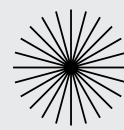




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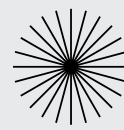


A Case for Full LGBTQ+  
Inclusion in the Church

by Chris Altrock



AND AFFIRMING



## INTRODUCTION

This document has one goal: to make a theological case for faith communities to be open and affirming regarding the LGBTQ+ community.

For queer Christians, this case might strengthen you as you see all the more how the Christian faith can support, rather than conflict with, your core identity. This case might also equip you as you engage with Christians and churches who use scripture to exclude you.

For allies of the LGBTQ+ community, including family members of queer Christians, this case might assist you as you strive to hold together on the one side your love for this community and desire to advocate for this community, and on the other side your love for Scripture and the church.

For church leaderships, this case might assist you as you continue a journey of striving to be the community Jesus envisioned when he imagined the church.

For those who remain unconvinced about this case, my hope is that you would, at the very least, be willing to grant freedom to those of us who *are* convinced about this case and that you would be passionate about treating all humans with grace, generosity and love.

This document is not comprehensive. I explore seven aspects of this case, none of them fully. I've tried to write briefly enough that you might be willing to read the entire document. And I've provided significant footnotes so that you can read more deeply on any particular issue if you desire.

Here's a summary of the document--you might start with those points that seem most crucial to you:

*ONE* - This topic deserves your investment of time because many in the LGBTQ+ community are endangered by the church, need advocacy by the church, and can enrich the church in wonderful ways.

*TWO* - The few biblical texts that appear to address sexual relationships between people of the same gender are not addressing the contemporary circumstance of two people of the same gender entering into a loving, consensual and covenantal relationship. This, thus, requires more than simply reading the Bible in a "literal" or "plain" way.

*THREE* - When it comes to gender, and a host of other things, God transcends our words and defies our categories. God expresses the divine self in ways that are sometimes feminine, sometimes masculine, sometimes singular and sometimes plural. It is rational, therefore, to believe that the humans created by this same God might also experience and express human selves along this same continuum.

*FOUR* - The goodness and beauty of the creation of which humans are a part is found not only in its contrasting binary categories (e.g., day/ night, land/ water) but also in the in-betweenness among those categories (e.g., dawn and dusk; wetlands and ice shelves). Similarly, the goodness and beauty of humans is found not only in their contrasting binary categories (e.g., male/ female and the relationship between males/ females) but also in the in-betweenness of those categories (and the relationship between individuals among them).

*FIVE* - Scripture describes celibacy as something that may be freely chosen by those who are gifted for it / called to it but not as something that can be uniformly expected of any person or group of people. Given this, marriage of individuals within the LGBTQ+ community is the only appropriate recourse for individuals for whom celibacy is not a legitimate individual option.

*SIX* - Only a handful of texts in the Bible directly address same-sex sexual relationships. All of these texts focus on specific failures of biblical sexual ethics (e.g., pederasty, sexual idolatry, etc.) rather than forbidding, in general, all same-sex sexual relationships.

*SEVEN* - The new creation, inaugurated by Jesus, is one in which God is working toward an ultimate reality for humanity where biases and evaluations based upon categories like race, gender and class are no longer viable and where no single racial, ethnic, gender or sexual category may be considered superior or normative.

## ONE

The question of the relationship between the church and the LGBTQ+ community matters because (among other vital reasons) individuals in this community 1) are endangered by the church, 2) need advocacy by the church, and 3) bring a transformative presence into the church (all three reasons are similar to those compelling the question of the relationship between the white church and black Americans in the 1960's and between patriarchal churches and women Christians today). To paraphrase Brian Nietzel, founder of Renovus, this is not simply a question of theology -- it is a question of humanity.<sup>1</sup> Just as Jesus modeled a reinvestigation of Sabbath doctrine for the sake of those harmed by orthodox interpretations of that very doctrine,<sup>2</sup> so Jesus' followers must explore a reinvestigation of LGBTQ+ doctrines for the sake of those harmed by those very doctrines (a harm which, ironically, actually hurts the church because it robs the church of the transformative presence of these individuals).

“

***This is not simply a question of theology -- it is a question of humanity.***

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- *Individuals in the LGBTQ+ community are endangered by the church.* Andrew Marin conducted the largest-ever survey on the religious history, practices, and beliefs of the LGBTQ+ community. 86% of the LGBTQ+ community were raised in the church (vs. 75% of the general population). 54% left their faith community after age 18 (vs. 27% of the general population). Their top reason for leaving: negative personal experiences.<sup>3</sup> These experiences are often traumatic. My wife Kendra and I can point to dozens of stories we personally know that demonstrate this truth, including our own story. Endangerment from the church comes in many forms: being literally cast out from or bullied within churches; being ignored in teaching churches conduct in youth groups/ young adult groups regarding sex and sexual ethics; creating cultures in which queer Christians have to lie in order to comply with expected behavior (e.g., a gay man getting married to a woman because that is the only way to have sexual drives satisfied “according to the Bible or church”). Addressing the question of the church’s relationship to the LGBTQ+ community is vital to decreasing the trauma-inducing response of the church.
- *Individuals in the LGBTQ+ community need the advocacy of the church.* This was the point of 2023 comments by Pope Francis who said that homosexuality is not a “crime” (and therefore should not be criminalized).<sup>4</sup> Yet 67 countries or jurisdictions worldwide do criminalize consensual same-sex sexual activity.<sup>5</sup> In addition, according to a 2022 study within the U.S., “LGBTQ+ people and other ‘sexual and gender diverse’ people experience structural and interpersonal discrimination that adversely affects their well-being ... (continued page 4)

- (continued from page 3)... *The current patchwork of nondiscrimination laws in states across the country and existing gaps in federal civil rights laws leave millions of LGBTQI+ people without protection from discrimination ... state attacks explicitly targeting the rights of LGBTQI+ people have surged in recent years. In 2022 alone, state lawmakers introduced more than 300 bills targeting the rights of LGBTQI+ people—especially LGBTQI+ youth and transgender people. These discriminatory policies are inextricably linked to and contribute to a rise in extremist anti-LGBTQI+ and, specifically, anti-transgender rhetoric, disinformation, and violence.*<sup>6</sup> Addressing the question of the church's relationship to the LGBTQ+ community is vital to increasing advocacy from the church on behalf of a community unjustly criminalized.
- *Individuals in the LGBTQ+ community bring a transformative presence into the church. As does the white church's rejection of full inclusion of people of color and the patriarchal church's rejection of full inclusion of women, so the heteronormative church's rejection of full inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals today robs the church of the transformative presence of remarkable individuals. Paul's comment to the Galatians, "My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:19 NRSVue) is written to Jewish Christians unwilling to accept full inclusion of Gentile Christians. Paul indicates that it's only through full inclusion that they and their church will be reborn into Christ-formed people. That is, inclusion is one way the church matures most fully into Christlikeness. Speaking of transgender individuals, Tara Sougthers' question has a wider application: "What gifts are we missing due to our inability to really see the ways God is present in those bodies that do not match our culturally generated ideals?"<sup>7</sup>*

## NOTES: ONE

1. "Making Things Right," Brian Nietzel, <https://briannietzel.com/>; <https://www.renovus.org/>
2. Sabbath Controversies in the Gospels: John 5:18; Matt 12:1-8 + Mark 2:23-28 + Luke 6:1-5; Matt 12:1-8 + Mark 2:23-28 + Luke 6:1-5; Luke 13:10-17; Lk. 14:1-6; Jn. 9:1-41.
3. Andrew Marin, *Us versus Us: The Untold Story of Religion and the LGBT Community* (NavPress, 2016)
4. Nicole Winfield, "Pope Francis: Homosexuality not a crime," *America: The Jesuit Review* (Jan. 25, 2023), [https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2023/01/25/pope-francis-homosexuality-244592?gclid=CjwKCAiA9NGfBhBvEiwAq5vSy7oPbA6GqDZp1yvDPdNQyoyOT46GZb\\_k43k5YsQgcsQbqaAcf9xORoC1gAQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2023/01/25/pope-francis-homosexuality-244592?gclid=CjwKCAiA9NGfBhBvEiwAq5vSy7oPbA6GqDZp1yvDPdNQyoyOT46GZb_k43k5YsQgcsQbqaAcf9xORoC1gAQAvD_BwE); Nicole Winfield, "The AP Interview: Pope says homosexuality not a crime," Associated Press (Jan. 23, 2023), <https://apnews.com/article/pope-francis-gay-rights-ap-interview-1359756ae22f27f87c1d4d6b9c8ce212>
5. Nicole Winfield, *Ibid.*
6. Caroline Medina, Lindsay Mahowald, "Discrimination and Barriers to Well-Being: The State of the LGBTQI+ Community in 2022," (Jan. 12, 2023), Center for American Progress, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/discrimination-and-barriers-to-well-being-the-state-of-the-lgbtqi-community-in-2022/>
7. Tara K. Sougthers, *Beyond a Binary God* (Church Publishing Inc., 2018).

## TWO

Answering the question regarding the relationship between the church and the LGBTQ+ community is not as straightforward as saying, "Let's just do what the Bible tells us to do." Christian faith groups, despite an often common commitment to Scripture, nonetheless disagree about the Bible's answer to this question (and policies that flow from it) (see the two sources in the notes for summaries of where various faith groups fall).<sup>1</sup> This is, in part, due to the nature of Scripture itself. Because the Bible first addresses the ancient circumstances of its readers, in ways shaped by the ancient perspectives of its authors, the Bible does not directly and clearly address many of our contemporary concerns regarding sexuality, identity and relationships within the LGBTQ+ community and their place within the church. We are, in some respects, asking a question that was not specifically asked/ answered by the ancient people of God. There is, therefore, no "plain" or "literal" reading of Scripture regarding this topic. We can only answer this question using a hermeneutic, applied with humility, that aims to interpret specific texts touching on this question in light of texts that provide themes and theological directions central to the story of the Bible.

**“ We are, in some respects, asking a question that was not specifically asked/ answered by the ancient people of God. ”**

- Churches tend to fall into "affirming" (*"the gender identities, sexual orientations, and sexual relationships of LGBTQ+ individuals are equally as good and holy in the sight of God as those of cisgender, heterosexual people"*) and "non-affirming" categories, with "affirming" churches falling into two more categories: "side a" (*"any theology which fully affirms both LGBTQ+ identity and same-gender sex"*) and "side b" (*"any theology which affirm LGBTQ+ identities, yet maintains that Christians should refrain from same-gender sex for a variety of personal and/or theological reasons."*) (see the notes below for references to books/ authors that fit into these broad categories).<sup>2</sup>
- Peter Enns has argued (convincingly, I think) in a trilogy of books that 1) the Bible is not an instruction manual by which we simply follow the instructions printed for us; 2) the instructions that are in the Bible are not always clear and unambiguous and thus capable of granting certainty about what to believe/ not believe in all areas; and 3) the Bible is written more to provide wisdom (that can be used in discernment (or what Karen Keen calls "the deliberative process"<sup>3</sup>) rather than to provide answers to each and every question brought to it.<sup>4</sup>

- James Brownson writes, *"Traditionalists on the homosexuality question believe that the church must read the plain sense of Scripture clearly on this issue. and they generally believe that Scripture plainly and clearly regards all same-sex erotic behavior to be immoral. How, they ask, will the church find the strength to bear witness in word and deed to all of Scripture's other teachings regarding sexuality in a context where the larger culture increasingly ignores the biblical vision for sexuality and marriage and experiences deep brokenness as a result? In this context, then, the question of the ethics of homosexuality become for many traditionalists a line in the sand that will determine whether the church as a whole will lose its capacity to speak a clear word from God to its surrounding culture. For revisionist Christians, however, this attempt to draw a line in the sand is fundamentally misguided. They see deliberations over the ethics of homosexuality as an opportunity for the church to consecrate same-sex unions, drawing gay and lesbian persons into a Biblical and traditional vision of faithful, committed unions that can stand as a witness against the prevailing patterns of promiscuity, divorce, and brokenness that characterize so much sexual experience in the wider North American culture...the meaning of scripture for Christians today must not be drawn from just one passage but from the way any particular passage of scripture is located within the larger themes and movements of Scripture as a whole. We must discern the deeper and more comprehensive **moral logic** that undergirds the specific commands, prohibitions, and examples of the biblical text. We do not interpret rightly any single passage of Scripture until we locate the text within **this larger fabric of meaning** in Scripture as a whole."*<sup>5</sup> Much of the remaining content in this document will touch on "this larger fabric of meaning."
- Dale Pauls writes, *"Scripture for much of the past 500 years has been largely understood in its primary sense as a law code despite the apostle Paul's pleas that it not be (Romans 6:14; 7:6; 10:4; 2 Corinthians 3:6; the gist of Galatians). It had not always been understood that way. Previously it was often read in allegorical and/or mystical ways; it was frequently spiritualized. Then, more recently it has been primarily interpreted in the light of its historical context as is all literature, indeed, all human communication. Interpreters seek the original intent of a passage: how it was read and understood by its original writer and readers, and why. As part of this process, it becomes important to consider what meanings were originally possible and what meanings weren't. For a given passage, concept, or conclusion, what was **the horizon of possible meanings?**"*<sup>6</sup> This "horizon of possible meanings" becomes vital in reading the Bible's few passages that relate directly to same-sex sexual relationships.
- We might also consider a similar interpretive piece, that of an "anchor scripture."<sup>7</sup> Certain scriptures serve as anchor points for interpreting the rest of Scripture--we learn to see the rest of Scripture through them. For example, more than once Jesus used Hos. 6:6 as an anchor scripture for interpreting what was happening around him (Matt. 9:13; 12:7). Jesus also urged the use of two Great Commands (love God, love neighbor) to serve as anchor scriptures. What anchor texts might aid our reading of other texts in the Bible that address same-sex sexual relations?

## NOTES: TWO

1. David Masci and Michael Lipka, "Where Christian churches, other religions stand on gay marriage," Pew Research Center (Dec. 21, 2015), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/21/where-christian-churches-stand-on-gay-marriage/>; "Faith Positions," Human Rights Campaign (undated, accessed Feb. 23, 2023), <https://www.hrc.org/resources/faith-positions>.
2. "LGBTQ+ Theology 101," Q Christian Fellowship (undated, accessed Feb. 23, 2023), <https://www.qchristian.org/resources/theology#theologies>; Josh Proctor, "Four Christian Views on Sexuality," The Life on Side B Podcast (undated; accessed Feb. 23, 2023), <https://www.lifeonsideb.com/thefoursides>; Prominent books written from the Side A position include: Justin Lee, *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate* (Jericho Books, 2013); James V Brownson, *Bible Gender Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Eerdmans, 2013); Sally Gary, *Affirming* (Eerdmans, 2021); Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (Convergent Books, 2015); Karen Keen, *The Scripture, Ethics, and the Possibility of Same-Sex Relationships* (Eerdmans, 2018); David and Constantino Khalaf, *Modern Kinship: A Queer Guide to Christian Marriage* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2019). Prominent books written from the Side B position include: David Bennett, *A War of Loves: The Unexpected Story of a Gay Activist Discovering Jesus* (Zondervan, 2018); Greg Coles, *Single, Gay, Christian: A Personal Journey of Faith and Sexual Identity* (InterVarsity Press, 2017); Nate Collins, *All But Invisible: Exploring Identity Questions at the Intersection of Faith, Gender, and Sexuality* (Zondervan, 2017); Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Zondervan, 2016); Preston Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue* (Zondervan, 2015). Eve Tushnet, *Gay and Catholic: Accepting My Sexuality, Finding Community, Living My Faith* (Ave Maria Press, 2014); Bridget Eileen Rivera, *Heavy Burdens: Seven Ways LGBTQ Christians Experience Harm in the Church* (Brazos, 2021). Prominent non-affirming books include: Ron Citlau, *Hope for the Same-Sex Attracted: Biblical Direction for Friends, Family Members, and Those Struggling with Homosexuality* (Bethany House, 2017); Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?* (The Good Book Company, 2013); Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* (Crossway, 2015); Jackie Hill Perry, *Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was, and Who God Has Always Been* (B&H Books, 2018).
3. Karen Keen, *Scripture, Ethics, and the Possibility of Same-Sex Relationships* (Eerdmans, 2018).
4. Peter Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* (HarperOne, 2015); Peter Enns, *The Sin of Certainty: Why God Desires Our Trust More Than Our "Correct" Beliefs* (HarperOne, 2017); Peter Enns, *How the Bible Actually Works: In Which I Explain How An Ancient, Ambiguous, and Diverse Book Leads Us to Wisdom Rather Than Answers—and Why That's Great News* (HarperOne, 2020).
5. James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Eerdmans, 2018).
6. Dale Pauls, "LGBT+ Full Inclusion," Adult Bible Class, Stamford Church of Christ, March 12, 2023.
7. I've borrowed this term from Charles Rix, private email correspondence between Chris Altrock and Charles Rix.



## THREE

The Creator is a God whose gender identity, gender expression and general self-identity do not fit neatly into a binary box, but fluidly exist along a spectrum. That is, God's gender identity and gender expression is given in both masculine and feminine forms (as well as non-human and non-gendered forms). In addition, God's general self-identity is expressed in both plural (e.g., Trinity) and singular forms. Humans made in the image of this multi-gendered and non-gendered God may expect that their own sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression will exist in a variety of forms.

**“Humans made in the image of this multi-gendered and non-gendered God may expect that their own sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression will exist in a variety of forms.”**

- While masculine images and presentations of God are used throughout the Old Testament and New Testament for imagining God, there are a range of other images.<sup>1</sup> We find images for God like these: Comforting Mother (Is 66:13); Mother Bear (Hos. 13:8); Mother Eagle (Deut 32:11-12); Mother Giving Birth (Deuteronomy 32:18); Nursing Mother (Is 49:15); Woman in Labor (Isaiah 42:14). We find images of Jesus like this: Mother Hen (Matthew 23:37 and Luke 13:34). God is imagined as both male and female (and, of course, as neither: Rock (Deuteronomy 32:4, 14, Psalm 18:2); Clothing (Gal. 3); Bread (John 6:35); Lamb (John 1:36); Lion (Revelation 5:5); Water (John 7:38-39); Fire (Acts 2).
- Amy Peeler<sup>2</sup> wrestles with the gender identity of Jesus, concluding he is “a male-embodied Savior with female-provided flesh” and that, to quote scholar Andrew Lincoln, “If Jesus had human flesh, and the texts of the New Testament are rather adamant that he did, that human flesh came from her. Mary supplies what the woman normally supplies in procreation: her genes, her body, her food, her energy, her blood. God’s Holy Spirit overshadowed her flesh so that it could do what it could not do on its own, namely, conceive a child. To send the Savior, the Spirit came upon only one human, and that human was a woman.” In other words, the flesh of Jesus is both male and female.
- How we envision God is of vital importance regarding the question of the church and the LGBTQ+ community, because, as Amy Peeler writes,<sup>3</sup> “It is easier to devalue and then mistreat those humans who are believed to be less like God.” There has been a tendency to somehow believe that sexuality and gender that does not conform to clear binary categories (male-female) results from humans who are less like God. But, how can this be, when the God in whom all are made defies clear binary categories?

- The Hebrew of Gen. 1:26-27 makes it clear that imaging God has little to do with the binary categories of male/ female:
  - 26 Then God said, "Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." 27 So God created humans in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:26-27 NRSVue)
  - "Let us make" -- God speaks about himself in the plural (meaning either "God and the heavenly court," or, more likely, in the context of the entire canon's testimony about God, meaning the Trinity). The notion of Trinity, itself, overturns notions of binary categories for God: "By giving the Spirit equal voice with the Father and Son, it disrupts that binary, reminding us that the heart of God is one and three, but never two, and therefore challenges all binaries."<sup>4</sup>
  - God proposed to "make humans in our image" and then "created humans in his image." The language of imaging God appears before any mention of gender among "humans," suggesting that whatever it means to image God, it is not tied to the binary categories of "male" and "female." Thus any human, regardless of their gender (identity, expression, etc.), bears the image of God.
  
- We might use Judith Butler's language in *Undoing Gender* both to make sense of God as well as those whom God has made. <sup>5</sup> Gender is, in many respects, "performed" in ways that are shaped by culture. This "performance," however may vary from what we might otherwise call gender "identity" or even "sex" (which is biologically based).

## NOTES: THREE

1. Amy Peeler, *Women and the Gender of God* (Eerdmans, 2022); Mallory Wyckoff, *God Is* (Eerdmans, 2022).
2. Amy Peeler, *Ibid.*
3. Amy Peeler, *Ibid.*
4. Tara K. Soughers, *Beyond a Binary God* (Church Publishing Incorporated, 2018).
5. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (Routledge, 2004).

## FOUR

The goodness and beauty of the creation of which humans are a part is found not only in its contrasting binary categories (e.g., day/ night, land/ water) but also in the in-betweenness among those categories (e.g., dawn and dusk; wetlands and ice shelves). Similarly, the goodness and beauty of humans is found not only in their contrasting binary categories (e.g., male/ female and the relationship between males/ females) but also in the in-betweenness of those categories (and the relationship between individuals among them). All creation, including humanity, expresses and experiences a goodness and beauty in between, and beyond, any binary categories.

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- Repeatedly, the artistry of creation is painted in seemingly fixed and firm categories that stand opposite to each other: Heavens v. Earth (Gen 1:1); Light v. Darkness/ Day v. Night (Gen. 1:4-5); Dry Land v. Seas (Gen. 1:9-10); Sun v. Moon & Stars (Gen. 1:14-16); Sea creatures v. Birds (Gen. 1:20-21); Male v. Female (Gen. 1:27). The creation account may leave us wondering: is beauty only to be found in the binary? An unimaginative reading of the poetry of Genesis 1 might lead us to assume “That is beautiful!”--land/ sea, sun/ stars, fish/ birds, male/ female. “But not that!”--that is, anything that seems to be outside these categories. This is especially true for some people of faith when it comes to the final category: male/ female.
- Based on the apparent binary nature of the Genesis creation account, some have made assumptions about goodness and beauty when it comes to human gender, sexuality and identity. Their conclusion is that gender identities, gender expressions, and sexuality that fall outside those categories are anything but beautiful--they are blasphemous. There’s only male and female. What’s male is always male. What’s female is always female. Most importantly, when it comes to sexuality, it may only exist as an experience between the two in the opposing categories--males with females/ females with males. Only this is virtuous. All else is vile.
- But this binary viewpoint on gender, sexuality and identity ignores something historical. Cultures, races and classes often differ in how they view masculinity, femininity, gender and identity. And even within a culture, constructs of masculinity, femininity and sexuality change over time.<sup>1</sup> Historically, what seems clear to us now about gender and sexuality was not always so. In fact, Jane Ward in *Not Gay* explores sex between straight white men in which they engage in homosexual contact in heterosexual ways. These sex acts reveal the fluidity and complexity that characterizes human sexual desire. <sup>2</sup>

- This viewpoint also ignores something *scientific*. A simplistic and superficial viewpoint says that all we need to know is whether there's a Y chromosome present or not. If Y is present, a person is male. If it's not, the person is female. But a more authentic understanding recognizes the reality that chromosomes may create an expectation that does not align with the physicality of ovaries or testes. Parents of children with intersex conditions often face difficult decisions about whether to raise their children as masculine or feminine.<sup>3</sup>
- Most significantly, a binary way of thinking ignores something *biblical*. Reflected in the Hebrew Bible's ancient creation account, and lived by each of us in this same creation, is the existence of countless realities that lie in between these bounded-binaries and even beyond them. Many people recognize this, almost intuitively, when it comes to every category in Genesis 1 except gender, sexuality and identity. A binary world has no room for a creature like the penguin. A binary world has no room for dusk and dawn. A binary world has no place for sea ice. A world in which beauty only comes in binaries has no room for wetlands. But the real world, the world God created, makes room for all of this. *There is beauty in between and beyond.*
- All of these realities have led some to propose that what we actually find in Genesis 1 are a series of something called "merisms." For example, describing God as the "alpha" and "omega" is a merism. The saying doesn't mean that God is only the "alpha" or only the "omega." It means he is both--and everything in between. Something similar may be true for the categories of Genesis 1. The "good" which God calls his creation applies not only to the binaries of day/ night, sea/ land, sun/moon and fish/ birds, but to all that lies in between them (and even beyond them): dawn and dusk, wetlands and marshland, certain species and atmospheric and celestial phenomenon that defy clear categorization. Everything--all of this--has beauty.
- If this is true for these non-human creation categories, must it not also be true with the human creation category? Why would everything else in creation except humanity thrive and flourish because of and not in spite of this creative fluidity? The poetry of Genesis invites us to demurely (and defiantly!) conclude that humanity itself contains dusks and dawns, not just days and nights. Humanity itself possesses sea ice and wetlands, not merely lands and seas. Beauty exists not only with respect to gender, identity and sexuality contained in the binaries of male and female, but also with respect to that which lies in between and beyond those categories.

- "Although it may sound odd to those of us used to thinking in binary terms, a close look at God's creation shows that gender identity and gender expression are complex among all of God's creatures. While we may assume that the primary care of young is always associated with females, that is not the case with the spotted sandpiper. After mating and laying eggs, the female sandpiper flies off to find another mate, leaving the eggs in the care of the male ... While we assume that gender is stable, that is not the case with the hawkfish. All hawkfish are born female, but if there are not enough males in a harem, then one or more of the females in the harem will become male and the harem will be split. If a male hawkfish loses part of his harem and then is challenged by a larger male, rather than fighting, as is the case with many animal species, the smaller male will revert back to being a female. While we assume that giving birth is associated with females, in sea horses it is the male that gives birth. There is great variety and complexity throughout God's creation, not only with human beings but with the animal population as well, indicating, just perhaps, that God does not always think the same way that we do about gender. In fact, perhaps the whole idea of binaries—either/or categories—is not something God created, but something human beings created to make the world a more comprehensible place."<sup>4</sup>

## NOTES: FOUR

1. Consider, for example, *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada*, edited by Cecilia Louise Morgan, Kathryn M. McPherson, Nancy M. Forestell (University of Toronto Press, 2011).
2. Jane Ward *Not Gay* (NYU Press, 2015).
3. See Megan DeFranza *Sex Difference in Christian Theology* (Eerdmans, 2015); See also Claire Ainsworth, "Sex Redefined: The Idea of 2 Sexes," *Scientific American*, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/sex-redefined-the-idea-of-2-sexes-is-overly-simplistic1/> accessed Oct. 23, 2022.
4. Tara K. Soughers, *Beyond a Binary God* (Church Publishing Inc., 2018); See also Austen Hartke, *Transforming*, Updated and Expanded Edition with Study Guide (John Knox, 2023).

## FIVE

Scripture describes celibacy as something that may be freely chosen by those who are gifted for it / called to it but not as something that can be uniformly expected of any person or group of people. Given this, marriage of individuals within the LGBTQ+ community is the only appropriate recourse for individuals for whom celibacy is not a legitimate individual option. That is, if LGBTQ+ individuals are not, by their divine gifting/ calling, capable of celibacy, then marriage is not only permissible, but necessary. Such marriage enables LGBTQ+ individuals to practice a healthy and genuinely biblical sexual ethic.

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***Scripture does not describe celibacy as something that can be uniformly expected of any person or group of people.***

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- *10 The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” 11 But he said to them, “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. 12 For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.”* (Matt. 19:10-12 NRSVue) “This teaching” refers to the disciples’ assessment, “it is better not to marry” (which is their response to Jesus’ teaching regarding marriage/ divorce). Jesus replies with three classes of “eunuchs” who can accept “this teaching”: those born eunuchs,<sup>1</sup> those made eunuchs by castration,<sup>2</sup> and those who choose celibacy “for the sake of the kingdom” (e.g., because they are so consumed by matters of the kingdom they do not marry). Thus, for Jesus, celibacy is only for “those to whom it is given.” This language speaks of divine gifting.<sup>3</sup>
- *7 I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind.* (1 Cor. 7:7 NRSVue) Paul is referring to his unmarried and celibate condition. His wish is that all might be celibate, yet he recognizes such an existence is a “gift from God”--almost certainly an allusion to Matt. 19.<sup>4</sup> Paul’s follow up statement--“one having one kind and another a different kind”--suggests the capacity to enter into marriage a gift just as the capacity to enter celibacy is a gift.

- *8 To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain unmarried as I am. 9 But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.” (1 Cor. 7:8-8 NRVSe)* "Paul clearly recognizes that there are quite a few unmarried people whose 'gift' is not the calling to celibacy but the calling to marriage, and he urges them to get married. Paul also implicitly recognizes that simply admonishing these people to avoid sexual immorality will not always be sufficient. Instead, the divinely given calling for them is marriage, and the failure to follow that call will likely result in sexual immorality." [5](#)
- *25 Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. 26 I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is good for you to remain as you are ... 32 I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord, 33 but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit, but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. 35 I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord. (1 Cor. 7:25-35 NRSVue)* Paul's primary argument for singleness is to promote "unhindered devotion to the Lord." Secondly, he argues for singleness because of the "anxieties" that come with marriage. In short, he argues using the language of Jesus when Jesus spoke of those who chose celibacy for the sake of the kingdom. Still, this comes in the context of his confession that such a state is indeed a gift that not all have. [6](#)
- *"Lifelong celibacy is beautiful for those who have the grace and call for it. But it can lead to physical and emotional death for those who do not. In the discussion on same-sex relationships, traditionalists have not adequately wrestled with the question of permanent sexual abstinence. Is lifelong celibacy achievable for anyone who attempts it (including an entire demographic, comprising millions of people)?" [7](#)*
- Martin Luther remarked that the "voluntarily celibate" are "rare, not one in a thousand, for they are a special miracle of God." [8](#)

- *“One common argument that traditionalists make is that gay people are no different than straight people who can't find a mate and must remain chaste. This assertion has significant problems. First, saying no to temptation is not as difficult when no one is available to tempt one's desires; it's a different story to resist the love of one's life. When straight people fall in love, they marry. When gay people fall in love, they must find the Herculean strength to say no, not only in the moment of desire, but to every dream of marriage and family. Second, a profound difference exists between someone who happens to be single but can actively pursue dating and marriage and someone who is forbidden to do either. How many heterosexual singles are willing to cease dating, give up the hope of marriage, and make a lifetime vow of celibacy? Not many. Yet that is essentially what traditionalists are requiring gay people to do. Third, and perhaps most significantly, straight, unmarried people often don't succeed at celibacy. While some straight people might have the ability to live in a permanent sexual abstinence, not everyone can. In fact, 'single' is a misnomer, since many many unmarried heterosexuals, including Christians, are dating, cohabitating, or otherwise involved in romantic or sexual relationships. In other words, arguing that gay people must be celibate because heterosexuals also need to be chaste ignores the reality that many straight people are equally unable to achieve lifelong celibacy. This cannot be blamed only on moral weakness. Rather, God designed human beings for intimate relations.” [9](#)*
- For LGBTQ+ individuals, marriage becomes one of the ways in which they can practice a healthy and truly biblical sexual ethic. [10](#)



## NOTES: FIVE

1. "First-century Jews called naturally born eunuchs 'eunuchs of the sun' (*saris khama*) -- indicating they were discovered to be eunuchs at the moment the sun shone upon them. Babies born with ambiguous or poorly formed genitals were considered eunuchs from the day of their birth." Megan DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology* (Eerdmans, 2015).
2. "... many Roman emperors and elite householders depended upon castrated eunuchs ... Their inability to procreate barred them from claiming power in their own name, and also from producing heirs who might challenge the dynastic authority of the sacred king or emperor. Their gender ambiguity also enabled them to mediate between men and women, elite and public, sacred and secular ... Eunuchs were elite slaves, entrusted with any number of important duties, but they were also considered luxury items and status symbols in the Roman Empire." Megan DeFranza.
3. Jay E. Smith, "Celibacy According to Jesus and Paul," in *Sanctified Sexuality*, Sandra Glahn & C. Gary Barnes, editors (Kregel, 2020); see also "Celibacy is a gift," <https://reformationproject.org/case/celibacy/>
4. Jay E. Smith.
5. James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality* (Eerdmans, 2013).
6. Jay E. Smith.
7. Karen Keen *Scripture, Ethics and the Possibility of Sam-Sex Relationships* (Eerdmans, 2018).
8. Jay E. Smith.
9. Karen Keen.
10. Rev. Tonetta-Landis Aina, in *Affirmation Guide for Sexuality & Spirituality* (2023) proposes 9 criteria for a biblical sexual ethic, none of which are heteronormative: (1 - Vulnerability (a loss of the need to protect oneself); 2 - Commitment (some form--whether covenant, contract, or agreement--should be entered into with intention); 3 - Fruitfulness (brings new life into the world (not necessarily children)); 4 - Mutuality (active receptivity and receptive activity); 5 - Equality (primarily equality of power); 6 - Concern (seeing someone as a whole person and not just a willing body); 7 - Social Justice (not harming third parties with the relationship); 8 - Do No Unjust Harm (the relationship should build up and edify); and 9 - Free Consent (respecting the human capacity for choice)); See <https://www.qchristian.org/guides/sexuality>

## SIX

Only a handful of texts in the Bible directly address same-sex sexual relationships. All of these texts focus on specific failures of biblical sexual ethics (e.g., pederasty, sexual idolatry, etc.) rather than forbidding, in general, all same-sex sexual relationships.<sup>1</sup> That is, these texts are not prohibitions against same-sex relationships but against any sexual relationships (including heterosexual) that violate a broader biblical sexual ethic (an ethic which might include some of the following: 1 - commitment (a covenant, contract, or agreement entered into with intention); 2 - mutuality (each partner actively receiving the other and each receptive to the other's action toward them); 3 - equality (each partner equal primarily in terms of the power they hold and give in the relationship); 4 - concern (each seeing the other as a whole person and not just a willing body); 5 - doing no unjust harm (the relationship should build up and edify each partner); and 6 - free consent (the relationship respects and highly values the human capacity for choice)).<sup>2</sup> Biblical texts that address same-sex relationships exist largely because the people described in them do not demonstrate a sexual ethic like this, the very ethic which the church can affirm in LGBTQ+ couples today.

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**Only a handful of texts in the Bible address same-sex sexual relationships.**

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- Dale Pauls writes, *“Does Scripture condemn – does Scripture address – life-long, monogamous, mutual and loving (that is, non-exploitative) gay relationships? How do we determine this? What difference does it make that such relationships do not seem to have existed back then, or were kept very, very private? The historical record is essentially silent about such relationships. Some claim otherwise, but on closer look their evidence breaks down which is not surprising: society back then was decidedly hierarchical, that is, top-down. What difference does it make that such relationships were, as far as we can tell, beyond the horizon of possible meanings for Biblical writers and their audiences? ... So the great shame of same-sex behavior in the ancient world was that one of the men was acting like or being treated ‘like a woman.’ Nothing could be more shameful than a man taking on, or being forced to take on, the passive feminine role. It was this that was ‘against nature.’ Likewise it was ‘against nature’ for a woman to take on the active role, to act ‘like a man.’ But since the concerns of society was almost entirely masculine, this comes up less often. In any case, it’s all wrapped up in premises very different from ours today.”*<sup>3</sup>

- Most forms of same-sex behavior in the ancient world fit a pattern of lustful self-indulgence: sex by masters forced upon enslaved men, prostitution, and pederasty (e.g., sexual relationships between adult men and adolescent boys).<sup>4</sup> Same-sex behavior in ancient societies was shaped by class and gender hierarchies (e.g., an adult male citizen could have sex with an enslaved man, prostitute, or youth, as long as others viewed the adult male citizen as being dominant). Some today cite Plato's Symposium, Achilles and Patroclus, and Nero's marriage to a man he enslaved as examples of loving same-sex relationships in antiquity. Yet these examples are quite different from contemporary same-sex marriages in that they all involve status hierarchies, and most are not monogamous.
- Genesis 19 - God sends two angels to Sodom, where the men of Sodom threaten to rape the angels, who appear to them as men. The men's aggressive actions are contrasted by lavish hospitality toward the angels from Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18) and Lot (Genesis 19). The focus is on the men of Sodom's violent and disgraceful treatment of strangers (the angels/men). This type of same-sex rape was a common form of aggression and humiliation in the ancient world. The gang rape portrayed in Gen. 19 is completely different from loving relationships based on consent, much less mutuality and commitment. There are more than twenty references to Sodom and Gomorrah in Scripture after Genesis 19. Only a handful mention sexual sins (E.g., 2 Pet. 2:7; Jude 7). Most biblical texts tie the sin of Sodom to something other than sexual sin such as unconcern for the poor (Ez. 16; Amos 4; Zeph. 2)), oppression of marginalized groups (Is. 1), and power abuse (Jer. 23). The story of Sodom tells us no more about attitudes toward what we call homosexuality than the story of the rape of Dinah tells us about attitudes toward heterosexuality.
- Leviticus 18:22 prohibits male same-sex intercourse, and Leviticus 20:13 prescribes the death penalty for violators: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination"; "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their bloodguilt is upon them." Some argue that laws like these carry over to the New Testament (and thus to modern day Christians), yet Leviticus also prohibits sex during a woman's menstrual period (Leviticus 18:19), which most Christians do not regard as sinful. Others suggest that the term "abomination" indicates that same-sex behavior is particularly egregious, but many Christians today accept other practices described in Scripture as "abominations" (e.g., charging interest on loans (Ezekiel 18:13), burning incense (Isaiah 1:13), and eating pork, rabbit, and shellfish. (Deuteronomy 14:3-21)). Even the death penalty applied to some practices we now accept: working on the Sabbath (Exodus 35:2) and charging interest on loans (Ezekiel 18:13). Lev. 18 and Lev. 20 prohibit male same-sex intercourse because it subverted patriarchal gender norms of male dominance in a society that devalued women. Leviticus doesn't address female same-sex relations, which illustrates that the real issue here is not same-sex relations per se but rather patriarchal views of men and women.

- In Romans 1:26-27, Paul condemns certain types of same-sex behavior: "Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error." Paul is not condemning same-sex sexual relationships in general. He is condemning same-sex sexual relationships rooted in a kind of "self-seeking excess." Committed same-sex relationships aren't in view here. In the ancient world, same-sex behavior between men was regarded as shameful and unnatural because it reduced the status of the passive male to the lower status of a female. Male passivity, female dominance, and a lack of self-control made same-sex behavior emblematic of excess and dishonor. These factors also made same-sex relations an apt illustration of what happens when we fail to honor God: we ourselves are given over to dishonor. But the problems Paul focuses on in Romans 1 do not characterize same-sex unions based on love, commitment, and that are self-giving. "Paul's use of the word 'natural' in the context of sex was meant to indicate only sexual intimacy intended for procreation. Therefore, when the passage says, 'Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones' (Romans 1:26, NIV), the early church fathers saw this as referencing any sexual acts that didn't lead to procreation, i.e. non-vaginal penetration. It wasn't until the fourth century that church fathers began interpreting Romans 1 as a prohibition on specifically woman with woman sexual intimacy. So what we find described in Romans 1 is sexual behavior contrary to what was culturally viewed as natural: disciplined and procreative. The word 'natural' in itself is specifically referencing cultural norms, not rooted in absolute principles, in the Epistles. A man with long hair was also noted as being against nature (1 Cor. 11:14)." [5](#)
- In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul warns that those who persist in sin will not inherit the kingdom of God. In his list of wrongdoers, he includes two Greek words that connect to some forms of same-sex behavior: "Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, men who engage in illicit sex, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, swindlers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." (NRSVue) "Male prostitutes" is the word *malakoi* and "men who engage in illicit sex" is the word *arsenokoitai*. 1 Timothy 1:10 also uses the term *arsenokoitai* in a similar "vice list." Given that many Bible translations since 1946 have rendered *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* as "homosexuals" or "men who have sex with men," it's important to look at these two Greek terms. The term *malakoi* literally means "soft," and it was widely used to describe a lack of self-control, weakness, cowardice, and laziness. Given that those negative characteristics were unfortunately (and unfairly) attributed to women in the ancient world, the term was also long translated as "effeminate." The term *arsenokoites* (the singular form) comes from two Greek words: *arsen*, meaning "male," and *koites*, meaning "bed." (continued on next page)

- (continued from previous page) Those words appear together in the Greek translation of Leviticus 20:13, leading some to speculate that Paul coined the term arsenokoites. While this term may denote same-sex behavior, it almost certainly refers to exploitative forms of it, not loving relationships. If Paul had intended to condemn both partners in male same-sex relations, it's critical to remember the major gap between same-sex behavior as it was practiced in ancient societies—where it was based on status, power, and lust—and committed same-sex unions today. “Before 1946, there were no Bibles that contained the word ‘homosexual.’ The Greek words mistranslated as ‘homosexual’ have historically been translated as ‘sodomites,’ ‘abusers of themselves with mankind,’ ‘liars with mankind,’ ‘perverts,’ and ‘buggerers.’ Prior to 1946, ‘malakoi’ was translated as ‘soft’ or ‘effeminate.’ Theologians admit that arsenokoitai and malakoi are very difficult words to translate. Unfortunately, the 1946 Revised Standard Version New introduced the word ‘homosexual’ into our English Bibles, and many other English translations chose to follow their example. Simply put, the translations that chose to use the word ‘homosexual’ are in error. The essence of the original Greek word ‘arsenokoitai’ is exploitative in nature. It wasn’t simply an issue of homosexuality but the abuse and exploitation of another person as a demonstration of power.” [6](#)

## NOTES: SIX

1. See “Brief Biblical Case for LGBTQ Inclusion,” <https://reformationproject.org/biblical-case/>; Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian* (Convergent, 2014); Colby Martin, *Unclobber* (Westminster John Knox, 2016); “LGBTQ+ Theology 101,” <https://www.gchristian.org/resources/theology#theologies>; Danny Cortez & Kathy Baldock, “Relational Guide for Clergy,” <https://www.gchristian.org/guides/clergy>; Amy-Jill Levine, “How to read the Bible’s “clobber passages” on homosexuality,” Outreach: An LGBTQ Catholic Resource, <https://outreach.faith/2022/09/amy-jill-levine-how-to-read-the-bibles-clobber-passages-on-homosexuality/>.
2. Rev. Tonetta-Landis Aina, in “Affirmation Guide for Sexuality & Spirituality” (2023) <https://www.gchristian.org/guides/sexuality>
3. Dale Pauls, “LGBT+ Full Inclusion,” Adult Bible Class, Stamford Church of Christ, March 12, 2023.
4. See Martii Nissienn, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* (Fortress, 2004); see also <https://reformationproject.org/biblical-case/>.
5. Danny Cortez and Kathy Baldock, “Relational Guide for Clergy,” <https://www.gchristian.org/guides/clergy>.
6. Cortez and Baldock.

## SEVEN

The new creation, inaugurated by Jesus, is one in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female (Gal. 3:28). That is, from Genesis (and before) to Revelation (and after) God is working toward an ultimate reality for humanity where biases and evaluations based upon categories like these are no longer viable and where no single racial, ethnic, gender or sexual category may be considered superior or normative. The Greatest Commandments--love of God and love of neighbor--represent the ultimate expression of this new creation, and the direction of the arc of Scripture and history. All Scripture is interpreted and applied through the lens of this new creation. All activity of the church is aimed toward an increasing expression of this new creation.

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***All Scripture is interpreted and applied through the lens of this new creation.***

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- Brandon Robertson writes, *“From the beginning of Scripture to the final pages of the Book of Revelation, there is a gradual but consistent attack on systems of oppression, dominance, and exclusion. In Jesus, whom Scripture proclaims to be the very revelation of God, we see a radical revolutionary who is willing to lay down his own life in order to show humanity the horror of our dominating, exclusionary behavior and reveal to us a better way. We see a Christ who stands ready to call out and destroy the systems—the ‘powers and principalities’ that lead to exclusion and oppression, but never justified violence or ‘wrestl[ing] against flesh and blood.’ Jesus and the apostles understood that the problem wasn’t necessarily bad people, but rather evil systems of power that find the incarnation and expression through human institutions.”* [1](#)
- Walter Brueggemann writes, *“Martin Luther King, Jr., famously said that the arc of history is bent toward justice. And the parallel statement that I want to make is that the arc of the Gospel is bent toward inclusiveness. And I think that’s a kind of elemental conviction through which I then read the text.”* [2](#)
- Danny Cortez: *“If the greatest commandment is to love God and our neighbor, then the most immoral thing we can do is to not love our neighbor. Considering all the harm that has been done to LGBTQ+ people by the church, we have to consider that we have been the ones acting immorally. So yes, immorality already exists in the church. It’s immoral to treat another person with disdain. It’s immoral to cause a person to hate themselves. Our hope, therefore, is to pursue what it means to better love our neighbor. The church’s greatest concern has to be tied in to the Great Commandment. So our top priority is to examine whether we are loving our people well, especially those on the margins.”* [3](#)

- Walter Brueggemann notes: *"The Ethiopian Eunuch, who our reading [Acts 8] tells us had come to Jerusalem to worship, still lacked access to the temple. He was kept outside the walls of the temple, barred from entering, even for worship, because of his identity. Remember, the Ethiopian Eunuch was not only an Ethiopian. He was a eunuch. And according to the religious laws, according to temple regulations, eunuchs were not allowed inside the temple walls ... The short, family-friendly way to explain what it means to be a eunuch in the time of this Bible story is that a eunuch was a person who was considered to be a gender or sexual minority. They did not fit inside the binary of expectations for gender – eunuchs were not considered men, but they weren't considered women either. They were their own expression of gender, a person who, in our terms today, might be considered part of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender community.*
  - *And one of the holy books of the Law, Deuteronomy, said that no eunuchs had any business being inside the temple of the Lord. And yet. Here we are. The Ethiopian Eunuch is one of the earliest converts to Christianity. It can be confusing, sometimes, when the Bible seems to say one thing and do another. That happens a lot, actually, that in one place scripture says one thing, and in another place it seems to say the opposite. That is why when we read scripture, we can't just take one little piece of it as the whole Capital "T" Truth. We have to look at the whole story, the whole narrative, the whole arc of the Gospel. We have to look at and consider what direction the story is going.*
  - *In the case of eunuchs, Deuteronomy on its own seems pretty clear. Eunuchs were not good enough to be included in holy spaces. But then we look, later on, to the book of Isaiah. The Eunuch was sitting in his chariot and he was reading the book of the prophet Isaiah. He was reading a section of Isaiah we sometimes call the verses about "the suffering servant," verses which we now relate to the sacrifice and suffering of Jesus. But it is not far after those verses in Isaiah about the suffering servant that there are other verses. Verses that have words from God directly to eunuchs. In Isaiah 56 verses 4 and 5, God says: 'To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than many descendants; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever.' ... Although the book of Deuteronomy said that eunuchs have no place in the temple, God says in Isaiah that God will give faithful eunuchs not only access to the temple and entrance within its walls, but a memorial. A legacy, known to generations.*
  - *And here we have in the book of Acts, an Ethiopian eunuch, whose entire legacy is known by his faith. Who is memorialized within scripture as one of the earliest faithful Christians. We have to look at scripture not bit by bit, piece by piece, but see the entire story arc. And here we see, clearly, that the arc of the story that God tells is moving away from exclusive rules and towards more and more and more and more inclusion. That is the radical thing about our God. God keeps widening the temple and knocking down walls to make room for everyone." 4*

- Consider also the proposal by Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, who, in a commentary piece on the prophet Amos writes that Amos "*debunks Israel's claim to the exclusionary love and justice of God and insists that, in its universal scope, YHWH's emancipatory reach extends everywhere, at many times and in many places, bringing emancipation for those not yet liberated. Indeed, he suggests that the wide sweep of history under YHWH is a sequence of Exoduses, so that there is nothing exclusionary about Israel's emancipatory memory or claim. Thus we may consider an inventory of the chosen and the unchosen whom God emancipates.*" Brueggemann goes on to explore how this emancipation includes unchosen people such as people of color, women and the LGBTQ+ community: "*And now, belatedly, we are able to see that the reach of God's emancipatory love extends beyond straight people, who are readily approved by society, to include LGBTQ persons, who have been much too long held in the bondage of social censorship and social disapproval. The passion of God's emancipatory embrace goes well beyond straight people.*" This is, Brueggemann writes, part of the ever-expanding love of God revealed in Scripture: "*First, Gentiles beyond chosen Israel; Then, people of color beyond whites; Later, females beyond males and very belatedly, LGBTQ persons beyond straight hegemony ... Our several orthodoxies of nationalism, racism, sexism and gender inclusion all have imagined a God who could be safely kept in our preferred boundaries. But the God of the covenant, who is the God of the Gospel, will not be so contained.*" [5](#)

## NOTES: SEVEN

1. Brandon J. Robertson, *The Gospel of Inclusion, Revised Edition A Christian Case for LGBT+ Inclusion in the Church* (2021)
2. Walter Brueggemann, *The Gospel vs. Scripture? Biblical Theology and the Debate about Rites of Blessing: An Interview with Walter Brueggemann* by Julie A. Wortman, <https://theotherjournal.com/2004/10/the-gospel-vs-scripture-biblical-theology-and-the-debate-about-rites-of-blessing-an-interview-with-walter-brueggemann/>
3. Danny Cortez, "Relational Guide for Clergy," [https://www.qchristian.org/guides/clergy\\_](https://www.qchristian.org/guides/clergy_)
4. Elle Dowd, "The Arc of the Gospel," April 28, 2019, <https://elledowd.com/2018/04/28/the-arc-of-the-gospel/>
5. Walter Brueggemann, "The Book of Amos shows how God's 'emancipatory embrace' includes LGBTQ people," *Outreach: An LGBTQ Catholic Resource*, April 2, 2023 <https://outreach.faith/2023/04/walter-brueggemann-the-book-of-amos-shows-how-gods-emancipatory-embrace-includes-lgbtq-people/>