

Strange Bedfellows: Progressive Christian Voices for LGBT etc. Equality

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## Abstract

Christian theology is at the root of the debate over LGBT etc.<sup>1</sup> equality. What the movement needs to counteract conservative Christian voices is for progressive Christian allies to come out proclaiming a doctrine of love and acceptance. Progressive here means either apologetic or non-apologetic interpretations of scripture, sex positive interpretations, compromising views of essentialism and constructionism, etc. Certain Christian biblical interpretations and doctrines have been used to support efforts toward equality for different identities. Progressive Christian rhetoric, grounded in scripture, can be used to argue in favor of LGBT etc. rights and so counter conservative Christian anti-LGBT etc. rhetoric.

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<sup>1</sup>Throughout this paper, the label LGBT etc. will be used to refer to the classification of individuals which this paper addresses. This term is an acronym which has been used for decades now and, more or less, represents the community. The acronym stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and more. Typically the acronym is solely LGBT or sometimes LGBTQ (the Q standing for queer), in this paper I use 'etc.' to simplify the 'alphabet soup' which may ensue when identities like asexual, polyamorous, polysexual, pansexual, etc. vie for attention. Whereas others have used the word 'queer' to encapsulate the same complexity, the term is loaded with politicization. I will attempt to avoid the word 'queer' out of respect for those who have been traumatized by the derogatory use of 'queer.' Furthermore, the term 'queer' is in many ways incorrect at totally encapsulating all the various identities represented by 'etc.' Queer is sometimes used by members of the community as a catch all term to include the whole of the acronym, but this is a clear oversimplification, to the point of pushing the diversity of identities into false amalgamation and confusion. 'Queer' is also used in a more specific identity known as gender queer and encompasses several ideas such as movement between genders (i.e. fluid gender), lack of gender (i.e. agender), or many genders (i.e. polygender). I will still own the fact that 'etc.' is itself an oversimplification which belittles the identities of the marginalized within the marginalized, none the less I defer to it, to avoid having to type LGBTTQIAAAPPPPOOFF etc. several times within the same sentence.

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Religion in the popular consciousness is often seen as against the LGBT etc. community. Such impressions may come from the comments of religious figures on the matter. Some of the most respected religious leaders of millions of people, such as his holiness Pope Benedict XVI, have directly opposed LGBT etc. civil liberties and rather espouse a notion that being LGBT etc. is a crime against humanity, “Pope Benedict declared that calling homosexual partnerships a marriage was among several threats to the family... ‘Consequently, policies which undermine the family threaten human dignity and the future of humanity itself.’”<sup>2</sup> This quote was delivered by his holiness in Los Angeles California during the federal appeals process to overturn proposition 8, a law enacted in 2008 by California voters to outlaw same-sex marriage.<sup>3</sup> His holiness may be implying that the decision to enact same-sex marriage in California and elsewhere in the US is, “a threat to humanity.” The Pope seems to be saying that allowing two (or more) men or two (or more) women to get married will somehow threaten the human species. His holiness directly identifies marriage as solely for heterosexual couples, “pride of place goes to the family, based on the marriage of a man and a woman.” His holiness not only opposes the LGBT etc. community out of theological reasons but also seems to suggest that secular law should also oppose the LGBT etc. community. The call for anti-LGBT etc. policy not only comes from the Catholic Pope but also from Protestant religious figures within the US. The late Jerry Falwell made a highly politically charged assault on LGBT etc. rights, as well as allies to the community, “And the fact that he (John Kerry) would not support a federal marriage amendment [prohibiting gay marriage], it equates in our minds as someone 150 years ago saying I’m personally opposed to slavery, but if my neighbor wants to own one or two that’s OK. We

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<sup>2</sup> Catholic Online (NEWS CONSORTIUM). (1, 11 20). *Catholic online*. Retrieved from [http://www.catholic.org/international/international\\_story.php?id=44351](http://www.catholic.org/international/international_story.php?id=44351) Retrieved on 3/15/12

<sup>3</sup> Times Magazine. (1/29/10). *Times Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1957505,00.html> Retrieved on 3/16/12

don't buy that.<sup>4</sup>” Here Reverend Falwell makes a personal attack on John Kerry during his 2004 Presidential race. The Reverend has exercised his influence with evangelical voters to denounce a political candidate for his policies on LGBT etc. people. What’s also intriguing is that he seems to compare same-sex marriage to owning slaves which is both unfounded and illogical. Falwell may have believed that same-sex marriage is in some way an infringement on the personal liberties of some people. It seems that many voices from the pulpits speak up to declare that LGBT etc. identities are an evil that the US cannot support.

Perhaps reason can be seen in the words of politicians? Surely even the most conservative of political figures would not use religion as fodder for an attack on LGBT etc. civil rights. Several of the 2012 Republican presidential candidates have actually, directly used religion in their attacks on the LGBT etc. community. Herman Cain applauded the passage of a law in his home state of Georgia banning same-sex marriage by saying, “We have a war on our moral fiber. We will not allow the Godless few to destroy our moral foundation.<sup>5</sup>” This statement by Cain is full of religious imagery that equates LGBT etc. identity with “Godless[ness].” Cain seems to be under the impression that LGBT etc. identities and religious belief in a deity are mutually exclusive identities. Cain seems to be unaware of the many Christian LGBT etc. identified people, as well as other religious LGBT etc. people. He seems to have no idea that the Metropolitan Community Church, as well as other faith communities, exist, and that they support LGBT etc. identities (Wilson 1995). By quantifying LGBT etc. people with a lack of religious belief Cain may be attempting to pit religious people against LGBT etc. people as an effort to

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<sup>4</sup> CNN : Anderson Cooper\_360 *Degrees* (3 November 2004) <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0411/03/acd.01.html>  
Retrieved 3/13/2012

<sup>5</sup> Stein, S. (2011, 10 05). Herman cain's 2004 campaign: 'godless' gays and planned parenthood eugenics. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/05/herman-cain-abortion-planned-parenthood-2004-campaign\\_n\\_996631.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/05/herman-cain-abortion-planned-parenthood-2004-campaign_n_996631.html)  
Retrieved on 3/15/12

galvanize the public against LGBT etc. civil liberties. In their appeal to voters the 2012 Republican candidates directly reference religious freedom and LGBT etc. rights as opposites. Rick Perry exemplifies this attitude, “I’m not ashamed to admit that I’m a Christian, but you don’t need to be in the pew every Sunday to know that there’s something wrong in this country when gays can serve openly in the military but our kids can’t openly celebrate Christmas or pray in school.<sup>6</sup>” Mr. Perry is trying to appeal to the Christian right in identifying himself as a Christian, claiming that Christian religious freedom is being infringed on, and that LGBT etc. rights are a threat; all within the same sentence. He may even be implying that somehow liberty for LGBT etc. people is responsible for perceived Christian suppression. The candidates claim that their stances are not discriminatory as Michele Bachmann demonstrates, “I am not here bashing people who are homosexuals, who are lesbians, who are bisexual, who are transgender... We need to have profound compassion for people who are dealing with the very real issue of sexual dysfunction in their life, and sexual identity disorders...It’s part of Satan.<sup>7</sup>” Bachmann’s comments have a tone which seemingly comes from a place of empathy, and yet she describes LGBT etc. identities as mental illnesses, which come from Satan. Though her comments are loaded with anti-LGBT etc. rhetoric, coming from pseudo-scientific stigmatization and literal demonization, she still claims that she is not discriminating against LGBT etc. people. The candidates have even attempted to claim that they are being discriminated against on the basis of their religion due to their comments on LGBT etc. rights, case in point Rick Santorum, “Because I believe what the Catholic Church teaches with respect to homosexuality, I’m a bigot. So now I’m a bigot? Because I believe what the Bible teaches. Now, 2,000 years of teaching and moral

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<sup>6</sup> Gibson, M. (2011, December 9). Rick perry’s ‘strong’ campaign ad gets the web angry. Retrieved from <http://newsfeed.time.com/2011/12/09/rick-perrys-strong-campaign-ad-gets-the-web-angry-and-laughing/> Retrieved on 3/19/11

<sup>7</sup> Montopoli, B. (7/13/11). Michele Bachmann in 2004: Homosexuality is "personal enslavement". Retrieved from [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544\\_162-20079221-503544.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-20079221-503544.html) Retrieved on 3/15/11

theology is now *bigoted!* And of course we don't elect *bigots* to office.<sup>8</sup>” Mr. Santorum argues here that his religious views condemning LGBT etc. people are not discriminatory. He implies that efforts to call him out on his biased views constitute a form of discrimination which might bar him from the presidency.

It seems that both religious leaders and politicians call for political action against LGBT etc. people in the name of Christianity. This involvement of religion in politics directly violates the concept of separation of church and state. It is fascinating that the arguments from both faith leaders and politicians do not engage secular policy nearly as much as they engage religious doctrine. The candidates are not arguing points from secular political perspectives. They are arguing points from Christian family values, gender binary models as divine law, and biblical teaching, which sees LGBT etc. people as immoral. From the rhetoric, it seems that the debate over LGBT etc. rights is not a secular debate at all but rather a debate about religion, specifically Christianity.

In the United States today, and in many other countries, civil liberties and rights are being granted to some and not to others. For example, in 1992 the state of Colorado attempted to enact a second amendment<sup>9</sup> to the Colorado constitution which would have prevented any government body from enacting legislation to protect gay or lesbian identified persons under the law. Amendment two led to the Supreme Court case *Romer vs. Evans* (1996)<sup>10</sup> which struck down the case as unconstitutional, still legislation like amendment two comes up quite often. The

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<sup>8</sup> dailycollegian. (2011, August 30). *Presidential candidate rick santorum q&a at the hub-roberson center*. Retrieved from [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmwZh-8i8Fs&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmwZh-8i8Fs&feature=player_embedded) Retrieved 3/19/12

<sup>9</sup> CO. Const. pt. 1, art. II.

<sup>10</sup> *Romer v. Evans* - 517 U.S. 620 (1996)

fourteenth amendment to the constitution guarantees all citizens equal protection under the law. In this country, some people are awarded the economic, legal, and social privileges of marriage, employment non-discrimination, and legal validation of their relationships solely because they are heterosexual,<sup>11</sup> cisgender,<sup>12</sup> and monogamous.<sup>13</sup> Some social categories of people such as women, people of color, LGBT etc. people, to name a few, face discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, socio-economic status, ability, creed, sexual orientation, gender identity, relationship orientation, religion, etc. This paper focuses on the issues surrounding the recognition of LGBT etc. identities within the religio-political climate of the United States. In the context, of the United States, one of my primary arguments for this paper is that the issues surrounding the LGBT etc. community are not political debates but rather are truly debates over LGBT etc. status within religion. At every point in the debate, the issue of religion comes up. Political leaders and policy makers often speak of advocacy for LGBT etc. people in terms of religion and religious scripture. Religious organizations actively contribute to campaigns denying rights to LGBT etc. groups.<sup>14</sup> LGBT etc. protections are often given a loop hole for religious freedom considerations counter to the first amendment; as was the case in the state of Michigan in 2011,<sup>15</sup> when legislation was proposed to curtail bullying in public schools especially towards LGBT etc. youth. State legislators wanted to provide an exemption on the basis of religious belief, which would have allowed a student to assault and harass other students by claiming it as a requirement of their religion. In American history, movements towards equality such as the abolitionist and civil rights movements received at least partial support, if

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<sup>11</sup> Sexually attracted to the different-sex

<sup>12</sup> people whose biological sex match their gender identity

<sup>13</sup> people who only desire to be with one partner

<sup>14</sup> Jacobs, R. (2008, November 04). Mormon church on prop 8: We oppose civil rights (but don't tell). Huffington Post. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rick-jacobs/mormon-church-on-prop-8-w\\_b\\_140804.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rick-jacobs/mormon-church-on-prop-8-w_b_140804.html) Retrieved on 3/10/2012

<sup>15</sup> Raushenbush, P. (2011, November 08). Leave religion out of michigan's anti-bullying bill. Huffington Post. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-raushenbush/michigan-bullying-law\\_b\\_1082162.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-raushenbush/michigan-bullying-law_b_1082162.html) Retrieved on 3/10/2012



not majority support, from religious institutions (Grimke 2008). If LGBT etc. rights are to pass in this country the support of religious institutions, may be helpful in turning public opinion.

The reasons why some members of the dominant religion of the United States (i.e. Christianity), as well as other religions, feel LGBT etc. identities are wrong are not inherent traits of religious or spiritual beliefs but rather notions of heterosexism,<sup>16</sup> cissexism,<sup>17</sup> and monosexism<sup>18</sup> which are present in many religious traditions. There is no theoretical understanding of religion that sees LGBT etc. discrimination as a necessary component of religious belief. Still many traditions can be found to have LGBT etc. discrimination present in them. If the movement can convince major religious institutions to accept and celebrate<sup>19</sup> LGBT etc. identities as morally correct, which more and more traditions are doing, hearts and minds of many individuals will change toward the subject and eventually legislation will follow.

It is crucial to note that the dominant religion of a region, and religion rather than spirituality is what can affect the most political change in a region. A major reason that this is the case is readily apparent in the fact that most politicians in the United States identify as Christians, which is the dominant religion of the country, demographically. Christian values and ethics have dominated the US political sphere since the Moral Majority revolution of the late 80's and to a lesser extent prior to that. Studies (Vilaythong, Lindner, & Nosek, 2010) have shown that, in the case of LGBT etc. inclusion, the dominant religion of a region creates the greater positive attitude toward LGBT etc. people, as compared to a minority religion. The study

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<sup>16</sup> The assumption that heterosexuality is superior to other sexualities.

<sup>17</sup> The assumption that cisgender is superior to other genders.

<sup>18</sup> The assumption that monogamy is superior to non-monogamies.

<sup>19</sup> This is the distinction between tolerance and celebration within religious organizations, which will be explained in detail later in the paper.

primed participants with the golden rule, a tenant of both Christianity and Buddhism, and were then either told that the quote was from Buddha or Jesus and finally asked about their opinions of gay and lesbian people. Those told the quote came from Buddha showed greater antipathy towards LGBT etc. identified people suggesting that since Buddhism is a minority religion in Britain (the area the study was done) it had lesser sway. People may see Buddhism as an intruder to the religio-cultural milieu of the area, and so are less trusting of it and feel more comfortable ignoring its tenants even though they are identical to the dominant religion.

A growing demographic in the US and elsewhere is the identity of spiritual but not religious. Spiritual but not religious people are an amalgamation of different theological opinions and backgrounds. They have at least one thing in common, that they believe in notions of spirituality but do not identify themselves as belonging to any particular religion. This group is acknowledged here because while they may espouse progressive values they are not a cohesive group which can act as a single movement for change. Difficulties lie in speaking to all spiritual but not religious individuals or getting a consensus from that demographic. Aside from the fact that spiritual but not religious as an identity is not demographically dominant (14.6% of the US population),<sup>20</sup> it is also a catch all category which is made up of millions of individuals all with different ontological views which cannot come together as a cohesive force to denounce bigotry and support equality. There are also no, formal institutional, environments in which members of the spiritual but not religious identity can be mobilized into direct action, whereas religions have those formal settings.

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<sup>20</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) *World factbook*. (2012, February 27). Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/us.html> Retrieved on 3/3/2012

This paper will focus on the ways in which progressive Christianity can aid in the civil rights movement for LGBT etc. identities. The paper will focus on three primary identities and their aspirations toward freedom within the LGBT etc. movement; these identities are lesbian/gay, transgender, and polyamorous. Each of these identities will have specific legislative goals outlined and explained in the context of progressive Christian contributions to their liberation.

### **Should Religion Ally with the LGBT etc. Community-**

Having already mentioned this term ally, I should further define what I mean by it. Ally is a term used by various social justice movements to identify privileged people who support their cause. For example a white person can be an ally to people of color, a wealthy person can be an ally to the poor, a straight person could be an ally to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. In using this term in this paper I would like to expand the understanding of the word. As a system, rather than just individuals, religious traditions could ally to the LGBT etc. movement. The privileged socially acceptable institution of religion could aid in the struggles of the socially unacceptable LGBT etc. movement.

An obvious question arises in this paper, should religion, and the LGBT etc. movement be allied? After all LGBT etc. people have faced religious bigotry for thousands of years. A collective psychological scar is apparent not only in the community but also in the lives of individuals. Many LGBT etc. people have been personally scarred by the voices from the pulpits saying being bisexual is a lifestyle choice, not an orientation. They've been damaged by the words of scripture proclaiming a man who loves his husband has sinned and deserves to die for

it. They have felt the bitter sting of being kicked out of the clergy, the place of worship, and grace itself simply for choosing to change their bodies to the anatomy God intended. Because of the bitter hatred leveled against LGBT etc. people, some of them have decided to self-identify as Atheist, Agnostic, or Secular Humanist. These scars are not apparitions; they are real and they do affect the direction the LGBT etc. rights movement takes. This paper does not intend to say that the perceived gulf between religion and the LGBT etc. community does not exist; rather it attempts to argue that the gulf is not as far apart as one might think and jumping it will lead to the betterment of both sides.

Some LGBT etc. activists who have been scarred by religion have allowed that to enter into their advocacy. The LGBT etc. movement has been accused (Mollenkott, 2007, 42, Wilson, 1995, 25) of being a one issue singular movement solely interested in their own betterment and ignoring issues of sexism, racism, classism, abelism, etc. One might add to the list that the movement ignores issues of religious discrimination. As many would argue (Mollenkott, 2007, 42, Wilson, 1995, 25) the fate of the LGBT etc. movement is linked to the fate of the ongoing movement for the civil liberties of women, people of color, the poor, the differently abeled, and people of all faith traditions or non-belief traditions.

LGBT etc. activists who consciously or unconsciously ignore the issues surrounding religion also ignore the issues faced by LGBT etc. people of faith. They forget that there are lesbian Muslims, polyamorous Catholics, bisexual Wiccans, intersex Jews, transgender Buddhists, pansexual Jains, etc. etc. etc. Religion is an integral part of these people's lives and the discrimination they face is twofold as both LGBT etc. and people of faith. Many LGBT etc.

people of faith face discrimination in both places of worship and secular LGBT etc. organizations (Mollenkott 2007, 73). The issues that these people face, with the intersections of their identities as religious and LGBT etc. are important and need to be advocated for. Activists who ignore religion forget that there are faith traditions, which are not just open and affirming but celebratory of LGBT etc. identities. Forgetting that celebratory communities exist alienates a vital source of LGBT etc. allies. Finally, it makes no strategic sense to ignore a significant source of funding, motivated protesters, and expert allies who can help fight the bigotry of the religious right. The rhetorical advantage that celebratory faith communities can provide in combating theological objections to LGBT etc. rights is immense, especially considering that these theologies of terror highly influence the political climate. Activists might argue that they are not willing to run organizations open to all faith traditions because they are afraid of promoting the interests of a particular faith tradition. To that one might argue, 'shouldn't you be interested in promoting celebratory faith traditions?' To ignore celebratory traditions can be seen as promoting traditions that are not celebratory. If activists are concerned that it may alienate Atheist and Agnostic identified LGBT etc. people, shouldn't they be asking whether stopping the faithful at the door is a way of silencing voices of faith and unfairly promoting atheism and agnosticism as the only acceptable beliefs of LGBT etc. people (Mollenkott, 2007, 73)? For LGBT etc. organizations perhaps the best compromise is to model themselves on the academic study of religion<sup>21</sup>. The academy attempts to provide a neutral ground at which all faith traditions and non-belief traditions can exist on an equal level of discourse and communication. Even LGBT etc. organizations, mandated by federal funding to provide a secular environment, such as school Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs), can argue that they do, as modeled by the academic study

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<sup>21</sup> Moore, D. L. (2010, APRIL). *The AAR religion in the schools task force*. American Academy of Religion. Retrieved from [http://www.aarweb.org/publications/Online\\_Publications/Curriculum\\_Guidelines/AARK-12CurriculumGuidelines.pdf](http://www.aarweb.org/publications/Online_Publications/Curriculum_Guidelines/AARK-12CurriculumGuidelines.pdf) Retrieved on 3/10/12

of religion which has been the source of exactly how to run a secular educational environment. The academic study of religion has been tasked by the Supreme Court in the case *Abington school district vs. Schempp* to create a way to “teach about religion” rather than “teach religion.”<sup>22</sup>”

### **Doctrine and Biblical Interpretation-**

By the use of the term doctrine this paper means to speak of theological issues not explicitly present or which are overarching themes in Christian scripture. To that end we will speak of three issues that progressive Christians can take up to defend LGBT etc. people. These issues are a celebratory community, a sex positive theology of body, and an inclusive theology of being made in the image of God.

Faith organizations such as churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, and other institutions of religious life that support LGBT etc. individuals often describe themselves with the words ‘open and affirming’ (Comstock, 2009, 22). In the evolution of various religious opinions over the issue of LGBT etc. people, we have seen a shift from a place of condemnation, to a place of neutrality and closetedness, and now towards a place of acceptance (Wilson, 1995, 2) but what is needed is more than acceptance. The rhetoric of ‘open and affirming’ can be thought to mean that ‘gay is okay’ but what the movement needs in order to go further is the notion that ‘gay is great.’ The movement needs places of worship that are more than okay with LGBT etc. people. The movement needs faith communities that believe that being LGBT etc. is a special gift from the divine which reveals and instructs humanity in a certain truth that the

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<sup>22</sup> School Dist. of Abington Tp. v. Schempp - 374 U.S. 203 (1963)

power(s) of ultimate reality wants us to understand. What is needed are celebratory churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, etc. The movement needs faith organizations to move beyond questions like can we survive ‘the gay issue’ to can we survive without ‘gay’ people? (Comstock, 2009, 22). This celebratory model might be likened to the notion of tribal shamanism or more specifically the role of two spirit people in some native American tribes. Two spirit people like other shamans in many other cultures use their marginalized status (Two Spirit people may be considered in western terminology sexual and or gender deviants) as an advantage in likening their difference to an otherworldly nature. Shamans who are often members of marginalized groups are made sacred by their marginalization, which can be a model of how to view LGBT etc. people. Shamans made their differences into something powerful and strangely divine as a person on the border between categories and in a symbolic way on the border between reality and divinity (Mollenkott, 2007, 170-173). Shamans across cultures have often been members of marginalized groups such as the blind, deaf, elderly, differently abled, women, and often LGBT etc. individuals. These people used belief as a means to protect themselves from hegemonic society, which may have sought to persecute them. One might even theorize that religion was originally created as a means to aid the powerless, by their taking up an ultimate and invisible power as their protector against worldly powers of the privileged. These tribal shamans have set an example for the so called ‘world religions’ in their view of LGBT etc. identity as something unique to share with the world.

In her book “Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus, and the Bible” Rev. Nancy Wilson speaks about the LGBT etc. communities gifts to communities of faith (Wilson, 1995). Wilson speaks of several gifts such as a new view of parenting and family, revealing the myths and

misconceptions of sex assault and child abuse, kindness towards the most marginalized groups, the gift of using our wounds to heal others, the gift of coming out, the gift of homoeroticism, a new view of “God’s image,” holding a proverbial mirror to the church, a new lens on scripture, humor, art, hospitality, and finally sex as a gift from the divine. Although Wilson as a Reverend of the Metropolitan Community Church comes at this issue from a Christian-centric lens much of what she has to say is generalizable to a variety of religious traditions. Wilson finds that LGBT etc. individuals can show society not a new meaning of family but rather a concept of family of choice rather than birth. She cites Jesus of Nazareth as the primary example (Wilson, 1995, 87) as well as the fact that lifelong, monogamous, heterosexual nuclear families only account for eleven percent of the US population (Wilson, 1995, 133). The Reverend notes the myths surrounding LGBT etc. people, especially gay men, and sex assault when she addresses the irony of how gay men have been unilaterally labeled as both victims and perpetrators of sex assault. She addresses how they have often felt the need to distance themselves from children. Yet the statistics show that the vast majority of sex assaults are committed by straight white men on young girls and women (Wilson, 1995, 28-29). In keeping with that gift, the book discusses how when thousands of children were diagnosed as HIV positive, society shunned them like lepers, and the only ones willing to take them in were gay men and other LGBT etc. individuals. Wilson likens this to Christ embracing the lepers (Wilson, 1995, 31) she also relates this to other issues in which the most persecuted of individuals in society often feel accepted by the LGBT etc. community. Wilson speaks of the shared suffering LGBT etc. individuals have experienced, and how they use that suffering to move them towards healing others and preventing suffering (Wilson, 1995, 39). In quoting from scripture “the truth will set you free” (John 8:32)<sup>23</sup> Wilson reminds the reader that coming out is a profound admission of the truth and how it can set the

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<sup>23</sup> Two versions of the Bible were consulted for this process the New International Version and the King James version.



individual free from psycho-social fear and terror (Wilson, 1995, 42). Wilson discusses the concept of homoeroticism as a love of the similar which can be generalized towards greater self-acceptance (Wilson, 1995, 44), which is also echoed in the book “Queering Christ: beyond Jesus Acted Up” in which homoerotic longing for the image of Christ is considered an experience of religious enlightenment (Goss, 2003, 16). The Reverend Wilson points out that if all people are created in the image of God and if LGBT etc. people are, in truth, people then God is gay, God is Transgender, God is Polyamorous, etc. and suddenly the image of God as truly encompassing all of human diversity is revealed (Wilson, 1995, 54). “The Church is a whore, but she is my mother” this phrase, which is often attributed to St. Augustine, demonstrates another of Wilson’s gifts, which is that gay people like other marginalized groups hold a mirror up to the church, so it can see its own proverbial whoredom (Wilson, 1995, 59-62). The Church can also heal from its state of fallen grace to be a mother to its children teaching them what compassion really is. “Our Tribe” also speaks of LGBT etc. people providing a new lens on the Bible not as the word of an authoritative parent but as the word of a friend to a friend as Gary David Comstock author of “Gay Theology Without Apology” describes (Comstock, 2009, 11). Parts of the Bible which are truly counter to a message of love must be pointed out, according to Comstock. Wilson describes how creative use of suffering (Wilson, 1995, 62) leads to humor and art which LGBT etc. culture is just beginning to produce in phenomenal ways. In discussing the story of Sodom and Gomorrah Wilson points out that the real sin of Sodom as many other scholars agree is not gay sex but rather inhospitality. She theorizes that the two angels sent to Lot were gay noting the erotic undertones of the Bible’s descriptions of these two fair looking men. Wilson also discusses how as people who have often been thrown out of their homes LGBT etc. individuals often go to considerable lengths to be hospitable and kind to strangers (Wilson, 1995, 232). Finally, “Our

Tribe” speaks of sex itself as a fundamental human right and a source of divine joy. Wilson sees LGBT etc. individuals as especially able to make sex more equitable and ethical for all people by seeing “Sex as made for man not man for sex” (Wilson, 1995, 269) thus lessening millennia of sex negativity and stigmatization. ‘Our Tribe’ is an example of what a celebratory attitude toward LGBT etc. identities can look like.

Another theological issue which concerns the LGBT etc. community, is the issue of sexual theology. In his book “Body Theology” James Nelson directly addresses the issues of the body and sexual experience from the Christian theological perspective, which can perhaps shed light on issues in other traditions. Nelson outlines how the Bible regards God as love (1 John 4:8) but not God as lover and identifies this as one of the many ways that the Christian tradition has stumbled in the understanding of divinity. Robert Goss in his book “Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up” talks about how his early same-sex sexual encounters as well as explorations in masturbation involved his visualization of Christ as a lover physically penetrating and being penetrated by him. Goss also points out that sex can be an enlightening experience which connects people to each other and to the divine. Scholars have pointed out that, at times in Christian history, people have related to God in sexual terms such as Aelred of Rievaulx (Boswell, 1980, 163). The Song of Songs in the Bible is an entire book of overt sexual imagery. The book recounts the story of a young, unmarried, heterosexual couple running around an ancient city having illicit premarital sex. The story is often interpreted to be an allegory of the love of God to the bride, ancient Israel. Even if an allegorical understanding were what the ancients intended in writing the book that still makes it significantly sex positive. Sex positivity is the notion that sex is pleasurable, normal, and healthy rather than unpleasant, abnormal, and

unhealthy. The Song of Songs displays the notions of sex positivity in its celebration of physical human love as in some way divine. The Song of Songs is notable for this paper in that it includes a passage which seems to suggest that non-procreative sex is not only acceptable but sacred, “My beloved thrust his hand through the latch-opening; my heart began to pound for him. I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with flowing myrrh, on the handles of the bolt.” What this verse could suggest is that this is an example of vaginal and/or anal fisting. It is fascinating to note also that the King James Version (KJV) of the text has the second sentence as “and my bowels were moved for him” suggesting anal fisting, though the KJV is notorious for its inaccurate translations. The flowing myrrh may be vaginal secretions suggesting that the female lover was fingering herself. The handles of the bolt could be a reference to the labia of the vagina and possibly the clitoris as well. This verse may even be describing an ancient form of birth control in which couples practiced acts which were non-procreative but still sexual such as fisting, fingering, anal sex, oral sex, etc. What is compelling about this verse is that it is the woman who receives the pleasure not the man which is rather counter to contemporary notions of males taking pleasure and females only giving it. A common criticism of same-sex relationships by conservative pundits is that since couples of the same-sex are not capable of biological reproduction they do not deserve the right to marry. If this verse is an innuendo for fisting then the Bible may fully affirm and celebrate non-procreative sex.

A verse at the very beginning of the account of the creation of man in genesis has man being made in the image of God (Gen 1:26). The ways Christians interpret this passage vary across Christian traditions. Some see the passage as a literal understanding of the corporeal bodies of humans are made to look like the image of the incorporeal body of God. Some see this

verse as allegorical in that the image of God is the mind of the creator rather than any corporeal understanding. Both perspectives are actually useful for LGBT etc. advocacy. In the anthropomorphic sense it suggests that God is both male and female bodied, perhaps, as Mollenkott suggests, even intersex (Mollenkott, 2007, 100). This understanding makes intersex closer than any other gender to the divine. It could be hypothesized that God is both male and female, both, neither, and other capable of taking on any of those forms. If this is the case then transgender identities may not be thought of as deviant since God changes gender as well. In the psychological sense of having a mind like God's LGBT etc. identities are still supported. If we have God's mind then God is gay, God is bisexual, God is polyamorous, God feels like a man stuck in a woman's body sometimes. LGBT etc. identities are externally invisible and rather more a part of internal feelings and emotions so if that is the mind of God then so be it. This idea has been challenged from not only the usually non-academic conservatives but also quite academic progressives.

Both an anthropomorphic and psychological understanding of the image of God supports the notion of essentialism over constructionism. Biological essentialism is the thought that LGBT etc. identities are biologically determined and firmly, not choices. Social constructionism is the idea that LGBT etc. identities are matters of social interaction that are in some way, consciously or unconsciously, choices. Progressive constructionists may argue that LGBT etc. identity is a choice but that it is okay to choose any identity. Conservative constructionists argue that if it is a choice you should choose to be straight, cisgender, and monogamous. Essentialism has been the dominant perspective of the LGBT etc. movement for decades. Recently the theories of constructionism arose out of queer theory. Queer theory is a system of understanding

sex, gender, and sexuality as play, performance, and fluidity (Butler, 1993, 310) which need to be deconstructed and subverted. Queer Theory evolved out of postmodernism (Goss, 2003, 73, Comstock, 2009, 47). Postmodernism is uniquely difficult to define since various theorists will give different definitions of it based on the field they apply it. Many theorists also see postmodernism variously as not one theory but a collection of them or possibly not a thing at all rather emphasizing notions of meaninglessness, disruption, and chaos (Spretnak, 1997). Some postmodernists would criticize both science and religion for their reliance on metanarratives which attempt to describe an ontological reality to the universe. Some postmodern theorists might say that there is even no such thing as any ontological reality rather everything simply being a social construction. This sort of sensibility presents a problem for the LGBT etc. community. Some conservatives as well as progressives subscribe to queer theories which see LGBT etc. identity as choices and as fluid definitions. This sort of idea sees LGBT etc. identities as transitory and passing even one might say ‘fads,’ criticisms often leveled against the community out of notions of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. If postmodernists are willing to declare such things as the scientific theory of gravity, for example, a social construction which has no correlating ultimate truth, outside the human experience, then they are free to jump out of an airplane without a parachute and see what happens, perhaps if they realize gravity to be a social construction they might not fall. While of course the theories of gravity have changed from Newton to Einstein to Hawking as new information was uncovered almost all human beings are relatively sure that there is such a thing as gravity and that it is not a construction of human culture, so one might hope that few postmodernists would jump out the plane. With this example hopefully most people will admit that there is, to some extent, a real ontological truth to existence which human knowledge attempts to grasp.

At this point we come back around to the idea that the doctrine of being made in the image of God is an essentialist notion that sees LGBT etc. identities as determined. If we can admit that some tiny ultimate reality exists which is not socially constructed, with the understanding that our ideas about it are partially constructed with at least a little hint of the ultimate, then, a compromise becomes possible. What I propose is that an idea be imported from the field of psychology. This idea is termed the stress-diathesis model and was originally designed to describe the etiology of mental disorders though of course by the use of this model, the paper does not intend to argue that LGBT etc. identities are mental disorders rather the model as a concept is perhaps generalizable to other human traits besides disorders. The stress-diathesis model describes how, biological factors like genetics and hormones do affect the potential for a trait to occur in an individual, but environmental factors such as social interactions also play a role. The model assumes a yet as unknown hierarchy of various biological and social factors which vary on a continuum of degree of exposure. This model settles the ontological monkey wrench of constructionism without allowing for a purest argument that LGBT etc. identities are 'choices.' It may make the most sense as a theoretical model in that if LGBT etc. identities were exclusively biological they would be literally a compulsion that would be irresistible when we know of many examples of individuals coming out late in life and having resisted their feelings, due to social forces. On the other hand, if LGBT etc. identities were solely a matter of social effect then there would clearly have never been any LGBT etc. individuals. For thousands of years of human history, LGBT etc. individuals have been one of the most universally and brutally oppressed and persecuted people who have ever lived (Scanzoni & Mollenkott, 1994,

109); thus social forces would have been firmly against such behavior (Scanzoni & Mollenkott, 1994, 109).

This model is really not only tactically the best but also theoretically superior to either essentialism or constructionism alone. Others have theorized similar ideas to this stress-diathesis model (Mollenkott 2007, 9, Wilson 1995, 11, Nelson 1992, 45, 48, 67). The model leaves no one out. Both constructionism and essentialism could be critiqued for their attempts to dictate identity. Essentialist notions deny the experiences of fluid sexual and fluid gender people rather preferring to see identity as static as well as fostering the confusion of categories. The stress-diathesis model counters essentialism by saying that fluidity is an identity in itself on a spectrum from static to fluid. By the confusion of categories we mean to say that scientists may feel inclined to, for example, see sexual orientation as somehow related to biological sex in that a lesbian's brain should look more like a biological heterosexual male's brain (Allen & Gorski 1992). What this confusion of identity might lead to is thinking that a man attracted to other men, for example, cannot possibly be a complete man, some part of him must be a woman which is plainly incorrect. The stress-diathesis model counters this by saying that categories are distinctly separate, one can be a fully masculine male identified gay man. Constructionism argues that contemporary LGBT etc. advocacy attempts to create a "homonormativity" (Goss, 2009, 234) similar to heteronormativity and sees that as wrong, as well as argues that since gender and sexuality are performances, people who report having static identities are lying, and finally that identities like gay, lesbian, male, and female are illusions which people should cease to identify as in favor of queer which has no definition of gender or sexuality (Mollenkott, 2007, 185). The stress diathesis model suggests that there is nothing wrong with being normal; it is as if cisgender

guilt, straight guilt, or monogamous guilt somehow infiltrated queer theory and developed to see any form of normalcy as wrong. The stress-diathesis model allows people to see themselves as normal with the notion that all human diversity is just another expression of the species. As stated above the stress-diathesis model sees static and fluid identities both as legitimate and at different poles of a spectrum. The stress-diathesis model does not see gender, sexuality, or relationships as illusions and allows people to identify however they want even if they don't want an identity.

The stress diathesis model collects disparate parts of the movement together allowing room for compromise and yet still does not capitulate to conservatives who both argue that essentialism improves support for LGBT etc. people among the public (Schmidt, 1995, 27), and that constructionism proves that LGBT etc. identities are choices (Schmidt, 1995, 142-143). Progressive Christianity can directly help to counter notions of constructionism if it becomes acceptable doctrine that LGBT etc. people are made in the image of God.

Some faith traditions look to religious scripture to define the morality of an action. When looking to scripture in relation to LGBT etc. identities some people of faith see a definitive immorality in LGBT etc. identities while others do not. Scholarship into what religious scriptures say about LGBT etc. people sees the situation as a complex and evolving one with perhaps no easy answer one way or another. There is still an argument to be made, from biblical scholarship, that progressive attitudes toward LGBT etc. people are legitimate. Progressive Christians espousing these interpretations are doing a great favor to the movement.



Here, we must pause in the discourse to address the fact that the scholarship on LGBT etc. theology has been overwhelmingly Christian centric and to a lesser degree addresses Jewish theology but ignores the theological issues of other traditions. This paper will not make an attempt to correct for this despite the author's dejection. Perhaps as the field of LGBT etc. theology and religious studies grows, more scholarship will exist addressing a variety of faith traditions. It should also be noted that the vast majority of scriptural and theological scholarship is primarily focused on gay, lesbian, and bisexual people while ignoring transgender, polyamorous, Asexual, Pansexual, Intersex, etc. identities. This paper will attempt to address that, to an extent, by talking about scripture in relation to transgender and polyamorous identities.

When LGBT etc. issues are brought up the focus, may turn to what does a particular religious scripture say about it. To that no straightforward answer can be given other than scriptures are interpreted by individuals in different ways not only in the contemporary context but at the time of their writing up until today. One perspective that exists is that verses condemning LGBT etc. identities can be countered and that there are verses which support LGBT etc. identities. When talking about scriptural references to LGBT etc. people it is essential to address verses which have been interpreted to be hostile toward LGBT etc. identities as well as verses that can be interpreted to be LGBT etc. friendly. We will speak first of the potentially negative verses which often seem most paramount to believers, but later the potentially positive verses will also be discussed. In talking about hostile scriptural references to LGBT etc. people, two primary strategies evolve to address that rhetoric. One strategy is to use a language of apologetics, as Mollenkott and Wilson do in their books, which attempts to defend the scriptures

by saying that they have been interpreted incorrectly and are not hostile to certain identities. Another strategy used primarily by author Gary Comstock in his book “Gay Theology Without Apology” is to call scripture out; to admit that some verses are discriminatory, homophobic, transphobic, polyphobic, etc. and are inauthentic to the tradition. Comstock speaks of moving away from the Bible as a conversation between parent and child and rather to a conversation between friends that can point out each other’s faults. Reverend Nancy Wilson also addresses the fact that, out LGBT etc. people, as well as women, people of color, the poor, etc. were not present at the council of Nicaea to vote on the text of the Bible and that they now have the right to go back and choose which texts they feel to be legitimate (Wilson, 1995, 70). Both these strategies have merits. In the case, of apologetics literalists can be satisfied that the scriptures are still the perfect words of ultimate reality and also LGBT etc. supportive. Apologetics also allows for an in depth examination of the cultures that produced scriptures thus leading to a deeper understanding of a faith, whereas non-apologetics simply dismisses that culture as primitive in its understanding. Non-apologetics has been successfully used in cases of women’s rights, and anti-slavery movements to say that, for example, yes the Bible states that, it is okay to sell your daughters as slaves (Exodus 21:7), but that’s fundamentally wrong, and counter to the true spirit of the tradition. Apologetics allows the reader to look at scripture and to say that yes there is discrimination here; this discrimination is wrong, the religion as it is now has changed and is still changing to become more inclusive; these verses are not authentic parts of scripture and should be ignored. As we move along, verses of the Bible will be examined, in detail, to address from both an apologetic and non-apologetic lens the issues relevant to the LGBT etc. community.

In the Bible a handful of verses are cited by detractors from the LGBT etc. movement as arguments that gay men and lesbians are sinners in the sight of God. From these verses, certain authors point out that, in each case, the Bible may simply not be talking about committed same-sex partners as we know them today, but rather, violent or coercive same-sex encounters (Mollenkott 2007, Wilson 1995, Goss 2003, Comstock 2009). Reverend Wilson directly quotes from a major conference on biblical scholarship which states that, “No serious biblical scholar would say the Bible unilaterally condemns gay people.” (Wilson, 1995, 78). Many authors (Wilson 1995, Mollenkott 2007) also point out that whereas the Bible contains only a handful of verses that may be talking about same-sex sexual activity there are hundreds of verses talking about different-sex sexual activity. One comedian by the name of Lynn Lavner sums this up rather well in her “Butch Fatale” comedy tour, “The Bible contains six admonishments to homosexuals and 362 admonishments to heterosexuals. That doesn't mean that God doesn't love heterosexuals. It is just that they need more supervision.” In the discourse we will talk about these “six” or so verses in an attempt to disarm them as weapons to be used against the community.

Part of a celebratory attitude toward LGBT etc. identities would be looking back through scripture and identifying LGBT etc. individuals to celebrate their lives and the deeds they accomplished for the tradition. To that aim, we will again look through those texts to identify moments when the scripture identifies and glorifies LGBT etc. individuals. Queer theory may critique the idea that at the minimum gay and lesbian identities did not exist before the nineteenth century when the, now derogatory, term “homosexual” was coined by psychologists looking to stigmatize it. Others have argued (Vanita & Kidawai, 2001 xx-xxi, Boswell 1980,

Mollenkott, 2007, 9) that this notion is incorrect and that ancient cultures definitely had notions of sexual orientation, gender identity, and relationship orientation. Why certain streams of thought wish to perpetuate the myth of LGBT etc. identities as the newest transitory fad rather than recovering the buried history of LGBT etc. people is a mystery.

### **Gay men and Lesbians in the Bible-**

In beginning the examination, we will start in order of biblical books. In the nineteenth chapter, of the book of Genesis the first five verses speak of a now infamous story of potential same-sex sexuality. In these verses, two angels are sent in disguise as men to go to the city of Sodom and try to find righteous people to warrant the redemption of the city. Lot, a resident of Sodom, shows hospitality by offering to feed and shelter the strangers for the night. The biblical text contrasts the virtue of hospitality with the sin of inhospitality a major cultural faux-pas of the ancient near east (Michaelson, 2011, 68). When the men enter Lot's home, the Bible recounts how all the men of Sodom gathered and demanded that Lot turn out the guests so "that they may know them." The Hebrew verb used here is *yada* (Boswell, 1980, 94) and literally means 'to know' and is a euphemism for sexuality. Overall the vast majority of uses of the verb in the Bible are literal references to knowing a person or thing, but just a few verses later in the story, Lot's daughters conspire to get him drunk so "that they might know him" in order to reproduce. Some would argue (Gagnon, 2002, 71-78) that "knowing" is clearly saying that they wish to have sex with these strangers, and that is the sin of Sodom. From this story comes the root of the English word sodomy, meaning anal intercourse. Others argue (Boswell, 1980, 94) that two notable facts are being ignored; strangers were often suspected of being scouts for invading armies in ancient times and that the men literally wanted to know these men in order to

determine if they were enemy scouts (Numbers 13:1-2). It is also notable that if they did intend to have sex with these strangers that act would have been non-consensual, and thus rape, which was often practiced by all men in ancient times to humiliate defeated foes (Scanzoni & Mollenkott, 1994, 58-62). So perhaps the sin of Sodom is rape. This brings up the compelling point that, in Judges 19-21, a remarkably similar story takes place except the strangers are not angels and a Levite (Jewish priestly caste) in the place of Lot turns out his concubine for the men of Gibeah to rape to death. Afterwards, the Levite dismembers her body and sends pieces to different parts of Israel declaring its immorality. Wilson points out that few people quote this passage in talking about same-sex rights since it seems rather obvious the worse sin is on the part of the Levite (Wilson, 1995, 100-102, Goss, 2003, 192-197). The book of Jude, written much later and a part of the New Testament, describes (1:6-7) the sin of Sodom as sexual immorality, but that is vague enough to suggest rape rather than same-sex sexuality. Ezekiel also describes, “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.” (Ezekiel 16:49 see also Amos 4:1-11 and Jeremiah 23:14). Nowhere does the scripture say that the sin of Sodom was consensual same-sex sexuality. Even the ancient scriptures describe sodomy as it should be truly understood, as inhospitality (Wilson, 1995, 96-100), an egregious sin among the cultures of the Middle East and often committed by faith organizations who cast people out for who they are. Reverend Nancy Wilson in her book, “Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus, and the Bible” identifies the two angels in the story as gay men (Wilson 1995, 211), making the sin of Sodom especially palpable to the movement today. If the angels were meant to be gay, or at least posing as a human gay couple entering the town, the sin of Sodom (i.e. inhospitality), is comparable to homophobia as expressed through their attempted hate crime. Non-apologists (Comstock, 2009, 38-39) might

also chime in by noting that Genesis describes rape and it is disgusting to think of a society that sees the act of male on male sex as a greater sin or even a sin at all in comparison to the act of violating any person.

Leviticus chapter eighteen verse twenty two as well as chapter twenty verse thirteen simply state “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.” This seems like a quite simple, short, and definitive explanation that, gay men and lesbians are sinners, but it is anything except definitive. The verse itself is quite complex in its original Hebrew as the author Jay Michaelson describes in his book “God vs. Gay.” To start, the part translated, “as with a woman” literally means “the lyings of woman” (Michaelson, 2011, 61) what these “lyings” refer to is anyone’s guess as this language is not replicated in other sections of the Bible which might have shed light on their meaning. Most translators agree that, the reference is of a sexual nature but they are unsure as to what sexual act exactly. The words “lyings of a woman” seem to reflect emotionless sex rather than making love which the bible uses different words for (Michaelson, 2011, 61). It may be argued that the verse refers to anal sex, so as long as two men do not have anal sex (and some gay men do not) but do other things that is perfectly fine. Others have noted that perhaps the Bible refers to treating a man in a submissive sexual manner as people in biblical times treated women (Michaelson, 2011, 61); thus, it is praiseworthy to have sex with a man as long as he does not submit to you, ruling out bondage but not anal sex. Of course, apologists might take the previous stance and argue that yet again the Bible is revealing its misogyny. Still others might argue that it is physically impossible for a biological man to ‘lie’ with another biological man as he could ‘lie’ with a female bodied person since the anus is, in fact, a different bodily organ than the vagina thus the whole verse is made irrelevant. Apologists

might also point out that the last part of the verse describing the act as an “abomination” uses the Hebrew word *toevah* (Michaelson, 2011, 63), which is difficult to translate but may mean ritual impurity. Such ritual impurity was a specific kind of sin according to ancient Judaism, which could be removed through sacrifice (see Leviticus). It is also compelling to understand that the Bible speaks about certain things which are *Toevah* for some cultures but not for others, such as the case of Egyptians being unable to eat with foreigners as that was *toevah* for them (Gen. 43:32). Leviticus 20:13 specifically prescribes the death penalty for the act, whatever it may be. The Bible also prescribes the death penalty for talking back to your parents (Exodus 21:17), which is unlikely to have been observed in ancient times as it would be to observe today, with the holocaust of dead teenagers that would ensue. *Toevah* is used, in other places, to describe shrimp (Lev. 11:9-12) and mixed fabric cloth (Lev 19:19), as abominations, things that we consider totally normal in the world today. Of course, Christian theology might argue that the sacrifice of Jesus invalidates the old laws despite Jesus himself saying, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (Matthew 5:17). Even though Christian theology argues this, same-sex love may still be seen as an abomination though someone could just as easily argue that Christ did invalidate Leviticus 18:22. What is also critical to note is the verse just above 18:22. Leviticus 18:21 describes the prohibition of sacrificing your children to the God Molech. This proximity to ancient polytheistic religious temptations, as well as the use of ritual impurity (i.e. *toevah*), might suggest that it is perfectly fine to have sex with a person of the same gender; as long as you do not do so in dedication to a pagan God as often practiced by ancient near eastern polytheists (Deut. 23:17). Non-apologists will also point out that the verse seems to speak only about male sexual activity and ignores Lesbians, and other women who have sex with women, which is clearly biased since,

in fact, women can, and do have sex with each other. If this verse is speaking about male on male sex then the real confusion the ancients had was in the idea that a man who has sex with another man, somehow becomes less of a man. What this represents is the confusion of the categories of gender/sex and sexual orientation which is a total misunderstanding of the human being. Ancient Israelite law was often concerned with keeping categories separate such as two types of fabric in the same garment or two different types of seed planted in the same field (Lev. 19:19) and yet again Leviticus 18:22 wishes to keep male separate from female, but in doing so it mixes categories of sexual orientation and gender identity.

The story of the young soon to be king David as written in first and second Samuel recounts the boy king's encounters with the young prince of Israel, Jonathon. The story of David and Jonathon was interpreted by medieval and modern theologians to be a story of friendship rather than sexuality, but several contemporary scholars now doubt the chasteness of the relationship (Mollenkott, 2007, 109, Wilson, 1995, 149-157, Goss, 2003, 133, Comstock, 2009, 38-39). The story paints the scene of Jonathon as an adult, which in ancient Israel could have been as young as a teenager, and David as a boy which means at least prepubescent. This story already seems to borrow tropes from Greek literature of pederastic lovers one which is at least slightly older and of superior social position and the other as younger or of inferior position (Mollenkott, 2007, 109). The Bible recounts how immediately after slaying the Goliath Jonathon takes David aside and makes a covenant with him, "And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as



his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.” (1 Sam. 18:1-4) This passage is quite explicit if we understand it from the right lens. Jonathon is essentially taking him into his household as the book of genesis describes brides leaving their parents households for the house of their husbands. Several times there are references to a love between the two males that seems quite intense and spiritual. They celebrate this love by making a covenant one might notice that covenant is used in referring to the relationship of God to Israel and also the relationship of a marriage as often seen from the allegorical understanding of Israel as God’s wife. It is also beneficial to notice that such a marriage ceremony would have made David’s later kingship legitimate. At the end, Jonathon strips down to nothing before David which medieval scholars see as just something friends do. Later on, the Bible recounts how the pair was forced to separate. The separation was necessary due to Saul’s jealousy in thinking David had aspirations to kingship as well as possibly having realized his son was in love with David (1 Sam. 20:30). David and Jonathon wept with each other and kissed each other (1 Sam. 20:41). In ancient Israel, a kiss might not have meant more than friendship, but in the context of the other verses it seems to suggest the possibility of more than friendship. Later in the story Saul and Jonathon are killed, and David expresses his sorrow, “How the mighty have fallen in battle! Jonathan lies slain on your heights. I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.” This verse is perhaps the best evidence of a same-sex sexual relationship. David describes his love for Jonathon in almost definite sexual tones likening it to a relationship with a woman. The fact that David refers to Jonathon as his brother does not discount this idea since it is not uncommon for biblical lovers to refer to each other as siblings as in the song of songs. It should be noted that both David and Jonathon

practiced polyamory and had multiple wives as well as each other. Later on, David takes in Jonathon's son as if he was his own (2 Sam. 9) again making a connection that seems like a marriage. Perhaps most significant about this story is that regardless of the nature of the relationship between the historic characters of David and Jonathon the writer is using homoerotic language to perhaps reveal to their contemporaries as well as history that there were same-sex oriented individuals in biblical times.

The Bible also speaks of another famous couple which later scholars have interpreted to have a totally platonic love rather than a sexual one. Contemporary scholars have, as with David and Jonathon, pointed out certain homoerotic tropes in the story of Ruth and Naomi (Mollenkott, 2007, 110, Wilson, 1995, 149-157, Comstock, 2009, 38-39). Ruth and Naomi as recorded in the book of Ruth make a pact with one another that seems rather homoerotic. In Ruth 2:24 Ruth is said to cling to Naomi and the Hebrew word used is *dabaq*. What is compelling is that this word is used also in Genesis to describe how a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife. In Chapter one verses 16-17 the love of Ruth for Naomi is expressed, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die — there will I be buried. May the lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!" (Ruth 1:16-17). Ruth in the story is not an Israelite but rather marries one who later dies. Biblical Jewish weddings require that a non-Jewish partner convert in order for the wedding to occur. While Ruth had to in order to marry her husband who later dies she does not have to continue to practice Judaism except in the above verse she does still practice. Why she might do this, may be because she now considers herself married to Naomi.

In the New Testament Jesus either says nothing about gay and lesbian people or the only things he has to say are positive. One of the positive stories recounted is that of the Centurion and his servant. In Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10 the story is narrated how a Centurion of the Roman army came up to Jesus and asked that his servant be healed. The word used here is the Greek word *pais*. *Pais* could be understood to mean servant, child, or son or it could refer to the younger member of a pederastic same-sex couple. Even if, it were meant to be 'servant,' in ancient Roman society citizens had sexual rights to their servants and slaves, but it seems the centurion cares deeply for this slave and shows a committed rather than coercive sexual relationship (Mollenkott, 2007, 123, Wilson, 1995, 162). The centurion described how he was unworthy to have Jesus enter his home yet if Jesus were to but say the words the centurion believed his lover would be healed. Jesus marvels at the centurion and says he has more faith than any in the land of Israel sending him home to his healed lover. It seems Jesus may have not cared at all what the relationship of the centurion to his servant was and rather regarded the faith of this gentile and lover of men as more important.

Several reputable authors have also pointed out the possibility that Jesus may have been bisexual and intersex. (Wilson, 1995, 140-148, Mollenkott, 2007, 119). One might also speculate that Jesus could have been polyamorous given his possible relationships with several people. Many point out (Mollenkott, 2007, 119, Wilson, 1995, 140-148, Goss, 2003, 119) that Jesus refers to one of his disciples as beloved several times as well as the intriguing relationship he had with Mary Magdalene, Mary and Martha, and Lazarus (Mollenkott, 2007, 119, Wilson, 1995, 140-148, Goss, 2003, 119). In the Bible, the Greek word *phileo* is used to refer to Jesus feelings

for the beloved disciple and Lazarus (Mollenkott, 2007, 119). Phileo literally means love and can be used in the general context of mutual respect but is also used to refer to the feeling of a heterosexual couple for each other. There is also of course a verse in Mark which recounts how upon his arrest the disciples scatter including an unidentified youth who was wearing only a light garment which fell off easily which the youth took no notice to and instead ran naked through the night (Mark 14:51-52) (Goss, 2003, 119). In one passage (Mat. 5:22) Jesus is quoted as saying, “Whosoever shall say to his brother ‘raca’ shall be in danger of the council.” “Raca” is another Greek term which has been translated as effeminate or may in the modern slang be understood to mean ‘fag’ (Mollenkott, 2007, 121). If this is the case, then Jesus is actively speaking out against gay bashing and hate speech. Mollenkott also points out a scientific hypothesis of the virgin birth which states that if Mary was an intersex person she could, in theory, have been capable of self-fertilization, though that has never been observed in the human species. If she did impregnate herself, her offspring would have XX chromosomes so if Jesus is XX and yet anatomically male he must have been intersex (Mollenkott, 2007, 115). Jesus also seems to refer to three types of Eunuch in the gospels. Matthew 19:11-12 has Jesus speaking about Eunuch’s born that way (i.e. intersex), Eunuch’s made that way (i.e. true eunuch’s or gender reassignment surgery), and Eunuch’s for the sake of the kingdom of God (anyone’s guess) (Mollenkott, 2007, 120). We have no conclusive evidence that Jesus was bisexual, intersex, and polyamorous only speculations that suggest it.

Saint Paul and others unlike Jesus make clear references to same-sex sexual activity. In the first chapter of Romans (1:21-31), Paul describes how the people of Rome in practicing pagan polytheism are given over to shameful lusts and exchanged natural sex with women and

instead had sex with each other. Paul also makes the first biblical reference to women having sex with women thus equally discriminating. What complicates these verses, is that some might suggest Paul has no concept of loving committed same-sex relationships and is instead talking about coercive relationships as sinful such as the all too common child abuse practiced in Rome (Goss 2003, 200). One might also suggest that perhaps Paul is talking about people who defy their sexual orientations (hence the unnatural part) and have sex with the same sex when they are only attracted to the opposite sex (Comstock, 2009, 43). Yet again as with Leviticus 18:22 there is a connection made between idolatry and polytheism with same-sex sexuality perhaps suggesting that it is totally okay to have sex with the same-sex just as long as you do not worship a statue of Venus while doing it. Non-apologists can point out that Paul is coming from a culture of deep seeded masculine inferiority complexes; which causes them to confuse same-sex love with dominance by another man. Many authors (Wilson, 1995, 163, Goss, 2003, 123-125) have also argued that Paul is a closeted gay man struggling with his own sexuality forcing him to commit homophobic acts much like many men today.

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians contains an admonishment in chapter six verses nine and ten which says that the kingdom of God will not be inherited by two types of individuals malakoi and arsenokoitai. The meanings of these Greek words, as several authors note (Goss, 2003, 199, Michaelson, 2011, 88), is extremely difficult to determine. Many translations of the Bible describe both these words as homosexuals which is a bit of a leap to make. In the case of malakoi, the term seems to make both a reference to soft, pliable fabric and to a man (Michaelson, 2011, 88). Some authors note that malakoi is used by non-biblical writers at the time to refer to lazy people and not men who have sex with men (Seger, 2006, 153). Some

(Gagnon, 2002, 303-336) have imagined this word as related to the word for effeminate, but that's a stretch of innuendo which modern people might mistake. If it is correct that malakoi refers to effeminate men then perhaps, yet again, as long as two macho, manly men have sex with each other, without any form of submissiveness or coercion, then they may feel free to have all the sex they like. Arsenokoitai is a strange word, possibly even an ancient portmanteau combination of the Greek words for 'beds' and 'man.' The meaning of this word is rather difficult to tell since it does not appear in many ancient texts; though some ancient texts such as Sibylline Oracles 2.70-77<sup>24</sup>, seem to refer to it as a title of a pimp, hence it would be an innuendo for a man who owns many beds. People within the modern era might be inclined to interpret it as a man taking another man to bed, but where that becomes problematized is in the fact that there is no description of it as a sexual act, rather the oracle mentions a list of sexual acts it considers to be immoral and yet does not mention (Martin, 2007, 5-6). Arsenokoitai might also be most accurately translated as a man in beds or going to beds rather than the stretch of a man taking another man to a bed. No matter what interpretation, one has to wonder why Paul did not simply refer to pederasty if he intended to talk about same-sex sexuality. Pederasty was the word which the ancient world most often used to refer to men who have sex with men, most often older men and young boys but also adult slaves and low born persons (Boswell, 1980, 30). Yet again non-apologists would point out the fact that the text only speaks of men and not women not to mention the cultural differences between today and the ancient Mediterranean world. There is also of course the notion that St. Paul was not a terribly progressive person when it came to things like women's rights, the rights of slaves, etc. having preached against women speaking in

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<sup>24</sup> Martin, B. (2007, June 15). *The misuse and abuse of scripture and tradition*. Retrieved from [http://www.anglicancommunion.org/listening/book\\_resources/docs/Dale\\_martin.scripture.tradition.pdf](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/listening/book_resources/docs/Dale_martin.scripture.tradition.pdf) Retrieved on 3/11/12

church (1 Cor. 14:34) and himself returning a runaway slave to his master (Philemon 1:10-16) in opposition to ancient Hebrew law (Deut. 23:15-16).

### **Trans people in the Bible-**

When it comes to issues of gender identity, the Bible is less obvious in the ways it refers to gender variance as compared to its descriptions of same-sex sexuality. It should be noted that ancient cultures did have concepts of people changing genders (Vanita & Kidawai, 2001, 31-36) and also people of one gender wearing the clothing of another gender without identifying as that gender (Vanita & Kidawai, 2001, 90-93). Essentially the biblical writers may have been aware of the complexities of gender identity issues even if they responded to those complexities with animosity. When it comes to modern biblical scholarship academics and pundits, have been mostly silent on the things the Bible has to say about gender identity so most of the following interpretations are primarily speculative but none the less relevant.

The biblical creation story of Genesis seems to be rife with gender binary language and imagery that see man and woman as both the only gender options and biologically determined. What Virginia Mollenkott argues in her book "Omnigender: A Trans Religious Approach" is that rather the story is a little less clear. In the beginning, God created adamah which is the Hebrew base for the name Adam. Adamah is a word without gender connotation and means earth or perhaps, as Mollenkott suggests, earth creature (Mollenkott, 2007, 98). This earth creature seems to be without gender until God delineates gender as male and female later on in the story. Mollenkott points out that Jewish Midrash texts (extra canonical texts) depict Adamah as essentially intersex (Mollenkott 2007, 98). If mankind is originally made in the image of God

then God is trans, or God is at least intersex (Mollenkott 2007, 100). The reason many scholars believe the Bible uses masculine pronouns to refer to God is that Hebrew is devoid of a gender neutral pronoun having only male and female, meaning that the Hebrews may have chosen masculine pronouns as a default that arose out of sexism more than transphobia (Mollenkott 2007). None the less the prevailing attitude of Hebrew culture, as reflected in scripture, seems to be a gender binary culture. Hebrew culture seems uncomfortable with the idea of a person changing physical gender. The attitudes of ancient Hebrew culture are a relic of the past in which cisgender people were made irrationally uncertain of their gender identity because of the freedom gender variant people expressed, or so might a non-apologist argue.

Genesis chapter two verse twenty five describes how Adam and Eve were both naked and felt no shame. Where some might stretch the interpretation to is that they were okay with their bodies just the way they were and had no condition of gender identity disorder (i.e. transgender identity). While that may be true in the context of Adam and Eve it does not mean that all people should be that way after all Jesus certainly wore clothes at least some of the time (Mat. 9:20) and most Christians regard Jesus as a better moral example than Adam and Eve. The original humans, as literalists believe, did after all give birth to Transgender people eventually, so those traits must have been present. If anything this verse affirms nudist identity more than it defames Transgender identities. Non-apologists would like to point out the metaphorical meaning of genesis rather than its literal meaning using the hermeneutical framework of Origin in his allegorical interpretation of scripture (Kung 1999, 54) thus making this verse quite baseless in understanding the identity of Transgender people today.



Deuteronomy chapter twenty two verse five simply reads, “A woman must not wear men’s clothing, nor a man wear women’s clothing, for the lord your God detests anyone who does this.” While this verse seems quite explicit and clear as before with same-sex issues it is anything but easy. It could be argued that people whose gender identity is male, for example, and whose biological sex is female are not female but rather, are male, and so they are not breaking this law (Mollenkott, 2007, 88). Essentially this law may be preventing cisgender people from cross dressing (aka dressing in drag, aka transvestism) but may have no opinion on trans people dressing as they feel they should. In ancient cultures, laws varied based on a person’s gender, and people wishing to commit fraud may dress as a different gender and so receive a bride price for a male or inherit property as an unmarried female, and non-apologists would argue that those ideas are sexist and ridiculous today and should be ignored. It should also be noted that in ancient times neither men nor women, at least in Judea, wore pants. Pants have been recorded in other cultures such as the Persians but not among the Jews (Cleland, Davies, & Llewellyn-Jones, 2008, 199). Of course, later on pants were exclusively worn by men, but in the contemporary west women wearing pants is quite accepted.

In the very next chapter of Deuteronomy, the first verse reads, “No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the lord.” Some might argue that this statement forbids trans people to enter a church or synagogue much less the ancient temple. While that in itself is tenuous at best since the verse specifically refers to the ancient temple and not other places of worship, there are also reasons to believe that this is more reflective of humans than of God, according to a non-apologetic view. Jesus is recorded as healing many people of different abilities, which would make them ineligible to enter the temple such as the

people who cannot walk (Luke 5:17-26 (healing)) (2 Sam 5:8 (prohibition in the temple)) and people with leprosy (Mat. 8:1-4 (healing)) (Lev. 14:45-46 (prohibition in the temple)). The point of those stories, according to some Christian exegesis, was not that Jesus corrected problems that made his people invalid before God, but rather that God never considered them invalid in the first place, rather humans considered them so, from a non-apologetic perspective. Non-apologists would argue that the clear ableism and transphobia of the Bible is not the true message of hope that their religions endorse.

Transgender identities are not well supported in the Bible, but a few verses suggest a possibility for inclusion. First Samuel chapter sixteen verse seven reads, “But the lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the lord looks at the heart.” This verse seems to say that God does not care as much about what the outward body of a person is but more so what the inner being and essence of the individual is. One could extend this thought to say that God doesn’t judge a person’s gender based on their anatomy, chromosomes, or hormones, but on how they see themselves as the way God created them to be.

In Second Samuel chapter three verse twenty nine the story is told how Joab the nephew of King David killed Abner David’s first cousin prompting David to curse Joab and his descendants with many things including that one of them might always “Hold a spindle.” This phrase is perhaps a bit confusing until one realizes that in ancient cultures spindles, used to make wool, were solely used by women and so what David is doing is cursing Joab’s descendants that one of them should always be effeminate (Molenkott, 2007, 103). Later we will discuss how

David may have been at least bisexual if not gay, though apparently quite masculine, perhaps alluding to the concept that men could have sex with each other as long as they were still macho men according to ancient Hebrew culture. Some might use this verse to condemn Transgender women who are biological males since one might argue their behavior represents effeminacy. What the Bible is saying is that effeminate behavior in men is reprehensible in the eyes of human culture (i.e. David) but says nothing here of its reprehensibility in the sight of God. Non-apologists may have an easier time with this verse as they can simply claim that the attitudes expressed here are transphobic and sexist. Non-apologists might also speak of how yet again the Bible confuses categories though this time it is gender expression and gender identity. A man who expresses the outward signs of gender in more feminine ways is still, none the less, a man in every sense of the word, unless she identifies as a woman and is matching her gender expression to her gender identity.

In the book of psalms, a set of verses exists which can for, lesbians and gay men, support essentialist ideas that celebrate their identities and yet these same verses are potentially devastating for Transgender people. Psalms 139:13-16 describe how God knit a person together in their mother's womb knowing everything about their bodies and all the things that will happen in their lives. A theological problem is created here. The verses seem to suggest that God creates individuals, and since many traditions see God as only capable of creating perfect things that are later corrupted by evil, one might ask why God created people whose biological sex does not match their gender identity and thus may be thought to be, imperfect. Two possible theological perspectives exist that God has created an imperfection, or that an omni-malevolent force creates transgender people. For lesbians and gay men, the verses are quite affirming saying that their

innate feelings for people of the same-sex are created by God and are perfect. The best summary, of these verses, that supports gay men and lesbians is Jeremiah 1:5, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart.” Jeremiah 1:5 seems to speak to the special relationship lesbians and gay men have with God as speculated on by Reverend Wilson (Wilson 1995). One way to repair these verses in light of Trans people is to say that perhaps God does create us and that malevolent forces do attempt to make life difficult for trans people. Another way might be to say that God intentionally creates trans people, which are, perfect beings, thus removing any sense of stigma to the mismatched biological sex and gender identity. A verse to keep in mind concerning the mystery of these theological questions is Ecclesiastes 11:5 which states “As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother’s womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.” Non-apologists could also simply throw out several ideas such as the stigma around trans identity, the idea of an infallible God, the idea of predestination, or even that God directly creates people rather seeing it as a random event.

In the new testament Jesus, yet again, either says nothing about Trans people or everything he has to say is positive later on with Paul, whom Thomas Jefferson described as the first corrupter of the teachings of Jesus<sup>25</sup>, as well as others possibly make reference to trans people. Two verses in Romans (9:20-21) essentially sees Paul proclaiming that the body is sacred and cannot be altered, “But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? ‘Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’” This verse can be countered with the example of different ability and disease. In today’s world, we have developed

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<sup>25</sup> Jefferson, T. (n.d.). Retrieved from The Library of Congress website: [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mtj:@field\(DOCID @lit\(ws03101\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mtj:@field(DOCID @lit(ws03101))) Retrieved 3/15/12

cochlear implants to allow people to hear even though they have never had that ability. Would God object to our altering the human body in order to give the gift of hearing to the deaf sight to the blind and sturdy legs to the lame? Didn't Jesus himself alter bodies he, as God, also made by giving those bodies eyes to see (Mark 10:46-52) and ears to hear (Mark 7:31-37)? Non-apologists can simply say that yet again this is just humanity's transphobia overshadowing God's love.

In First Corinthians, a verse, which can only be seen as comical today, exists that describes gender expression and may be used to speak about Trans issues. Chapter eleven verses fourteen and fifteen read, "Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering." So clearly Halle Berry's short cut hair is an unnatural abomination despite the ravings of millions of straight men and quite a few lesbians and bisexuals. Willie Nelson is also clearly depraved for his ridiculously long hair. Clearly the artists who made contemporary depictions of Jesus did not read this verse and mistakenly gave him long, flowing hair. If one will pardon that facetious outburst the reality is attitudes like the above are way too culturally specific to be considered applicable to today (Mollenkott, 2007, 104) not to mention gender expression, as before, is not the same as gender identity and should not be confused in that way.

In the New Testament Paul, takes a rather harsh tone with same-sex love and yet redeems himself with his attitude toward gender. Galatians 3:28 reads, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." It seems

that from Paul's perspective, God does not care about gender but rather cares more about faith. Paul feels that, from God's perspective, the binaries of gender are irrelevant and do not matter for the kingdom of God (Mollenkott, 2007, 129). It is also notable that the first gentile convert Paul makes is an Ethiopian Eunuch which apparently wasn't a problem for Paul (Acts 8:27-40) (Mollenkott, 2007, 123). Mollenkott also points out that Paul, while in Crete, quotes a Cretan philosopher Epimenides whom Mollenkott identifies as Transgender and thus Paul again had no problem with gender variance.

### **Poly people in the Bible-**

When it comes to the identity of polyamory the Bible itself has nothing against that concept in and of itself, its later social developments that have made monogamy normative and all else abnormal, in western societies. The Bible speaks of many families that were polygynous in which one man had many wives that were not also each other's wives such as Abraham, Jacob, David, Jonathon, and Solomon to name just a few. Few families in the Bible can be described as monogamous, and those few are uncertain since references are made to one partner of an individual which doesn't exclude the possibility of other spouses. Where this becomes problematic, is that the Bible only describes heterosexual poly people or perhaps bisexual poly people, if one accepts David and Jonathon as lovers, when many gay and lesbian people are also poly. The Bible also only speaks of polygyny when many poly people are polyandrous (one woman many husbands), polyfidelitous (a group all involved with each other), and other networked arrangements of different individuals involved with select individuals in the group but not others. Of course, the Bible also doesn't specifically say that lesbian polyandrous people or gay polyfidelitous people are, necessarily, immoral.

The Bible contains numerous references to poly relationships. Great figures such as Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon, etc. were poly. The law of ancient Israel allowed multiple marriages and even required that a man support all his wives equally, or they are allowed to leave (Exodus 21:10-11). There is also a potential case in which it may be argued that polyandry (one woman many husbands) may have been allowable in a certain form. Deuteronomy 25:5–10 describes how, should a man die without producing a male heir; his brother must sleep with his wife in order to conceive the dead man's heir. In this way, a woman is allowed to have multiple male sexual partners though not while both are alive. Lest we imagine that poly relationships were the constructs of human culture contrary to the will of God we should consider the verse second Samuel 12:8 which reads, "I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more." Here, the 'I' is God and the Bible relates how God gives David multiple wives as well as potentially his husband Jonathon.

Kingship in ancient Israel was considered a highly honorable social station in which men were allowed to take multiple wives just not too many (Deut 17:16-17) which perhaps suggests the contemporary concepts of polysaturation and polysatisfaction. Polysaturation is the state of having too many partners based on the number that a person feels most comfortable having. Polysatisfaction is having just the right number of partners to satisfy the wants and needs of an individual. The fact that the Bible does not specify a number perhaps suggests that it is up to the individual to determine their level of comfort.

In the New Testament, early Christians speak out against multiple partners in first Timothy 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6. One might take this to be a clear denunciation of poly relationships and yet each of these verses is speaking to Christian clergy, specifically deacons, saying that only they should be without multiple partners and also means that, at one time, they did have multiple partners. This means that, at one time, the early Christian community practiced polyamory and found it to be perfectly acceptable. As we know the Bible reflects the dominant form of Christianity, one of many forms that crowded out other forms, such as Gnosticism (Corrigan 1998). Apparently at least some form of early Christian tradition practiced polyamory. Later on, Joseph Smith would form the Mormon Church and, for a time, practice Christian polygamy.

### **The Law-**

The current laws of the US concerning LGBT etc. identities are unjust. Currently lesbians and gay men face a total lack of legal recognition of their relationships in most states.<sup>26</sup> A few local regions have instituted domestic partner benefits, but those laws have almost no legal benefit. States instituting civil unions for same-sex couples provide most or all of the legal recognition afforded to a married couple, States issuing civil unions may still see such same-sex couples as second class citizens by not affording them the same language of marriage. A growing handful of US states allow full same-sex marriage which still does not provide federal level legal benefits. The defense of marriage act (DOMA<sup>27</sup>) prevents same-sex marriages performed in some states from being recognized in others as well as prevents the extension of federal benefits. Many same-sex couples face active discrimination from state and private adoption services that

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<sup>26</sup>Human Rights Campaign (HRC). (2011, July 06). *Marriage equality & other relationship recognition laws*. Retrieved from [http://www.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/Relationship\\_Recognition\\_Laws\\_Map\(1\).pdf](http://www.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/Relationship_Recognition_Laws_Map(1).pdf) Retrieved on 3/17/12

<sup>27</sup> Defense of Marriage Act of 1996 § 28, 1738C U.S.C. § 28 (1996)



see them as unfit parents.<sup>28</sup> Gay men have been barred from donating blood from fear of HIV,<sup>29</sup> even though the vast majority of HIV positive people on the planet are heterosexual and all blood donations are tested before use. Until recently lesbians and gay men were barred from serving openly in the US armed forces which was overturned with the repeal of the DADT ('don't ask don't tell') policy.<sup>30</sup> Lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men can be fired from their jobs in twenty nine states.<sup>31</sup> Assault and harassment of LGBT etc. youth in school settings is prevalent possibly leading to severe depression, substance use, youth homelessness, self-harm, and suicidality.<sup>32</sup> Transgender people face discrimination from insurance companies who define GRS (gender reassignment surgery) as cosmetic in nature sometimes contrary to a direct diagnosis by a mental health professional of GID (Gender Identity Disorder). Transgender people face the daily problem of which restroom facility to use in order to protect themselves from harassment. Transgender people are required to undergo full GRS, which is often not desired or healthy, in order to legally change their gender. Transgender people can be fired from their place of work in thirty four states. Polyamorous people face not only a prohibition from being legally married but also, in many states, are barred from being allowed to cohabit as a married couple with any other non-relative adult whom they do not employ. Many states define their bigamy laws as not only punishing the attempt to marry multiple people but also the active cohabitation of couples and an unmarried person/people. Many states define bigamy as a felony. Polyamorous people may face

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<sup>28</sup>Human Rights Campaign (HRC). (n.d.). *Human rights campaign: State laws & legislation*. Retrieved from <http://www.hrc.org/laws-and-legislation/state> Retrieved on 3/17/12

<sup>29</sup> Gibson, M. (2011, 09 15). Britain lifts ban on gay men donating blood. could the u.s. be far behind?. Retrieved from <http://healthland.time.com/2011/09/15/britain-lifts-ban-on-gay-men-donating-blood-could-the-u-s-be-far-behind/> Retrieved 3/17/12

<sup>30</sup> Human rights campaign (HRC). (Sept, 20 20). Retrieved from <http://www.hrc.org/laws-and-legislation/federal-laws/dont-ask-dont-tell-repeal-act-of-2010> Retrieved 3/15/12

<sup>31</sup>Human Rights Campaign (HRC). (n.d.). *Human rights campaign: State laws & legislation*. Retrieved from <http://www.hrc.org/laws-and-legislation/state> Retrieved on 3/17/12

<sup>32</sup> Melnick, M. (2011, June 06). Cdc: Why gay and bisexual teens are more likely to risk their health. Retrieved from <http://healthland.time.com/2011/06/06/cdc-gay-and-bisexual-teens-are-more-likely-to-risk-their-health/> Retrieved 3/17/12

prison time, fines, and the removal of their children without just cause. Unlike other identities in the LGBT etc. community, poly people can still be fired from their jobs in all fifty states if they are discovered to be poly. All LGBT etc. people face the daily possibility of being physically assaulted and harassed at school, at work, at home, even just walking down the street.

For the purposes of this paper three legal efforts to advocate for LGBT etc. people will be discussed to examine how religion can aid in those efforts. These issues are same-sex marriage, gender identity as a protected class in employment, and the removal of the cohabitation clause from state bigamy laws.

Same-sex marriage has been criticized within the movement as taking up too much of the spotlight shrouding other issues of the LGBT etc. community from public view. The fact that it is the most salient issue in the public consciousness is why it is the issue focused upon here. This issue, out of the three I will be addressing, may be the most relevant to religion and the one that religion is most able to advocate for. The United States constitution contains within it an amendment which reads, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” This amendment has been used in this country for centuries to expand religious freedoms for almost every religious group. The US is one of the few countries in the world in which religious freedom is protected almost uninhibited. This amendment may again be used to, not only, expand religious freedom but to expand lesbian, bisexual, and gay rights. Currently several Christian denominations and branches of Judaism perform same-sex wedding ceremonies without legal recognition as well as different-sex weddings with full legal recognition. These groups include the Metropolitan Community Church,

the United Church of Christ, Reconstructionist Judaism, and Reform Judaism, as well as others.

These organizations are being actively discriminated against. Other religious organizations receive full recognition of the marriage ceremonies they perform whereas these traditions have only some of their marriage ceremonies validated. This stance by the US government constitutes an establishment of certain religious organizations as valid and others as only half valid.

Marriage in this country has always been a religious institution although for the sake of religious freedom the country does recognize civil marriages, which grant legal protection to heterosexual couples without the requirements of a religious ceremony. Opponents to same-sex marriage have argued that allowing it would, in some way, infringe on their religious freedom even though no state requires that a religious institution be forced to marry any couple. Same-sex marriage would only increase religious freedom allowing equal recognition to institutions that perform them and to institutions that do not. Opponents to same-sex marriage also argue that same-sex marriage would in some way invalidate existing heterosexual marriages which they claim as the only proper definition of marriage. Marriage in the US has been redefined a number of times, such as during the civil rights movement, when multiracial couples were finally allowed the right to marry even though opposition to them often used a similar rhetoric as used in opposition to same-sex marriage. They saw the definition of marriage as between a white man and a white woman or a black man and a black woman rather than between a man and woman of any race. The other half of the argument seems to suggest that two lesbians getting married is going to encourage a straight married couple to divorce which is just frankly illogical. Others argue that same-sex couples do not biologically reproduce and, therefore, should not be allowed to marry yet they forget we allow heterosexual people who are unable to reproduce to marry such as the elderly or infertile people. Some Christian and Jewish people see religious reasons for a

requirement of marriage being, reproduction. This paper has already identified that there are biblical scriptures which glorify non-procreative sex such as the Song of Songs. The solution to this establishment of certain religions over others is to either allow same-sex marriage or to remove the word marriage from all legal language replace it with the word civil union and forbid any religious institution from performing a union. It is highly doubtful that the Supreme Court would rule in favor of the latter, which may in itself constitute religious discrimination, and so would almost certainly favor same-sex marriage.

Transgender people face a form of institutionalized discrimination that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people have mostly surpassed. The diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders fourth edition (DSM IV) is the leading resource for mental health professionals. The DSM is edited under the authority of the American Psychological Association (APA). In 1973, the APA removed “homosexuality” as a mental disorder from the DSM (Feist & Rosenberg, 2009, 15). Currently the DSM IV still has within it the condition gender identity disorder (GID) which is often applied to trans identified people (APA, 2000, 581-582). What this amounts to, is the labeling of trans people with a mental illness simply for being who they are. The stigma attached to this adversely affects the lives of trans people as well as attitudes toward them in the general populace. The treatment commonly prescribed for GID is gender reassignment surgery. Many trans identified people do not want to undergo full or partial GRS for a variety of reasons. Insurance companies are more likely to pay for GRS if a person is diagnosed with GID but is the stigma worth it? If progressive Christian voices campaign to view trans people as normal, healthy, and stigma free then the APA may be inclined to remove GID from the DSM IV. Those

same voices may also convince legislators to mandate that insurance companies pay for GRS without the need for a diagnosis of GID.

Conservative arguments against same-sex marriage often use the ‘slippery slope argument’ such as the infamous speech given by presidential candidate Rick Santorum at New England College on January 5<sup>th</sup> in his 2012 presidential race. He counters a student asking why two men cannot marry by saying “Well what about three men?”<sup>33</sup> The slippery slope goes something like this, ‘if you allow gay marriage you will have to allow incest, bestiality, and polygamy.’ The last item mentioned, polygamy, complicates the relationship between the greater LGBT etc. community and polyamory. Although polygamy is not the same as polyamory it is in reality a part of it and many conservatives may not realize that there is a distinction. The slippery slope argument is generally an irrational way to discuss any issue. It makes no sense to evaluate the morality of one thing by comparing it to the morality of other things. In US politics, though, the slippery slope argument may make some sense since, for example, originally only white, wealthy, male, landowners had the right to vote and then it was extended to non-landowners, then to women, and then to people of all races. In some ways, we see this with marriage in that originally only the wealthy that could marry (Boswell, 1980, 35), then all classes could marry, then multiracial marriages were allowed, now same-sex marriages are slowly happening, maybe one day multi-partner marriages will be allowed. When the issue of multi-partner relationships does come up certain religious groups, may be there yet again performing unlawful marriages. Certainly many arguments exist against incest or bestiality such as animals cannot consent or sign legal documents and the often coercive nature of incest so those as issues on their own will

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<sup>33</sup> TheYoungTurks. (2012, January 06). *Santorum compares gay marriage to polygamy*. Retrieved from [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S\\_4AAYpxSIg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_4AAYpxSIg)

likely remain unlawful. This paper, though, does not argue for poly marriage at this time rather it argues for the removal of the cohabitation clause in state bigamy laws. Poly marriage has less support from the public and many poly people, themselves, feel that the institution of marriage is a corrupt system and an unlawful involvement of state and church. Many states contain clauses in their bigamy laws which prohibit a legally married couple from cohabiting with a non-relative person or persons whom they do not employ.<sup>34</sup> This law prevents many poly people from living in the same location, the consequences being arrest, prison time, fines, and the removal of children from the home. An unusual legal situation arises for same-sex poly families. For same-sex poly families in many states, even two of them cannot legally marry which means by definition they cannot commit bigamy, and so are allowed to all live together, though some adoption agencies may still see the situation as an unfit one, and so deny adoption rights. For same-sex poly families, ironically, same-sex marriage may adversely affect them, which is a bridge to be crossed when come to. Religious organizations that come out as supporting poly people can speak using a rhetoric of family values to support all families multiracial families, single parent families, same-sex families, poly families, and even white, heterosexual, two parent, monogamous families. If progressive religious groups come out toting family values in support of these issues, it can counter the conservative family values arguments against same-sex marriage and poly cohabitation.

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<sup>34</sup> Colorado revised statutes Bigamy 18.6.201

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