society. I argue that the Puritans took their cues regarding homosexuality first from the Bible and second, in a more legalistic sense, from William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. In this book, Blackstone calls the act of sodomy abominable, detestable, and a crime against nature.⁵³ This language of "abomination" is the same language used in the book of Leviticus. It can be easily concluded that the reasoning behind the criminalization of sodomy, or homosexuality, has strong roots in

⁵⁰ Phillip Lyndon Reynolds, "Same Sex Unions: What Boswell Didn't Find," *Christian Century*, 1995.

⁵¹ Scott Gunther, *The Elastic Closet: A History of Homosexuality in France, 1942–present*, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009.

⁵² It is worth noting that in light of the 2012 Presidential Election, more states are starting to legalize gay marriage.

⁵³ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School, 2008

traditional religious morality. Homosexuality was first decriminalized by Illinois in 1961.⁵⁴

Now, in 2012, all fifty states have decriminalized homosexuality. This is thanks to the Supreme Court case *Lawrence v. Texas*.⁵⁵ Even now, in 2012, there are only a small number of states that recognize same-sex marriage. There are even more states that have voted to keep same-sex marriage from happening. The opponents of same-sex marriage, a vast majority being Evangelical Christians, believe that same-sex marriage is somehow an attack on a moral order enacted by God. They use the Bible to justify discrimination against a group of people. More mainstream Protestant churches, however, take a different stance on the issue and even work to ensure the rights of all people are recognized and respected.

⁵⁴ Gary Mucciaroni, *Same Sex, Different Politics*, Chicago University Press, 2008, p. 123.

⁵⁵ *Lawrence v. Texas* was a Supreme Court case in which two men were arrested for breaking sodomy laws in Texas. The case made it to the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court ruled that the sodomy laws were unconstitutional based on a person's right to privacy. This ruling also abolished the laws in thirteen other states that still prosecuted people under sodomy laws.

The Actions of the Church Today

Now that the precedent for the change in civil laws has been set, I think it is time to examine the Catholic Church, the United Church of Christ, The Episcopal Church, and the Assemblies of God, and, more importantly, how these different branches of Christianity have changed, or not changed, their views on homosexuality. With the exception of the Catholic Church and the Assemblies of God, the churches listed all belong to the National Council of Churches. The latter Assemblies of God church belongs to an organization called The National Association of Evangelicals.

Firstly, the Catholic Church is one of the oldest Christian churches in existence. As was discussed earlier, it was the primary form of Christianity for much of the world for much of modern time. The Catholic Church has taken a position against the LGBT Community in the world:

Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered." They are contrary to the natural law. They close the

sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.⁵⁶

This quote taken from the Catholic Church's Catechism calls homosexual persons "intrinsically disordered." Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, prior to his ascension to the Papacy, wrote an epistle in 1986 called *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*. In this letter, Cardinal Ratzinger affirms the Catechism calling homosexuality "intrinsically disordered" and claims that even the inclination towards homosexuality is evil, not just the act itself.⁵⁷ Ratzinger then uses Biblical texts previously discussed as Scriptural foundation for his argument: the laws in Leviticus and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.⁵⁸ He further states that ministers within the Catholic Church ought to be leary of those in the Catholic Church who would seek to make allowances for those afflicted with the "homosexual condition." That is, people who advocate for homosexuals are often times acquainted with homosexuals and the homosexuals mislead the people.⁵⁹ Ratzinger's prescription to the Bishops regarding homosexuality is to encourage chastity.⁶⁰ Basically, his prescription consists of homosexuals, whether their homosexuality is innate or not, must count their affliction as Christ's sacrifice on the cross. That is, bearing one's cross is, in effect, denial of the self and a sacrifice of the self to obtain salvation and to understand the mysteries therein. According to

⁵⁶ The Catholic Church, "Part Three: Life in Christ, Section Two: The Ten Commandments, Chapter Two: You Shall Love Your Neighbor As Yourself," *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, line 2357.

⁵⁷ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, 1986.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Ratzinger, a homosexual giving up homosexuality as a means of better understanding God is the same as a heterosexual giving up heterosexuality to better understand God. In congruence with Ratzinger's position, the Archdiocese of Hartford, Connecticut has instituted a new program, which is quite revolutionary for the Catholic Church, for its parishioners who are also members of the LGBT Community. The organization is called COURAGE and its goal is to "(make) a distinction between homosexual attractions or feelings – and – the behavior of acting on these feelings. It recognizes that the feelings in and of themselves are not a sin, but that the homosexual acts are."⁶¹ The Archdiocese does, however, disagree with Ratzinger's notion that the inclination is a sin. According to the mission statement from the program, the Church only recognizes the act of homosexual intercourse a sin.

Furthermore, the Catholic Church has chastised nuns in the United States, both organizations of nuns and individual nuns⁶², for their involvement, or lack thereof, in promoting equal rights for members of the LGBT Community.

In contrast to the Catholic Church is the United Church of Christ. The UCC Church is, historically, one of the most open and affirming churches. The UCC Church, in 1972, was the first church to ordain an openly gay minister.⁶³ It was also the first church to recognize and bless same-sex marriages in 2005 when

⁶¹ The Archdiocese of Hartford, "COURAGE." 2012.

⁶² The Leadership Conference on Women Religious has recently come under fire from the Vatican for not doing enough work in the field of opposing abortion and gay marriage. Also, the Vatican has chastised Sister Margaret Farley, a professor at Yale Divinity School, for her book *Just Love*. The Church feels that it does not reflect the views of morality set forth by the Church.

⁶³ The United Church of Christ, "UCC Firsts."

Massachusetts passed the law allowing same-sex couples to have a marriage recognized by the state.⁶⁴ A resolution was passed by the General Synod⁶⁵ to allow ordained UCC ministers to bless same-sex unions. This resolution included strong language calling the privilege to marry a human right. The UCC Church has a practice called “Open and Affirming” or “ONA.” The purpose of ONA is: “a journey of building inclusive churches and other ministry settings that welcome the full participation of LGBT people in the UCC's life and ministry.”⁶⁶ The justification for the ONA policy was spelled out in 1985.⁶⁷ The General Synod called on Paul’s teachings on the one-ness in the body of Christ⁶⁸ and Christ’s teachings on loving our neighbors and to be edifying to one another.⁶⁹ The UCC Church has been a driving force in mainstream Protestant theological progressiveness. Specifically for the LGBT Community, it has provided one of the safest environments for spiritual growth.

Perhaps the other strongest denomination for the LGBT Community is The Episcopal Church. Along with The United Church of Christ, The Episcopal Church has long been at the forefront of social change. In 1979, the Episcopal Church had its 66th General Convention.⁷⁰ During this historic Convention, the assembly

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ The General Synod in the UCC Church is the governing body in that meets every two years to discuss doctrine and resolve issues.

⁶⁶ The United Church of Christ, LGBT Ministries.

⁶⁷ The United Church of Christ, *1985 General Synod “Open and Affirming” resolution*, 2008.

⁶⁸ Romans 12:4 (NRSV)

⁶⁹ Mark 12:31, Matthew 7:1-2, and Luke 18:9-14 (NRSV)

⁷⁰ The Episcopal Church has a General Convention every three years where, among other things, they decide on doctrine. It is during these meetings that change in liturgy and church law is enacted and/or upheld.

officially stated that homosexual people are still the children of God and adopted rules that would allow homosexual people to be ordained as priests in The Episcopal Church as long as they lived wholesome lives as recognized by the Church.⁷¹ In 1991, however, resolutions were passed at the 70th General Convention that normatized heterosexuality.⁷² In 2003, The Episcopal Church elected its first openly gay bishop in New Hampshire, Bishop Gene Robinson. In 2002, The Episcopal Church's Executive Council⁷³ released the following resolution:

Resolved, That the Executive Council, meeting in Durham, NH, recognize the need for publicly acknowledged church communities where sexual minorities are welcome to participate fully in the life of the community respecting their dignity as children of God and their right to self-determination in accordance with the intentions of D039, adopted by the 73rd General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That parishes wishing to express a public welcome of sexual minorities be encouraged to do so and encouraged to prepare for such welcoming by engaging in the study and use of one of the following programs...

Resolved, That such congregations be encouraged to display outward and visible signs of such welcoming including such things as the prominent display of the rainbow flag, display of the study course, display of official welcoming statements by Vestry and clergy, the presence of alternative

⁷¹ Jeffrey Siker, *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, 1994, pp. 195-196.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ The Executive Council of The Episcopal Church is charged with implementing the resolutions enacted by the General Convention during the triennium (the three year period between General Conventions). Their resolutions are not taken as official positions of the church.

households in parish directories, and other appropriate means; and be it further...⁷⁴

This resolution passed by the Executive Council, while not a resolution passed by the General Convention, paved the way for The Episcopal Church to call for a standing committee to investigate a change in the liturgy surrounding marriage to be inclusive of homosexual couples in 2009 at the General Convention. And in 2012 at the 77th General Convention, a resolution was passed allowing Episcopal priests who preside in states that allow same-sex marriage to use the blessing “ I will bless you and you will be a blessing” in the liturgy of marriage for same-sex couples.⁷⁵ In 2010, Reverend Katherine Ragsdale and Reverend Mally Lloyd, both Episcopal priests, were married in Boston at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul. Reverend Ragsdale was also named the President of The Episcopal Divinity School. Furthermore, the Episcopal Divinity School was one the first seminaries in the United States to open its doors to LGBT students who were open about their sexuality.⁷⁶

The Assemblies of God church offers a position essay on homosexuality. The introduction to the paper ends with:

It should be noted at the outset that there is absolutely no affirmation of homosexual activity found anywhere in Scripture. Rather, the consistent sexual ideal in the Bible is chastity for those outside a monogamous heterosexual marriage and fidelity for those inside such a marriage. There is

⁷⁴ The Episcopal Church, “Welcoming Sexual Minorities into Church Communities.” *Executive Council Minutes*. 2002.

⁷⁵ The Episcopal Church, “A409: Authorize Liturgical Resources for Blessing Same-Gender Relationships,” 77th General Convention, 2012.

⁷⁶ The Episcopal Divinity School, “History.”

also abundant evidence that homosexual behavior, along with illicit heterosexual behavior, is immoral and comes under the judgment of God.⁷⁷ This paragraph sets the precedent for the reader to believe that the Bible provides a strict set of rules concerning both sexuality and marriage. That is, when one reads the Bible, these sets of rules will appear as black and white and there is no need for further research and interpretation. Furthermore, while the writer wants the reader to believe that the Bible clearly sets these boundaries, the writer also implies that the Bible gives the only acceptable social structure. The position then takes a clinical turn:

We believe, in the light of biblical revelation, that the growing cultural acceptance of homosexual identity and behavior, male and female, is symptomatic of a broader spiritual disorder that threatens the family, the government, and the church...historically, homosexuality often has been defined as an emotional (psychological) or organic (physiological) problem. In recent years, some have lobbied mental health organizations to have homosexuality removed from the list of classified diagnostic pathologies, and many have come to see it as nothing more than a morally neutral personal preference or a naturally occurring aspect of human biological diversity...we must remember scriptural warnings against depending on our own reasoning or even personal experience to discern truth.⁷⁸

Without actually saying that homosexuality is psychological disorder, the writer here implies that there is some kind of treatable reason why people identify as homosexual. The writer goes on to say that homosexuality is a sin because of specific scriptural references; especially those found in Leviticus. But most interestingly, the writer provides reconciliation for homosexuals at the end: "While

⁷⁷ The Assemblies of God, "Homosexuality," 2001.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Scripture makes it clear homosexual behavior is sin and comes under the judgment of God, it also indicates that those who are guilty of homosexual behavior or any other sin can be reconciled to God.”⁷⁹ Paul’s Corinthian letters are cited as a means to give instruction on how a homosexual can find reconciliation with God.

Within the Assemblies of God denomination, there are organizations, as there are for all denominations, which seek to provide further clarification of Biblical principles through enrichment materials. One specific organization is called Church Enrichment Ministries, Inc. This ministry organization, at one time, was headed by a man name Dr. H.S. Ryan. Dr. Ryan is an important figure to discuss because, while he is not an academic theologian, his views are shared and sanctioned by the people in the denomination to which he belongs, the Assemblies of God. He wrote a small book, which was distributed by Church Enrichment Ministries, entitled *A Teachers and Students Guide to: A Biblical Perspective of “Sodomy,” Incest, Bestiality, & Bi-sexuality and Their Affect on the Church, and Moral Society in General*. The header of every page in the booklet says “You have His Word on it!” I suppose Dr. Ryan is trying to re-affirm, on every page, that his writing is exactly what God intended. Dr. Ryan opens the booklet with another affirmation that what he writes is truth.⁸⁰ Ryan does, however, warn that Christians ought to approach a sinner with love and compassion.⁸¹ In his defense of “orthodox” ideology, he again makes clear the importance of not turning members of the LGBT community away. He uses the

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ H.S. Ryan, *A Teachers and Students Guide to: A Biblical Perspective of ‘Sodomy,’ Incest, Bestiality, & Bi-sexuality and Their Affect on the Church, and Moral Society in General*, p. 2.

⁸¹ Ibid.

phrase “inhospitable and biased” to describe how many people describe “orthodox” Christian beliefs.⁸² Dr. Ryan then begins to make his case. He begins his argument with a prayer from Paul that asks for guidance in continuing down the path to righteousness.⁸³ He then, like the Assemblies of God position, begins to systematically use Bible verses that have the word “homosexual” in them, verses about sexual immorality, and verses about Creation to prove that homosexuality is not a proper relationship structure. While Dr. Ryan is, of course, entitled to his opinion and his own interpretation of the Scriptures, he does cause two reasons for offense in this booklet. Firstly, he groups homosexuals (Sodomites) into the same classification as those who commit incest or have sex with animals. It goes without saying that this is a wretched and ill-informed way of grouping people. Secondly, what is most disturbing, is Dr. Ryan’s perverted interpretation of Romans 1:27. This verse speaks of some punishment people will receive for what is interpreted as homosexual relations. Dr. Ryan insinuates: “could this be the horrible penalty of AIDS???”⁸⁴ Dr. Ryan uses his position in the Church and his influence as a minister to espouse hateful theology, and, he uses something theological to justify something biological. Dr. Ryan is not a medical doctor, nor is he a virologist. Thus, his claim that HIV/AIDS is God’s punishment to homosexuals is completely and utterly unfounded scientifically.

So what we see here in modern theology is a broad spectrum of interpretation in how the churches ought to treat members of the LGBT community.

⁸² Ryan, p. 7.

⁸³ Ryan, p. 9-11.

⁸⁴ Ryan, p. 21-22.

On one side, there are denominations like the United Church of Christ and the Episcopal Church who are fully accepting and affirming of LGBT people and who recognize and perform marriage rights.⁸⁵ On the other side, are the Assemblies of God and the Catholic Church who, not only do not recognize the validity of LGBT lifestyles, but who actively fight against equal rights for LGBT people. This objection to lifestyle is no more evident than in the Evangelical and Catholic churches' attempt to prevent members of the LGBT Community from marrying. The National Organization for Marriage, a Protestant and Catholic organization that advocates against gay marriage, states that allowing gay people to marry would increase levels of poverty, make education for children more difficult, and a plethora of other horrible things.⁸⁶ They also talk about how marriage is a sacrament or a religious institution and allowing gay people to marry threatens the traditional, Christian view of what a family is. The ONA churches respond to this kind of logic through love and arguments of social justice. Basically, marriage is a civil institution, not a religious one; and Christ preached love as stated in the ONA creed.

The difference in opinion here comes from each of these churches different view of the Bible. These opinions are not just on homosexuality, but also on sexuality as a whole. The Assemblies of God church believes that the Bible is inerrant and not subject to any argument about its validity: "We believe the Bible is the Word of God written; it is the revelation of the truths of God conveyed by

⁸⁵ It is worth noting that not all Episcopalians support gay marriage and open and affirming inclusion in the Episcopal Church. Some members who feel this way have joined more conservative Anglican communities like those found in Africa.

⁸⁶ National Organization for Marriage, "Why Marriage Matters," 2005.

inspiration through His servants to us. As such, it is infallible and without error.”⁸⁷

Because of this belief, the Assemblies of God church, and other churches that prescribe to this notion of Biblical inerrancy, are bound by the morals from the Biblical translation they read from. If what Paul says in the book of Romans is translated as “homosexuality,” then that is how the Assemblies of God church positions itself on different social issues. Any discussion of possible misinterpretation is completely disregarded. On the other end of the spectrum, churches like the United Church of Christ see the Bible as a human document with human limitations, but that it is inspired by God and that it ought to be taken as a guide for how Christians ought to live and practice their faith.⁸⁸ In this kind of mindset, the Bible is open to hermeneutical study because the members of churches that believe this believe that the Bible can be interpreted differently and could have different meanings. Basically, because it is a human document, it is not perfect and, because it is not perfect, it is open to scholarly debate.

Also, an interesting point to note is, in regards to the Catholic Church’s perspective and the Assemblies of God’s perspective, if homosexuality is such a perverted evil, then why are gay people allowed in the church? I suppose the Assemblies of God church would say that there is hope for their soul to be redeemed. But, if Ratzinger is right and even the inclination towards homosexuality is truly evil, is abstinence a sufficient sacrifice for membership in the church? It seems there is so much emphasis put on the evils of homosexuality and its abiding

⁸⁷ The Assemblies of God, “The Inerrancy of Scripture,” 1976.

⁸⁸ Lee Barrett, “Theological Worlds in the United Church of Christ: Collision, Chaos, or Complementary,” *Prism: A Theological Forum for the United Church of Christ*, 2007.

and dangerous influence on those around it, as Ratzinger states, that the mere presence of homosexuals in a church congregation would be something the church would be actively fighting against. If the LGBT people are influencing the Catholics to make allowances for homosexuality, or rather, they are convincing Catholics to start a movement within the Catholic Church to accept homosexuality as a viable and morally right lifestyle, then it seems almost counter-productive to have them as members in the Catholic Church even though they may not be actively living a homosexual lifestyle. It seems inconsistent that Ratzinger would urge priests to perform pastoral care and that the Assemblies of God church would ask that congregants not condemn the homosexuals if they pose such a grave threat.

The Dangers of Continued Belief in Biblically Justified Discrimination

Using the Bible as a way of marginalizing the LGBT community can have detrimental effects on gay Christians. In 2009, The Barna Group, and independent Christian polling firm and research group, conducted a study on the spiritual lives of adults in the LGBT community, who for the sake of this study will be referred to as “gay adults.” According to the research, 72% of straight adults considered spirituality a “very important” aspect of their life while only 60% of gay adults did. Of the straight adults surveyed, 85% of them self-identified as Christians while only 70% of gay adults did. When asked about having a “personal relationship with Jesus Christ,” 75% of straight adults confirmed this while only 58% of gay adults did. Also, straight adults were able to qualify as born-again 47% of the time while gay adults were only able to qualify 27% of the time. 71% of the straight adults believed in the Biblical perception of Jehovah God while only 43% of the gay adults prescribed to this notion. And finally, straight adults were twice as likely to go to church, read the Bible, and pray on a regular basis than the gay adults, respectively, 31% versus 15%.⁸⁹ These statistics, I believe, reflect the alienation members of the LGBT community feel from some Christian churches.

Perhaps the greatest danger of all is the influence some of these faith groups have on public policy. On November 7, 2008, California voters passed Proposition 8. Proposition 8 is a measure that adds a constitutional ban on same-sex marriages in California. In this instance, some faith groups took a political role. While some

⁸⁹ The Barna Group, “Spiritual Profile of Homosexual Adults Provides Surprising Insight,” 2009.

churches, such as The Episcopal Church, strongly opposed Proposition 8, churches such as the Roman Catholic Church and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also known as Mormons, were strong proponents of the ballot measure. In fact, the Mormon Church donated \$37,000 in non-monetary contributions to the movement.⁹⁰ This ballot measure passed because there was a great amount of support garnered by these faith groups. The churches that promote an anti-LGBT agenda used their sway as a theologically grounded organization to influence the voters. And now, in California, same-sex members of the LGBT community are not able to enjoy the freedom to marry each other.

In August 2012, there was a movement to support the restaurant Chick-Fil-A because it was suffering the backlash of one of their executives supporting a Constitutional ban on same-sex marriage, and for condemning the people who support it.⁹¹ Here is an example of a man with executive power in a major restaurant chain using his influence to espouse his religious beliefs. Like the proponents of Proposition 8, his beliefs are based on misinterpretations in the Bible about the LGBT community.

Faith groups have an enormous responsibility. Its job is to provide a safe space for people to grow spiritually. Some denominations within the church have evolved to the point where a person's sexual orientation, and whether or not it is a sin, is between that person and God. Other faith groups, however, feel that it is their job to impose their beliefs and morals on those of us who may not agree. The way

⁹⁰ Ruben Vives, "Mormon Church to be fined by state political commission over Proposition 8," *The Los Angeles Times*, 2010.

⁹¹ Tiffany Hsu, "Is Chick-fil-A anti-gay marriage? 'Guilty as charged,' leader said," *The Los Angeles Times*, 2012.

these denominations do this is by influencing the laws that govern the land and the people. While American citizens have the right to allow their religious beliefs to influence their opinion, and, while officials who are legally elected are allowed to let their religious beliefs influence their policy making, it is bad politics to allow that much religion into government. Especially in America, there is a much to vast array of religious convictions to allow any one kind of religion-based moral code to exist.

Conclusion

When the Catholic and Evangelical churches allow their members to believe that the Bible provides justification for its members to act in opposition to the rights of members of the LGBT community, something very dangerous happens: people begin to use the Bible to justify other forms of discrimination. One hundred and fifty years ago, preachers stood at their pulpits and preached out of the Bible about the moral justification of slavery. Less than one hundred years ago, preachers used the Bible to justify the lynching of black people. Today, preachers use the Bible to justify the condemnation of LGBT people and the inhumane treatment of immigrants. The Bible can be used and interpreted to mean a lot of different things.

The Bible gives guidelines on how one ought to live his or her life and build a relationship with God. The Bible actually pretty clearly states that passing judgment on a person is dangerous because the way you judge someone is the way God will judge you.⁹²

LGBT people can, and should, have communion with God. It can be said that one can partake in communion with God without having communion with other members of a church. But, let us not forget that the book of Hebrews in the Bible charges us with the commandment “forsake not the assembling of yourselves together.” While gay people can certainly commune with God outside of the context of the Church, that sense of community and fellowship is vitally important to the stability and continuance of the Christian community.

⁹² Matt. 7:1 (NRSV)

We live in a world full of hatred. People kill each other over petty things. People suffer from a lack of the essentials required to live. People discriminate against others based on their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, and many, many more things. Christians are called to be like Christ, that is, to emulate the actions and the heart of Jesus Christ. Jesus loved everyone. Even as he was crucified, he had compassion for those who were responsible for killing him. The greatest lesson the Bible can teach us is to love. We ought not let petty differences such as opinions about lifestyles prevent us from reaching out and helping those who are desperately in need. Supporting the LGBT community is about love. Love is the central theme of Christianity. And, when all is said and done, the amount of Scripture that could possibly reference homosexuality is far surpassed by the amount of Scripture that talks about loving your neighbor.

The writer of the Book of Micah implores us to live our lives in a certain manner. I think this is the best philosophy of life anyone could ever live up to: "...do justice...love kindness...and walk humbly..."⁹³

⁹³ Mic. 6:8 (NRSV)

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