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The Call to Love: A Catholic's Guide to New Understandings of Homosexual Inclusivity

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The Call to Love:

A Catholic's Guide to New Understandings of Homosexual Inclusivity

by

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Abstract

The issue of homosexual inclusivity within the Catholic Church has been and continues to be at the center of much debate. This thesis analyzes the issue by engaging the document, "The Pastoral Care of the Homosexual Person" written by Joseph Ratzinger. New exegetical interpretations of both Old and New Testament texts are placed in dialogue with interpretations utilized by Ratzinger in his letter. These interpretations serve to provide an alternative and liberating reading of seminal texts that have been used to oppress and exclude the Queer community from the Catholic Church. Queer theology is then used to draw connections between the experience of Christ and that of the Queer person, in order to argue that in following Christ, Catholics must embrace the Queer community as another part of the Cosmic body of Christ.

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Background

I grew up in Montebello, California, where I attended St. Benedict Catholic Church every Sunday until about the time I was sixteen, when I began to attend Miraculous Medal Catholic Church. My earliest memories were of going to church with my mother on Sundays and falling asleep in the cold and hard pews, which did not make for good sleeping accommodations. Nonetheless, I persevered in my weekly mass naps until I was old enough to get pinched when I began to doze off. At which point, my father began to serve as an usher and, rather than repeat the masochistic cycle of “sleep-pinch-sleep,” I decided to become an usher. I enjoyed going to Church much more from that point on. Needless to say that I really did not listen to mass, I thought it was enough that I helped people get to their seat after walking in 25 minutes after the Mass had begun. I figured that God would forgive my lack of attention since I was being of service to the community.

As I grew in age, thankfully my desire to actually engage my faith also grew. I began to attend Miraculous Medal Catholic church and actually listened to the readings and the homily (although I still struggled to stay awake). This level of understanding about what my faith was did not mature much in the following years. My desire to learn more was limited to figuring out the minimum amount of confessions I needed per year in order to still be in God's good graces. However, in 2008 I was forced to become more informed and to grow in my understanding of what the Catholic Church stood for.

That year the California elections presented a controversial measure (Prop 8) on the ballot regarding marriage, gay marriage to be exact. At 26 years old, I had the opportunity to

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vote and express my personal position on gay marriage and whether or not to allow for it to occur in California. I took the time to research both sides of the argument finding documents from LGBTQ/homosexual groups and reading real life accounts of how this measure could affect many Americans who would not have the opportunity to marry, if it passed. Being Catholic, I also researched the Catholic Church's stance on the issue, focusing on the document by the USCCB on Proposition 8 and the 1986 document "The Pastoral Care of the Homosexual Person" by Cardinal Ratzinger carefully reading and discerning with all the other material I had found. This was the very first time I was consciously engaged in my faith. As the day approached, I found myself conflicted with what I felt to be just and what the leadership of my faith strongly suggested I do. The day arrived and after countless hours of thinking and prayer, I voted for Proposition 8, which eliminated the rights of same-sex couples to marry.

After this incident, I felt as if I had contributed to something innately unjust but I could not explain how or why I felt this way. This was a turning point in my faith journey. Nearly two years later, I would have the opportunity to expand my knowledge of faith and religion with an acceptance into the Graduate program in Theology at a Catholic-Jesuit University, Loyola Marymount University. At LMU, I have been able to find reasons to explain how I felt on that day, but why did I have to enroll into a Graduate program to find answers to an issue that is clearly one that every person in the Catholic Church had to and has to confront?

This thesis is a response to this event in my life and this question that lingers on: How should a follower of Christ within the Catholic tradition respond to inclusivity issues regarding the homosexual community in a responsible and just manner? The focus of this thesis is two-fold: First, I will argue that as followers of Christ, Catholics ought to love and provide full

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inclusion of the homosexual community within the Church.¹ Full inclusion would include all the rights and privileges that any heterosexual person and couple would have within the Church, including marriage. Second, it is my firm belief that a dialogical model engaging the church's stance on issues of homosexual inclusivity will serve the Church community by providing varied exegetical and theological perspectives that will illumine the issue and perhaps help the community of faith more authentically live out what it means to be a follower of Christ. The Church must look past sex and gender and focus on the personhood of its members so as to more fully live out the faith in Christ. In the Gospels, Jesus is in communion with all persons and is never seen excluding anyone based on their sexual orientation or gender identification.

Method

In order to provide a wide base on which to place this analysis, each section presented will be a dialogue within the themes of Scripture, Jesus, and the experience of the faithful. Each section will consist of two primary voices, the Church and a constructive voice offering a critique. The voice of the Church will be comprised of exegetical and theological reflections that are against homosexual inclusivity. The constructive voice will be represented by M. Shawn Copeland, Victor Paul Furnish, Margaret Farley, Nancy Wilson, and Patrick Cheng.

The thesis will begin the with a dialogue between the pastoral document "Care of the Homosexual Person" and theologian M. Shawn Copeland's book *Enfleshing Freedom* to explore the Magisterium's position, since this is the teaching body of the Church. In this section, I will unpack Scripture passages including various Old Testament texts' that have served as proof texts or evidence supporting the Church's stance on homosexuality. These texts will be juxtaposed

¹ I will use the term "homosexual" to refer to the entire LGBTQ community in order to make the explicit connection between my argument and the document "The Care of the Homosexual Person"

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against the exegesis of Victor Paul Furnish in his book, “The Moral Teaching of Paul.” Lastly, I will examine the life and works of Jesus Christ as presented through the exegesis of Patrick Cheng, a gay theologian who has found validity in being gay through the life Christ and not in spite of it.

To be clear, this thesis is meant to invite the Catholic community into conversation and discernment regarding its own identity and its ways of living out the love of Christ to its homosexual sisters and brothers. If a change is to happen, if inclusivity is possible, then it must come from a movement within each person to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.”²

Part 1

In order to understand how Catholic’s can engage the issue of homosexual inclusivity in a just and Christ-like manner, I will present the current stance of the Church so as to set the context of the dialogue. In 1986, the Letter to All Catholic Bishops on the Care of the Homosexual Person, otherwise known as “The Pastoral Care of the Homosexual Person,” was released in order to address the issues of LGBTQ treatment within the Catholic Church. While attempting to ‘Care for the Homosexual person,’ the document only magnified the uneasiness of the Church to engage and accept the homosexual community(from the LGBTQ perspective). This section will present key passages from the document coupled with those Scripture passages that act as foundation for the document and the current stance of the Church. Concomitantly, several theological voices will offer critiques and alternative points of view to see if there could be another more loving and inclusive interpretation, an interpretation that would express more authentically the love of Christ. Whereas the Church would argue that it is already providing an adequate interpretation, I argue that adding another voice from within the Christian tradition will

² Romans 13:14

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only render a more vibrant interpretation. The Church, like the body of Christ, is made up of all people and each person's experience of Christ provides a more depth understanding of how God acts within history.

The Catholic Stance

According to the teaching of the Catholic Church, while the inclination of the homosexual is not a sin *per se*, the “individual homosexual actions are intrinsically disordered.”³ It is imperative to highlight how this short phrase functions in creating an existential problem for all homosexual persons. According to the position articulated in “The Pastoral Care of the Homosexual Person,” the personhood of the homosexual is differentiated from the homosexual act of the person. In making a distinction between the person and the act, the Church can condemn the act while calling the person to abstain and live a life of celibacy. The act is referred to as “disordered,” which presents a problem for both those attempting to understand the issue both from outside and within the homosexual community. Why are persons referred to by their sexual orientation? This can be expanded to issues of gender as well, but the focus here is sexual orientation. What does Ratzinger mean when he refers to a homosexual person or homosexual action?

Homosexual: Anachronistic language

According to the Catholic Catechism, homosexual activities are viewed as distortions of the natural order of the world.⁴ “The Pastoral Care for the Homosexual Person” quotes several

³ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Homosexualitatis problema, “Letter to All Catholic Bishops on the Pastoral Care of the Homosexual Persons”*. 1986. #3

⁴ Alan Schreck. *The Essential Catholic Catechism: A Readable, Comprehensive Catechism*. Cincinnati, OH. Servant Books. 1999. 288

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biblical passages that list homosexual acts as “sinful” acts that cause “disharmony.”⁵ A viable issue arises when both the Catechism and Ratzinger use this word to describe same-sex activity. Victor Paul Furnish points to the innate problem found in the language in stating that, “there was no word for homosexuality in ancient language, including biblical languages...nor were there any words for heterosexuality or bisexuality.”⁶

The concept of sexuality as it is understood in today’s context which refers to a “persons sexual identity in relation to the gender to which he or she is typically attracted; the fact of being heterosexual, heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual” was not an understanding that the Biblical authors had.⁷ Furnish goes onto to explain that the term may have originated in 1868 by a physician named Karoly M. Benkert in a letter to a colleague in reference to male and female persons who are sexually oriented to their own sex.⁸ Moreover, the term did not appear in the English version of the Bible until 1946, which would make its use in Biblical text overtly anachronistic.⁹

This problem of misappropriated language coupled with what Nancy Wilson, in her book “Outing the Bible,” calls a “very biblically illiterate society,” has led to homophobia and prejudice among the Catholic community.¹⁰ For the purposes of this section, I will only focus on the language used by Ratzinger and Old Testament Biblical passages used to support their position that homosexual persons and actions are contrary to the teachings of the Church.

Based on this language, the Church calls for homosexual persons to repress and sacrifice their sexual orientation, to relinquish genital expression, and to deny their bodies and their

⁵ Ratzinger, *Homosexualitatis problema*. # 6

⁶ Victor Paul Furnish. *The Moral Teaching of Paul*. Nashville, TN. Abingdon Press. 2009. 55

⁷ Ibid. 56

⁸ Ibid. 57

⁹ Ibid. 57

¹⁰ Nancy Wilson. *Outing the Bible: Queer folks, God, Jesus, and the Christian Scriptures*. Indianapolis, IN. Life Journey Press, 2013. 49

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selves.¹¹ For the Church and Ratzinger, denial of the homosexual persons' sexuality will serve a necessary sacrifice to the Lord and will act as a means of salvation *against their way of life*, which looks to destroy them.¹² James Allison finds this prescription of “love and do not love, be and do not be” reprehensible in how it “destabilizes being into annihilation and think annihilation to be a good thing.”¹³ It is apparent that the term *homosexual* and the world of meaning that comes with it has been a point of contention in attempting to shed light on the issues of homosexual acceptance and inclusivity.

“...isn't it against the Bible?”

According to M. Shawn Copeland, “Church teaching on homosexuality ... coaxes our collusion in opposing and punishing gay and lesbian people who refuse to internalize homophobia...”¹⁴ How exactly does Church teaching go about instilling mass panic concerning the safety of families and fear of the homosexual person?¹⁵ How is it that most Catholics cannot tell the difference between the Feast of the Assumption and the Annunciation (they do both start with “A”), but can nonetheless bond over their agreement that same-sex couples are against God's intended vision for humanity?

Nancy Wilson recalls a real life event that speaks to this widespread homophobia caused by misinformed followers. She tells the story of an encounter with a panhandler and addict

¹¹ M. Shawn Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. 2010. 74

¹² Ibid. 75

¹³ James Allison. *Faith Beyond Resentment: Fragments and Catholic and Gay*. New York, New York. The Crossroads Publishing Co., 2001. 94

¹⁴ Copeland. 77

¹⁵ This is a reference to the 2008 Proposition 8 slogans of “restoring marriage and protecting California's children.” <http://protectmarriage.com/>.

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named John who stops to ask her a question after noticing two women engaged in a public display of affection.¹⁶

...He then told me that he'd seen two women leaving the church walking arm in arm or holding hands. Maybe it was the first time John realized that there were gay people involved in the church. I'm not sure. He said that this bothered him, them walking down the street like that because wasn't it *against the Bible*?¹⁷

Wilson makes note of the fact that while the man used drugs, is often found in prison for any petty crime, and is slowly deteriorating because of his addiction, he could still be morally offended the sight of a same-sex couple. This man could look past his own issues and judge that homosexuality was the "unpardonable sin" since he had heard (probably growing up in church) that the Bible condemned it.¹⁸

This story is a paradigm of how both the misuse of the language and misinterpretations of Scripture have led the majority of the Catholic hierarchy and laity to view same-sex expressions as the sin above all sins, superseding any other issue found in Scripture. The following sections will be a dialogue utilizing the often misused biblical passages from both the Old and New Testaments. To use Phyllis Trible's language, these text have been "Texts of Terror" for the homosexual person. In her seminal work, "Text of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings," Trible shows how various texts in Scripture have been used to justify mistreatment of women throughout history. Likewise, homophobic interpretation of several texts have contributed to the fear, prejudice, and hate that have plagued the homosexual community throughout the years.

¹⁶ I only mention these two characteristics because they play a role in depicting the widespread homophobia and biblical illiteracy

¹⁷ Wilson. 68

¹⁸ Ibid. 68

Texts of Terror: Scriptural References

Genesis 1:1-2:4 and 2:4b-24: In the beginning was ... heterosexuality ?

Let us begin with the beginning. Ratzinger calls upon the Creation accounts to support the Church's view that homosexuality is unnatural and not intended by God. This is done by equating God's creation with the idea of complementarity which coincides with God's wisdom since, for Ratzinger, essentially, things fit where they should fit citing that "God, in his infinite wisdom and love, brings into existence all of reality as a reflection of his goodness. He fashions mankind, male and female, in his own image and likeness...in the complementarity of the sexes, they are called to reflect the inner unity of the Creator."¹⁹ The quote exemplifies a mode of thinking which is based on the language found in Genesis 1:1-24 and which utilizes natural law as proof that complementarity is what dictates proper sexual relations. That is to say that by mere complementarity, by "nature", male and female were created so that they could be brought together through sexual attraction.²⁰ Wilson, lightheartedly, refers to this perspective as the "penis-in-the-vagina" theory and adds that this should not be viewed as the entire spectrum of sexual possibilities.²¹ Jeffrey Siker views the use of the Creation accounts as an argument by omission since nothing is mentioned concerning "homosexuality" to which he also adds, echoing Wilson, that, while heterosexuality may be the dominant form of sexuality, it does not constitute the only form.²²

Furnish looks at the language of the passage in order to illumine the argument. The word "humankind" in the Genesis 1:28 can be translated to the Hebrew word "adam" which refers to

¹⁹ Ratzinger. # 6

²⁰ Furnish. .63

²¹ Wilson. 83

²² Jeffrey Siker. *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/J. Knox Press, 1994. 184

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all of humanity.²³ He argues that the distinction between “male” and “female” is important only in that it shows they were made in the image and likeness of God and were the only creations to bear this mark. Consequently, there can be no argument for or against a homosexuality based on this text.²⁴

In looking at Genesis 2:4-24, Furnish again looks at language to point out the innate flaw in Ratzinger’s use of this passage to support his argument. The focus is on the terms “man” and “woman” found in verses 20-24. In this account, he highlights that the “women is created because the man is lonely and in need of a companion” and not because they need to reproduce. This is a stark contrast to how this passage is often used to support the prescribed Catholic view that sexual activity is only a means of procreation. It is not their biological (man, woman) or social (male, female) categories that make them compatible. On the contrary, it is that they are the *same flesh and bone*. [How is this not a form of a “biological,” essentialist argument.]

When reading these accounts, it is important to note, above all else, that they are *etiological* in nature.²⁵ They are meant to explain how the authors experienced their world. If authors experienced the social construct of “men” and “women” then the accounts will contain this construct. Moreover, whatever social or cultural norms and biases the authors may have had would have also been injected into the etiologically structured stories of faith, like the creation accounts.

Sodom, Gomorrah, and Philo

While the creation stories are often used to refute the legitimacy of homosexual persons and sexual expressions, no biblical story is more notorious in this respect than the story of

²³ Furnish. 64

²⁴ Ibid. 64

²⁵ Ibid. 65

Sodom and Gomorrah. Most people, whether Christian or not, know this story, or at least something of it. Here is the abridged version from Genesis 19: After God realizes the wickedness occurring in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, God sends two angels to destroy the city and help Lot and his family escape before the impending destruction. "Who else belongs to you here? Sons-in-law, your sons, your daughters...take them away from this place, for the outcry reaching the Lord against those here is so great that the Lord has sent us to destroy it."²⁶ The towns' people learn of the two visitors and, in their wickedness, look to rape the two visitors. Lot, attempting to salvage the honor of his visitors, instead offers his virgin daughters to the crowd. (How has this act not caused more upheaval than the near rape of two angels?) However, this is eventually not needed since the angels blind the people, and Lot and his family escape the doomed cities.

Ratzinger uses the story to depict how God views homosexual persons and sexual expression: "...in Genesis 19:1-11, the deterioration due to sin continues in the story of the men of Sodom."²⁷ This wickedness and deterioration due to sin has been connected to homosexuality since Philo of Alexandria wrote his commentary in the first century.²⁸ According to Wilson, Philo based his interpretation on nothing substantial that would explicitly depict the act as a homosexual act.²⁹ However, he did spend much of his interpretation on enumerating the various sins, focusing on the sexual intent of the towns people, stating, "Not only in their[men] mad lust for women did they violate the marriages of their neighbors, but also men mounted males without respect for the sexual nature which the active partner shares with the passive...little by

²⁶ Genesis 19:12-13

²⁷ Ratzinger. Section 6

²⁸ Wilson. 52

²⁹ Ibid. 52

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little they accustomed those who were by nature men to submit to play the part of women, they saddled them with the formidable curse of female disease.”³⁰

This interpretation, based on Philo and his own worldview, adopted by the Church fathers and passed on without further investigation, has almost become doctrine in its widespread acceptance among Catholics. This section will focus on the language and the story in order to posit another meaning to this well known tale of a town gone awry

According to Margaret Farley and her book on Christian sexual ethics, “Just Love,” in the Hebrew Scriptures there are three key elements that shape any and all views on sexual ethics and should be taken in to consideration when interpreting the text: the need to marry and procreate, “patriarchal model upon which ideas of marriage and society were institutionally based,” and those actions that serve as identity marker which set the Hebrew people apart from the surrounding nations.³¹ Keeping this in mind and understanding Philo’s heritage, we can see that he and his point of view, like anyone’s, is the product of his background. Moreover, his interpretation and the story itself must also be viewed with this in mind. Only in doing so can we render a more authentic interpretation.

Rape and “Yadah”: Genesis 19:1-25 and Judges 19:22-30:

According to Furnish, the story is not about homosexual behavior as understood in today’s context.³² It never mentions consent between the individuals, it does not model or speak of the countless married same-sex couples and the devotion and love shared in those marriages. The story is about the moral requirements of hospitality, male honor, and rape in all its forms. To

³⁰ Furnish. 68

³¹ Margaret Farley A. *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*. New York, NY. The Continuum International Publishing group.. 2006. 273

³² Furnish. 59

this list, Farley adds “injustice, arrogance and hatred of foreigners.”³³ Siker adds, “...one can certainly conclude that homosexual rape (just like heterosexual rape...), is an abomination before God, but it does not follow from this that all expressions of homosexuality are prohibited.”³⁴

The lingering question that remains and lies at the heart of the story: Why would men want to rape other men? In this context, to rape another man would lower the victim to the status of a women, since the penetrated would play the role of the women who is normally penetrated.³⁵ This would break the gender boundaries within the culture and essentially, demean the male rape victim. (This will be examined in depth in a later section). This is how “heterosexual men would humiliate other men, especially in the context of conquest.”³⁶

Past biblical interpretations did support Ratzinger’s position by connecting the “wickedness” of the town with the verb *yadah*, which is translated “to know” which is an allusion to sexual intercourse in this context. Here is where misappropriation occurs in changing the meaning of the verb of *yadah* to mean not just sexual intercourse but homosexual intercourse. The following example from the New Oxford Annotated Bible depicts this linguistic slight-of-hand.

19:1-38: The destruction of Sodom of Gomorrah impressed itself deeply on the later generations as an example of God’s total judgment upon appalling wickedness. (Deut 29:23; Is 1:9; Jer 49:18; Am 4:11) ... compare the crime of Gibeah (Judg 19:22-30). The episode is told to illustrate the sexual excess of the Canaanites. 5: *Know* refers to sexual relations, here homosexual (sodomy).”

When carefully read, the example renders an interesting reference to Judges 19:22-30. The story in Judges is similar to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in that it involves moral codes of hospitality and a town’s desire to rape a visitor. Oddly enough, this story is often overlooked

³³ Farley. 274

³⁴ Siker. 184

³⁵ Furnish. 63

³⁶ Wilson. 53

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even though it is more shocking than the other. A brief synopsis will help in drawing comparisons. The men of Gibeah harass and pound on the door of house with a male guest in order “to know” him. Instead of the visitor allowing himself to “be known” by the crowd, the visitor gives the crowd his concubine who is subsequently raped throughout the night and left for dead in the morning. Consequently, the concubine is placed on his donkey, dismembered so that the sight of her body parts could insight war.³⁷

According to Wilson, it is notable that this story, while using the same word, *yadah*, is not translated to mean homosexual intercourse, but matches the meaning with the action of “rape.” Moreover, for the men of Gibeah, while desiring “to know” the visitor, who is a male, there is no allusion to them being homosexuals.³⁸ Wilson also notes that the almost raped angels have “excited more outrage (and homophobia)” than the story of the women who was gang raped, left near death, and later dismembered.³⁹ She attributes this to a patriarchal, misogynistic interpretation of both stories.

The Real Sins of Sodom

To understand what exactly were the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, a passage from Ezekiel is particularly useful. Ezekiel 16:49-50 actually lists the sins of the cities, but it interesting that most interpretations of the Bible, including the more recent editions, do not include this as a footnote. This would help in clarifying the confusion and assist Catholics in a better understanding of the text. The passage from Ezekiel explains how Jerusalem too, has drifted from God in committing lewd acts beyond abominations and proceeds to describe the litany of the sins of Jerusalem: “This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters

³⁷ Ibid. 57

³⁸ Ibid. 57

³⁹ Ibid. 57

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had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them when I saw it.” The sins of Sodom are that of “pride, gluttony, excessive property, and indifference to those in need” and nowhere does it mention sexual behavior.⁴⁰ Moreover, when Sodom and Gomorrah are referenced in the New Testament, there is never a mention of homosexual intercourse.⁴¹

Abomination: Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

The term abomination is used both to describe the sins of Sodom and twice in the Holiness Code, Leviticus 18:22, “You shall not lie with a male as with a women; it is an abomination” and 20:13 “If a man lies with a male as with a women, both of them have committed an abomination : they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.” This section of Leviticus is a list of laws and practices that are meant to serve as identity markers and create a distinction between the Israelites and their “Godless neighbors.”⁴² Ratzinger also references these passages in stating, “In Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13... the author excludes from the People of God those who behave in a homosexual fashion.”⁴³ Also found in this section in Leviticus 19 are laws concerning idolatry, incest, intercourse with animals, crossbreeding of seeds and animals, wearing two kinds of fabric, and eating meat with blood. Siker makes the argument that these and several other prohibitions may stem from the Israelites’ need to distance themselves from common practices (like prostitution and child sacrifice) that were related to worship of other gods by past inhabitants of the land.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Furnish. 59

⁴¹ Farley. 274

⁴² Furnish. 61

⁴³ Ratzinger. Section 6

⁴⁴ Siker. 184

This section, Leviticus 17-26, gives guidelines that would lead to ritual purity, which was key to being part of the community of God's chosen. To be distinct and ritually pure meant that Israelite's were to act differently from those cultures that surrounded them. One key facet was the prohibition of "mixing of kinds that God from the beginning, ordained to be separate."⁴⁵ This type of reasoning is also seen in the Priestly account of the creation story where God, in a very neat and orderly fashion, created all things on separate days, keeping them distinct and apart. This characteristic of the Holiness Code is meant to impress the importance of the extended family, which is why incestuous relationships and male same-sex intercourse were prohibited.⁴⁶ The prohibition is not concerned with moral impurity, as such, but with ritual/physical impurity, which had very serious ramifications if not followed.

According to Lisa Sowle Cahill, the "Hebrews were to avoid the abominable customs of the pagan nations."⁴⁷ Similar to how Jazz aficionados avoid Kenny G. The word *abomination* is equal to something being taboo or unacceptable for God's chosen. The word then is a term regarding identity (ritual purity) rather than a term indicating a negative moral judgment.⁴⁸ Understanding Leviticus through this lens reveals two pieces of evidence that provide for a deeper, more appropriate interpretation. Since these prohibitions are focused on ritual purity, they do not mention any sort of moral implications for the actions. There is no mention of the specific context of the act, no mention of whether or not it was consensual, if it involved the act of pederasty, or if the persons were two adults living in a committed and loving relationship.⁴⁹ It is a blanket statement that makes both parties culpable, even if one were a rape victim, which seems woefully irresponsible. Furthermore, there is no mention of women lying with women,

⁴⁵ Furnish. 61

⁴⁶ Ibid.61

⁴⁷ Lisa Sowle Cahill. *Moral Methodology: A Case Study*. Chicago Studies. 19. 1980. 171-187

⁴⁸ Furnish. 62

⁴⁹ Ibid. 62

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only men lying with men. This shows the overtly patriarchal context of the prohibition. For a male to penetrate another male violates the sexual and gender roles of the society. The penetrated lowers himself to the status of women, submitting himself as only a female should submit; meanwhile the penetrator dishonors himself because he dominates another man.⁵⁰

Final Thoughts on the Old Testament “Texts of Terror”

In reading these Old Testament texts, it is imperative that context, language, history, and form be thoroughly examined in order to render a responsible exegesis. To read these passages out of context, as history has shown, often leads to misreadings and misapplications.⁵¹ Based on the evidence I have presented in this section, I argue that Ratzinger’s use of these Old Testament texts to support his position against homosexual inclusivity is unfounded and irresponsible. As responsible members of the Catholic community, we are called to be followers of Christ. In mirroring Christ’s earthly ministry, it is innate within our call that we be inclusive of all persons looking to take part in the community of Christ’s followers.

Ritual purity laws of old, like Ratzinger’s view on homosexuality today, enslave both those included in the faith community and those left out. This Old Testament dialogical analysis liberates us from ritual purity practices that no longer function the same way they did when they were written. Moreover, it liberates us from Ratzinger’s use of it to support his own archaic view of homosexuality and the homosexual person. Heeding the message derived from the prior analysis, we, as Catholics, are liberated from the shackles that make us slaves to fear and unwillingness to love a community that desires to be in accord with whom Christ was and continues to be in the lives of his followers. The next step in liberating ourselves in order to love

⁵⁰ Ibid. 62

⁵¹ Siker.184

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as Christ did, we must engage the Apostle Paul and “Text of Terror” found within his letters to the early Christian communities.

Part 2

In part One, I explored the Old Testament texts that have been employed by Ratzinger in order to provide proof for his stance on the treatment of the homosexual person and issues of inclusivity. I expanded on the problems with the anachronistic language of the document and its misuse with regard to exegesis of foundational Old Testament texts that have proved problematic for the homosexual community. This section will complete the exegesis of these “Texts of Terror” by focusing solely on the writings of Paul, for it is in Paul’s letters that the Church finds its New Testament support against full inclusion of the homosexual person.

According to Furnish, “Several of the scriptural passages that people cite as the most definitive for this topic are found in the letters of Paul.”⁵² In attempting to make this thesis as pragmatic and useful as possible, I will present Paul’s letters and Ratzinger’s position in a parable/dialogue in order to present a dialogue that is both engaging and informative. In presenting the exegesis in this form, I will expand on the problems within current normative heterosexist interpretations of Paul’s letters, especially those Ratzinger utilizes in his document.

Having spent the prior chapter analyzing the Old Testament and its affect on the Ratzinger’s position on homosexual inclusivity, this section will probe the question, “What would Paul say to Ratzinger about homosexuality?” The danger in posing this question is in having the pair talk past each other, since each represents vastly different social, economic, political and religious contexts. In order to provide a space where they would be able to talk with each other while not compromising their backgrounds, I have placed them in a dream where a

⁵² Furnish. 55

dialogue between them takes place. In the parable, I will highlight the problems that occur when different contexts interact. Anachronistic language, accepted cultural norms, thoughts on what constitutes natural law, and social constructs all play a pivotal role in placing the two figures in dialogue. Each will be discussed in order to understand the problems with Ratzinger's interpretation of Paul's texts.

This dialogue will give an insight into alternative ways of interpreting Paul so that it may shed light on the deficiencies in using his letters as support for excluding homosexual persons from the Church. A brief explanation of Paul's influences will act as the prologue to the story.

What influenced Paul?

The dialogue includes several allusions to Paul's context and how this could have shaped his view of homoeroticism. This section will explicate the dialogue in order to provide a more vivid picture of the overall argument. How was Paul influenced by his context? First and foremost, he was a Jew expecting the return of Jesus. He was, thus, well versed in and shaped by his Jewish heritage. Moreover, from his letters it is apparent that he was affected by his Greco-Roman context.⁵³ His writings, which contain traces of the primary stages of Greco-Roman education,⁵⁴ coupled with his use of conventional rhetorical style of the time,⁵⁵ it is apparent that Paul was influenced if not formally, at least informally by the world around him. This would also include his view on sexuality and types of homoeroticism.

⁵³ Hellenization is the process by which Greek culture, language, ideas, education, philosophy, religion, politics, and values were spread throughout a conquered region. Michael. J Gorman. *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Grand Rapids, MI. 2004. 2.

⁵⁴ J. Paul Sampley. *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Trinity Press International. 2003. 208

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 151

Greco-Roman medical handbooks, art, and contemporary literature give an insight into how the culture conceptualized sexual activity.⁵⁶ Physicians and philosophers alike had varying opinions on the use and role of sexual intercourse. Some believed that abstinence was ideal since an “excess of sexual activity...produces physical and spiritual weakness.”⁵⁷ Others felt that sex was good but must be limited by satisfaction, comparing the act of sex to eating and being satiated so as not to indulge in excess.⁵⁸ Among the Greeks, much of the debate was not about the object of sexual desire (like it is today), but rather the functional use of sexual desire. Greco-Roman discussions on household management advise the male householder on the “use” of his possessions, including the “use” of his wife.⁵⁹

The act of comparing the natural desire for food and the natural sexual desire was a common practice in Hellenistic philosophy.⁶⁰ Natural sexual activity was to be regulated in the same manner as the intake of food. What is natural is to eat until the person is satiated; anything outside of this realm is looked at as unnatural. According to David L. Balch, this view of sexuality is present in Paul’s writings, especially Romans 1:24-27, where Paul discusses the “natural use” and “unnatural use” of sexual desire.⁶¹ Paul’s use of natural and unnatural then is a product of Hellenistic thought which exhorted that the use of sexual activity was to be regulated the same way a “wise person with a full stomach limits eating.”⁶²

Much of the problem of placing Paul and Ratzinger in dialogue is in how each defines what is natural. In 1 Corinthians 11:14-15, Paul teaches that “flowing locks” on women are

⁵⁶ Ibid. 266

⁵⁷ Ibid. 267

⁵⁸ Ibid. 268

⁵⁹ Ibid. 268

⁶⁰ Ibid. 275

⁶¹ Ibid. 277

⁶² Ibid. 277

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natural while being unnatural for men.⁶³ After all, for Paul long hair was a mark of being soft or effeminate, which is a characteristic of women but not the proper way for men to act.⁶⁴ For Paul, natural “expresses a fundamental cultural rule or a conventional, proper, or inborn character or appearance or the true being of a person or a thing,” while the unnatural expressed whatever was not conventional per cultural expectations.⁶⁵ This is contrast to today’s definition of natural, which expresses the genetic and biological rather than the conventional.⁶⁶ Ratzinger, writing in the 1980’s, would have subscribed to the latter. Here in lies the problem that will be depicted in the dialogue.

Paul’s view of homoeroticism was shaped by many factors, among those where prevailing Hellenistic thoughts on sexuality and what was considered “natural.” Patriarchy was part of both his Jewish heritage and his Greco-Roman context. Common practices that relate specifically to Paul’s view on homoeroticism were: the inequality between men and women and slavery. This inequality between women and men could be seen in how the Greeks conceptualized the ideal form of friendship, which was manifested between two equals. In this context, it would be between two men.⁶⁷ Since women were subordinate they did not fulfill the criteria of what was ideal. The effects of this inequality were also visible in the prevailing perception of beauty. While the female form was the model of beauty, young male bodies were often seen as the ideal.⁶⁸ As a consequence, marriages to women functioned mostly as a means of

⁶³ Martti Nissinen. *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective*. Minneapolis, MN. Fortress Press. 2004.105

⁶⁴ Sampley.276

⁶⁵ Nissinen.105

⁶⁶ Nissinen.105

⁶⁷ Furnish. 69

⁶⁸ Ibid.

producing children who would later care for the aging parents, extend the bloodline, and provide for lawful transmittal of family property to the future generations.⁶⁹

In this patriarchal culture, several forms of sexual exploitation existed. Slavery took on many forms, and oftentimes slaves were sexually exploited by their masters.⁷⁰ In a similar fashion was the practice of pederasty. This was a practice that involved an adult male showering his attentions on younger boys.⁷¹ This was an accepted part of the culture in varying degrees among both Greek and Romans, but like slavery, the practice led to sexual exploitation of the young boys. The boys could be victims of abuse and the practice could also lead to the selling of sexual favors by the young boys to the older men.⁷²

Furnish argues that the aforementioned form of homoeroticism, being the kind Paul would have heard about, would have been the kind he was most aware of and was alluding to in his letters.⁷³ With this in mind, Paul could have viewed this practice of pederasty as being akin to the problems found in issues of prostitution and divorce. Paul's point of contention would have been with how the practices of slavery, pederasty, prostitution, and divorce all exploited groups of people by creating dominant power relationship.⁷⁴

My parable attempts to present a Paul, who is a product of his Greco-Roman context and his Jewish background. I will highlight the contextual differences between Paul and Ratzinger by focusing on how each defines (1) Scripture and (2) what is natural. Like the dialogue will show, Paul would obviously not have a grasp of how today's context defines homosexual

⁶⁹ Ibid. 33

⁷⁰ Gorman. 7

⁷¹ Furnish. 69

⁷² Ibid. 70

⁷³ Ibid. 70

⁷⁴ Lisa Sowle Cahill. *Sex, Gender, & Christian Ethics*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 155

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relationships.⁷⁵ His definition of Scripture did not involve the New Testament, which means that he relied solely on the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures) to inform his views and his faith. According to Furnish, what Paul says about “homoerotic conduct—which is very little, can be best understood when we are aware of what he would have read in his Bible on this subject, of the forms that homoeroticism took in his own day, and of why it was condemned by many of his contemporaries, both Jewish and Pagan.”⁷⁶ In support of this view, Lisa Sowle Cahill asserts that Paul’s condemnations of homoeroticism were “common social assumptions, especially among Jews, about ‘natural’ behavior.”⁷⁷

With these factors in mind, the dialogue will take sections from “The Pastoral Care for the Homosexual Person,” where Paul’s letters are referenced, and place them in dialogue with the time-travelling Paul to posit how he would actually react to the Ratzinger’s inquiries on homosexual inclusivity in the Church. Embedded within the dialogue is the exegesis of Paul’s letters, posed as his responses to these questions. This will serve the purpose of the thesis by highlighting the shortcomings of Ratzinger’s arguments in using Paul as support for his stance on homosexual inclusivity in the Catholic Church.

Joseph and the Rainbow Colored Dream Coat

Just as Joseph in Genesis 40 interpreted dreams and Joseph in Matthew 2:13 was led by an angel of God through dreams, so to this dialogue involves another Joseph in a dream in 2014.

...and as Joseph dreamed that he was walking into bar with his Rabbi friend, he was suddenly stopped outside by Paul and Paul said, “Excuse me sir, would you happen to know the way to Corinth? I need to get there soon. People are getting all mixed up about issues about

⁷⁵ The term and its etymology were defined in Part 1.

⁷⁶ Furnish. 77

⁷⁷ Cahill. *Sex, Gender, & Christian Ethics*. 157

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sexual asceticism, some guy marrying his stepmother, and what not and, if I'm correct (and believe you me, I know I am), I don't have much time since Jesus, the end of time, and the Big Man upstairs should be arriving soon.... I think next Tuesday." Joseph, perturbed and slightly annoyed responded, "Sorry pal, can't help you there. But, if you "Google" it, you should be good to go."

As Paul stood puzzled about what "Google" was Joseph suddenly realized the opportunity that had been given to him. Gathering himself and his thoughts, Joseph asked, "Paul, have you got a second?" Paul replied, "Well ... one second, but that's it. I still have to figure out how I "Google" something." Joseph began, "So, Paul, I need some help here. How should the church deal with... homosexuals?" Paul, now perturbed about what Joseph was asking him, took a seat on the floor and replied, "Ok, first question: What on God's green, quickly dying, very temporal, earth is a HOMOSEXUAL?" Joseph, astounded that Paul did not know what he was referring to, replied "You mean, you don't know what a HOMOSEXUAL is? Have you ever seen the television show "Will and Grace"? The musical "Rent"? Come on, HO-MO-SEXUAL? You have to know homosexuals, you wrote about them!"

Joseph pulled out his phone and looked up the definition and handed the phone for Paul to read. "I see it here on Wikipedia. It says that the term *homosexual* was first used in the mid- to late- 800's by a Hungarian-German physician named Karoly M. Benkert in a letter he wrote to a friend of his."⁷⁸ He continued, "Yep, it also says that the word first appeared in an English bible in 1946."⁷⁹ Quick question, the Bible is still made up of the same books right? The Septuagint, the good ole' book of stories telling the plights and journey of the Jewish people?"

⁷⁸ Furnish. 57

⁷⁹ Furnish.57

Joseph responded, “Whoa *der Herr* dude! The word was first used just recently? Then what was all that hoopla about in your letters? And, no, the Bible has another testament called The New Testament, and your writings are part of it.” Paul surprised and blushing, “Wow, you all actually read my letters?” Joseph responded, “Yea, Yea, Yea we do. Anyway, back to this whole thing. Explain some things for me, if you would. You wrote to the Corinthian community once and said,” clearing his throat, “Do you not know that the unjust will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor boy prostitutes nor sodomites nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor robbers will inherit the Kingdom of God.”⁸⁰

Paul, still feeling overly proud of his accomplishment, said, “Where in there does it say anything about *homosexuals*? Oh, you might be thinking about that whole ‘boy prostitutes nor sodomites’ thing. Let me explain. Before this section, I had written about some weirdo having relations with his stepmother and I wanted to send a message that this guy, and those who condoned and practiced sexual immorality, would not get into the Kingdom. So, to drive the point home to my kids, I used a list of things that are commonly associated with Gentile idolaters. This list is made up of common vices used by others in my time. Other vices include but are not limited to wickedness, greed, malice, envy, murder, rivalry, treachery, spite, and gossiping.⁸¹ In my letter to the Corinthians, I warn against someone being associated with someone who is immoral, an idolater, a slanderer, a drunkard, or a robber.”⁸² Joseph responded, “So, is it right for men to have sex with other men?” Paul replied, “Well, it is not right or natural because this action like other unnatural acts results in idolatry. This was always my greatest concern when I wrote to my communities. It’s as if a man grew out his hair long like a women,

⁸⁰ 1 Corinthians 6-10

⁸¹ Romans 1:29-31

⁸² 1 Corinthians 5:10-11

it's a sign of something unnatural, not conventional.” Joseph became elated, as it seemed that Paul would solidify his own writings on the topic. Paul continued, “In my time, if a man chose to demean himself by becoming “effeminate” and passive like a woman, in any way, it would be said that he was acting unnaturally.”⁸³ Ratzinger responded, “You mean your concern was not procreation and complementarity of the sexes?” Paul answered, “Procreation in a world that was or is going to end soon is not really any of my concern. Jesus is coming soon, I wanted to make sure that everyone was focused on this and not on inordinate desires.⁸⁴ Don't get me wrong, sex is not ‘inherently evil’⁸⁵ but desires like adultery,⁸⁶ incest⁸⁷ and having sex with a prostitute⁸⁸ are to be avoided.”

Paul then expanded, “What I was talking about was pederasty and male prostitution. What I was talking about are men who would normally, naturally, have sexual intercourse with women, but who took part in pederasty and male prostitution.⁸⁹ This exploited young boys by making them servants to older men whereby they would be forced to respond all of the erotic demands of these men and at times be victims’ of sexual abuse.⁹⁰ Male prostitution is exploitative because the body represents the whole self and the whole self belongs to the Lord.⁹¹ When someone buys sexual favors, that relationship is violated since the person has essentially made a transaction that gives the whole self, for money, to an uncontrolled desire.⁹² Exploitation is a sign of idolatry and those who partake in it will not be part of the Kingdom.”

⁸³ Farley. 275-276

⁸⁴ Sampley.278

⁸⁵ Furnish. 32

⁸⁶ Romans 13:9

⁸⁷ 1 Corinthians 5:2,5

⁸⁸ 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

⁸⁹ Siker. 185

⁹⁰ Furnish.70

⁹¹ Ibid. 31

⁹² Ibid.

Paul continued, “I was trying to differentiate between believers and non-believers. People who were believers would be called not to take part in anything that was bad, like exploiting another person. What better way than to use a list that people were already well aware of? I can put all sorts of stuff in there. Plus, every other philosopher had similar lists to mine. I had to show my vast knowledge, since I’m kind of a big deal. Also, my lists, like all the others, come from the same set of accepted ethical traditions.”⁹³ Joseph replied, “Ok, so that is really confusing. Thanks for not really being definitive. What about your passage in your letter to the Romans, where you talk about women exchanging natural intercourse for unnatural, and men doing the same? What then, your saintliness?”

Paul said, “ First off, this is definitely not the most important section of this letter. The good stuff comes much later. What I wrote to the Romans is basically the same thing. Any time some guy exploited another guy in either pederasty or male prostitution, it showed what idolatrous practices can lead to and we all know that anytime you practice idolatry, you essentially reject the big G-O-D.”⁹⁴ Joseph said, “So, your issues are with exploitation and not homosexuality?” and Paul said, “Well, yeah! We didn’t even know the word *homosexual* and all I was saying was that people who didn’t treat others as equals would not get in good with Jesus. I wrote something to the Galatians once, it goes something like this, ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is neither male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’⁹⁵ In Christ every one is equal, we are all a new family and this is more important than structures of the world. So, anyone who is part of this new family should not take part in pederasty or male prostitution because it demeans both parties.”

⁹³ Furnish. 82

⁹⁴ Siker. 185

⁹⁵ Galatians 3:28-29

Joseph replied, “But to choose someone of the same sex for one’s sexual activity is to annul the rich symbolism and meaning, not to mention the goals of the Creator’s sexual design. It is not a complementary union, able to transmit life; and so it thwarts the call to a life of self-giving, which the Gospel says is the essence of Christian living.”⁹⁶ Paul replied, “Well, I didn’t really write about ‘the goals of the Creators sexual design’, because it didn’t matter since the end was... uh ... is near. My critique of pederasty and male prostitution has more to do with some of the more accepted practices of my context. Check this out. My main concern is that whatever desire led a man, who would normally have relations with women, to seek out those forms of inordinate sexual expression is actually breaking the tenth commandment, because the dude would be expressing excessive passion, covetousness, and that is a big, NO-NO!”⁹⁷ Paul continued, “ And not that this really matters too much, but I was a man of my time and I was in line with the culture. All this is to say that in Greco-Roman times, this whole ‘excessive passion’ thing was more of a feminine thing. For man to act like a woman would be to say that he was soft and did not have control over himself, which meant that the man would lose his honor.”⁹⁸ When this happens, the community begins to crumble, and the love that each person should have for their neighbor is lost and that whole “no Jew or Greek” thing is thrown out the window. When that love is lost, people exploit and take advantage of their neighbors, and the community suffers.”

Then Paul asked, “Are people who are homosexual involved in relationships that go in line with what I said to the Corinthians about equality?”⁹⁹ Joseph replied, “Well, yes, I suppose.” Paul replied, “Then, I guess if I had to say something on this specific homosexual issue, I would

⁹⁶ Ratzinger. #7

⁹⁷ Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache. *The Queer Bible Commentary*. London, England: SCM Press, 2006. Loc 16198 (Kindle version)

⁹⁸ Guest. Loc 16214 (Kindle version)

⁹⁹ Siker. 185. Reference to 1 Cor. 7

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say that if no one is exploiting and instrumentalizing anyone, then I ... whoops. I gotta go. See you in another dream.” Joseph crying out in desperation, “ No, I’m not done, you still weren’t very clear, NOOOOOOO!”

Clarity?

Having taken key texts in Paul and considering his background and intent (which we can only hypothesize based on other information), the dialogue shows that there does not seem to be any discernable position for or against homosexuality as defined by today’s context. Farley highlights this point in stating that the New Testament, like the Hebrew Bible, is not helpful in the determining the matter of homosexuality since it does not contain any clear systematic code of sexual ethics.¹⁰⁰ As we saw in the dialogue, when Paul mentions same-sex acts, he groups the acts with other vices that were meant to contrast the way followers of Christ were to act. Cahill views this as Paul appealing to his audience and being consistent with other philosophers of his time and their own stock list of vices.¹⁰¹ In addition she states that, “The evil of homosexuality did not rest only on the fact that it permitted the exploitation of some categories of individuals by others. The practice of homosexuality rested on the institutionalization of social control through the family, including misogynist attitudes towards sex and marriage.”¹⁰² Cahill references two points that were pivotal in the dialogue: different forms of exploitation and the patriarchal structure of society expressed through the language of what was conventional or natural in the context.

In Paul, as in the Old Testament writings, interpretations always confront problems of language and the ambiguity of key words. According to Farley, this adds to the problem of

¹⁰⁰ Farley. 274

¹⁰¹ Cahill. *Sex, Gender, & Christian Ethics*. 156

¹⁰² Ibid. 157

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rendering a helpful exegesis since there is a “disparity between the meaning of same-sex relationships” in Paul’s context versus our own context, which I highlighted when both Paul and Ratzinger defined what was natural in their own contexts.¹⁰³ At most, with regards to the use of Paul’s writings, we can conclude that Paul does not support or condemn homosexuality as defined in today’s context. To use his writings in support of excluding homosexuals from the Church is at best one of many interpretations that can be used within the greater ongoing dialogue between the Church and those in favor of homosexual inclusivity within Catholicism.

Having spent the last two sections defining language and engaging in exegesis of both Old and New Testament texts that are used in Ratzinger’s argument, the next section will look at the life and work of Jesus Christ as the catalyst for inclusivity. It is in the Jesus Christ of the Gospels, the Jesus Christ interpreted through the Queer experience by the voice of Patrick Cheng that my argument moves to the constructive. I assert that Jesus Christ’s experience as an outcast, as fully human and fully divine, as a man born of a virgin women, is the very reason why homosexuals should have a place within Catholicism. Jesus Christ shares in the experience of every human person, including the homosexual person

Part 3

Queering Christ

Having explored the Scriptural, linguistic, and contextual sources for Ratzinger’s position on the proper care of the homosexual person, this section constitutes an opportune time for taking stock of what we can conclude from the prior sections. I can safely say that while Scripture is important to understanding who we are as Catholics (and Christians), it does not explicitly give Catholics a framework that outlines what proper care of the homosexual person

¹⁰³ Farley. 274

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should resemble and certainly does not inform the Church on issues of homosexual inclusivity. The Old and New Testaments define same-sex acts based on the experience of that particular context, which is vastly different from today's context. Psychological, medical, and scientific advancements have provided for a new understanding about human sexuality and the experience of gender within a community. To ignore these insights into the human experience would be a disservice to the wealth of knowledge and wisdom found within Scripture. It is this holy text that beckons to be interpreted in a way that expands God's love for God's people throughout the world and across time.

If Scripture cannot explicitly inform us on issues of inclusivity of homosexual persons and what that would look like, then where do we turn? How do we know how to include homosexual persons in a Church that has long-standing traditions of exclusionist ideologies and practices against this community of believers? Should the Church include homosexual persons? (If you've been reading this then you know that my position is a resounding "yes"!) I argue that Jesus' life and works exemplified by all Gospel writers and interpreted by Patrick Cheng, constitute models for how we can know anything of inclusivity and proper care of this community of believers.

This section will focus on the work of Patrick Cheng, a gay theologian, ordained Episcopal priest, and attorney, whose book, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, has been a seminal influence on my ever growing and evolving theological stance on this issue. I will use Cheng's interpretation of Scripture and his theme of Jesus as "Radical Love" to provide an alternative approach to how Scripture can inform the issue. I will engage in a dialogue with Cheng's ideas in order to render an approach that might be both healing and a call to action. Through Cheng's hermeneutical lens, we are able to see a Jesus who takes part in the fullness of

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the Queer experience. Using Cheng's ideas I will utilize moments within the Gospels, where Jesus stood with the outcasts and was shown to be an outcast on the fringes of society. These moments will be used as paradigmatic in drawing parallels to the Queer experience. Jesus, like our lesbian, gay, and bisexual sisters and brothers, was an outcast. His experience is parallel to those homosexual persons who yearn to be part of the community of faith and who are turned away by the fear of the differences they bring. I contend that it is Jesus as God's "radical love" made flesh, who is the embodiment of the "odd". Jesus' very existence called to question cultural and societal structures by overturning expectations of purity and redefining the Law. Jesus' nature dissolves the boundaries between the human and divine. In engaging in dialogue with Cheng, I will present a Jesus who is the embodiment of what it means to be "queer."

What do you mean "Queer"?

The term "Queer", historically speaking, has negative connotations that coincide with meaning that something is strange, as in Robert Frost's poem "*Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*." In the poem, the traveler's horse is said to think that something about the trip is odd: "my little horse must think it queer, to stop without a farmhouse near."¹⁰⁴ Another more recent use for the word is as an "umbrella term that refers collectively to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, questioning, and other individuals who identify with non-normative sexualities and/or gender identities."¹⁰⁵ According to Cheng, the word also functions as positive self-labeling by all persons that oppose societal norms, especially with regards to sexuality and gender.¹⁰⁶

Moreover, Cheng states that queering something means to disrupt the status quo, to flip things

¹⁰⁴ Edward Connery Lathem. *The Poetry of Robert Frost*. New York, NY. Henry Holt and Co. 1979. 224-225

¹⁰⁵ Patrick S. Cheng. *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer theology*. New York, NY: Church Publishing Inc. 2011. 4. From this point forward, I will use the term "Queer" instead of "homosexual" in order to maintain the integrity of the theme of the chapter.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 6

upside down and inside out.¹⁰⁷ Lastly, he argues that when something is “queer” it can erase boundaries and challenge the traditional ideas of sex and gender as they have been constructed by society.¹⁰⁸

Here, I will outline briefly the contours of the academic discipline of queer theory. The focus of queer theory is the belief that sexuality and gender are not, as commonly believed to be, scientifically proven to fit neatly into a binary system.¹⁰⁹ Queer theory argues that categories of sexuality (homosexual and heterosexual) and gender (male and female) are social constructs and are not to be taken as an absolute fact. Here, being queer means to cross boundaries both in terms of sexuality and gender. The queer person, Cheng asserts, “destabilizes that which is perceived as normal ... by erasing the boundaries between such polarities and thus symbolizing a difference, a divergence.”¹¹⁰

Using Cheng’s ideas coupled with my own, I will apply the ideas of queer theory to the person of Jesus Christ in order to show how Jesus, like the queer person today, destabilized the cultural norms of his context. I will call upon instances throughout his life and ministry, articulated in Cheng’s theology, that can be seen as odd or queer. These moments, while being odd, have become key components of the Catholic faith. However, time and over-familiarity have proven detrimental to the efficacy of the Gospel narrative. Jesus, a man who stood against the tides of oppression has now been exploited by the very system of oppression that he stood against. The modern Catholic has come to know a Jesus who has been stripped of his radical nature. His healings and words have been dulled through our repeated listenings. It would be helpful to set these stories in today’s context in order to have a better understanding of

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 8

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the impact of his actions. As an example, in order to understand the taboo nature of his work in curing a woman on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17), we need to remember all the particularities this story includes in order to show how countercultural this act was. Jesus acting as any other teacher would, was teaching at the synagogue on the Sabbath. Jesus stopped to heal a crippled woman. He touched her and suddenly she was able to stand. Two aspects of the story are lost to most modern readers. Jesus worked on a day when, according to the Law, no work was to be done. In doing this, he committed a transgressive act. Moreover, he did this in the midst of the most “holy” and educated men of the community.

I offer my own re-telling of this story to hopefully recapture the shocking nature of this moment in his ministry.

Jesus was teaching at the nearby Cathedral when he got a text from his hipster friend Peter about a young woman sitting outside the building. He walked out to see a young woman with her face in her hands hunched over, weeping. She had been there for what felt like several days, so Jesus, being a warm and loving man, walked over. He checked her Facebook status to see if she had posted anything that would help him in speaking with her. Luckily, she did.

According to her status she had been weeping from the crippling fear of coming out to her parents and embracing who she really was. Jesus saw her and called to her, “Child, you are set free of the fear of coming out.”

He laid his hands on her and at once she stood up, filled with the Spirit and ready to embrace her true self. She danced around and glorified God for making her who she was. But a leader from the Bible study group saw this and became angry. He yelled at Jesus, “God did not make women to be with other women, God made men to be with women. It’s in the Bible and the Bible is absolutely clear about this issue. Jesus Christ, Jesus!” Jesus replied, “Look, wouldn’t you want your own child to embrace who God made him or her to be? Why should this woman be any different? This child of God had been bound by self-loathing, self-denial, and the fear of being accepted for who she is. It is just that she, like everyone else, be freed from the bonds that oppress her and stifle the beauty that God made within her.”

Everyone cheered and posted the event on YOU TUBE and it received several thousand “likes” in minutes. The End.

Reading the story as written in Luke’s Gospel, we have ceased to listen to what Jesus is calling us to.

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In my re-telling, the woman is bound by a debilitating sense of self-denial and self-loathing based on queer sexuality. This has essentially crippled her growth in becoming who God desires her to be. Like the story in Luke's Gospel, this context queers the circumstance by placing the meeting within a holy place. In both renditions, Jesus challenges the status quo in order to enact God's liberating qualities. Like Exodus, God frees God's people so that they may be free to live, fully embracing that they are God's children. Jesus leads the young woman out of bondage so she may live freely. My re-telling, while being a little crude and playful, hopes to inject the taboo nature of the act back into the story, thereby reclaiming the intended unsettling response

We need to make the familiar unfamiliar in order to truly understand the Gospel narrative. Expanding on Cheng's interpretation, I hope to accomplish this by showing a Jesus whose works disrupted the religious, political, and cultural climate of his time, thereby queering the circumstances of life in early first century Palestine, making all those around him question the way things were. My intention is to draw connections between the various meanings of the term "queer" in order to connect Jesus' experience to the Queer experience, so that in accepting Jesus, Catholics also come to accept Queer community. I believe that it is through drawing parallels between Jesus and the Queer experience, that the Church will hear the call to include our Queer sisters and brothers.

Queer Expectations

In order to see how Jesus can inform the Church on how and why to include the Queer community, it is important to note exactly how queer the life of Jesus was. According to Chris Glasser, gay Christian author and activist, the experience of the enfleshed, radical love of God,

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Jesus partakes in the queer experience because of the circumstance of his birth. In his book, *Coming Out as Sacrament*, he states that “in the birth of Jesus, God comes out to us through the union with human flesh—that of a woman, marginalized by her gender, her youth, her poverty, her unmarried yet pregnant state.”¹¹¹ Connecting Glasser’s metaphor of “coming out” to the “queering” motif in this chapter, it is clear that the birth of Jesus is queer because it does not resemble the idealized, expected coming of the Messiah. Jesus also queered the expectation of his reign. He did not overthrow the Roman Empire with violence, rather he came as a man who challenged all people to live and love in a radically new way. Instead of making Israel a strong nation through war, he dissolved boundaries in order to bring about the Kingdom of God, where all are included.

Everything about the state of his conception to his birth was both odd, unexpected, in a word—queer. This familiar story, told every Christmas season, must be made unfamiliar in order to recapture the innate Queerness of the circumstances. To say that the Messiah would be born to an unmarried virgin woman is to “queer” the expectations of his birth. Mary was an unwed mother, an outcast by all accounts, whose very existence challenged the boundaries of the traditional, acceptable familial structures.¹¹²

It is this experience that allows Jesus to take part in the fullness and imperfection of the human experience in all its oddity. The story of Mary and her unborn child is all too familiar in this day and age: an unwed teenage mother trying to figure out what to do and how to care for the child that grew inside of her. Mary’s story is odd precisely because it is the story of every young unwed mother to be. The sheer humanity of the situation places Mary and Jesus within the queering that is the human experience.

¹¹¹ Chris Glasser. *Coming Out as Sacrament*. Louisville, Kentucky. Westminster John Knox Press. 1998.

¹¹² Cheng. 88

Every person can attest to the fact that life is odd, plans change, things break, people evolve, love triumphs and fails, friendships end, unexpected relationships sprout from the unlikeliest of circumstances, and this is true for all of humanity. Like the rest of us, Jesus takes part in all of the oddity that comprises the human existence. Jesus is a “queer” Messiah because he came to earth in the most unexpected, ritually impure, queer of circumstances. The enfleshed radical love of God came to the world just like the rest of humanity—messy, bloody, painfully, wet, soaked in bodily fluid and in doing so, sanctifies all of humanity. In her study of Tertullian’s polemic against Marcion, Charlotte Radler, explains that it is in the “grittiness and indignity of Mary’s motherhood and Christ’s birth” that provide the “wonderful conditions for Christ’s fleshly solidarity with humanity,” which is salvific.¹¹³ Expanding this idea, it is Christ’s humanity that completes the salvific nature of his being. In looking at the Gospel narrative through a different angle, under a different light, we can see that Jesus, like all of us, takes part of in the Queer life.

Divine and Human

Cheng states that Jesus, as the Word made flesh, is the physical embodiment of God’s radical love, God’s reaching out to be with humanity.¹¹⁴ This radical love, both human and divine, which crosses and dissolves the boundaries between the human and the divine, then becomes the “living embodiment of the dissolution of boundaries.”¹¹⁵ Following Cheng’s logic, Jesus becomes the “boundary crosser extraordinaire,” who can dissolve any boundaries.¹¹⁶ The life of Christ is the “queering” of boundaries created by society. Jesus is queer or odd and shares

¹¹³ Charlotte Radler. *The Dirty Physician: Necessary Dishonor and Fleshly Solidarity in Tertullian’s Writings*. *Vigiliae Christianae* 63:4 (2009): 345-368. 361

¹¹⁴ Cheng. 78

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

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in the experience of the Queer community because he too did not fall into any category composed by his culture. Jesus is bi-existential (I'm reaching here, but you get the point).

Expanding on this theme, a bi-existential Jesus (rolls off the tongue, doesn't it?) embraces both the fully human and fully divine aspects of his existence and experiences the journey of self-discovery as the Word made flesh. He laughed and cried like all humans. Unlike humans, he was transfigured and resurrected in to a glorified state. He experienced fear and yet chose to embrace the cup given to him. He loved his friends and felt the pain at being betrayed by those he held closest to his heart. It is Jesus' bi-existential nature that bridges the divide between the divine and the human. By doing so, we are all embraced by the humanity of the Word.

Humanity is "bi-something." Our world is divided up in categories in which that we all take part. At once we are both one thing and something else. The words of American poet Walt Whitman speak to this very bi-existentiality: "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes."¹¹⁷ Our existence is like Jesus' precisely because we too are multitudes, even if being fully divine is not one of those multitudes.

Similar to all persons Jesus, like the bi-sexual person, shares in the diversity of the human experience. Like the bi-sexual person, Jesus' bi-existentiality is difficult for humanity to understand fully. While not being bi-sexual (although some might argue the contrary), I argue that Jesus embraces and shares in the "bi-existentialism" of the bi-sexual.

¹¹⁷ Edwin Haviland Miller. *Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself": a mosaic of interpretations by Edwin Haviland Miller.* Iowa City, Iowa. University of Iowa Press. 43

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Pure and Impure

Throughout his ministry, Jesus crossed and dissolved the social boundaries of his time. The stories we learn as children about Jesus befriending tax-collectors, healing lepers, speaking on behalf of a woman about to be stoned, and miraculously healing all who were ill, are all accounts of how Jesus dissolved and queered the boundaries between the socially acceptable and unacceptable. When looking at all of these acts through the lens of the ritual purity laws it is apparent that Jesus “dissolved the ‘holy’ boundaries of clean and unclean, holy and profane, and saint and sinner.”¹¹⁸ Not only did Jesus dissolve the boundaries, he also placed himself alongside those who society deemed unworthy. His was an act of non-violent civil disobedience against the structures within Judaism and the Roman empire that oppressed entire communities of people

Bridging this idea to the current context, it is clear that in providing full inclusion to the Queer community, the Church frees Jesus so that we, as the body of Christ, may continue his work. To welcome our Queer sisters and brothers at the table of the Eucharist is an act that calls to question a system that oppresses them for who they are. Like the purity laws, “The Pastoral Care of the Homosexual Person,” serves as a document of condemnation and alienation, stripping the Queer persons of a faith community and of their personhood. The Church is called to blur the lines of pure and impure, just as Jesus in Matthew 13:24-30 tells the parable of the master who allows the weeds to grow with the wheat blurring the lines of harvest, we are called to include all people. It is Jesus who will separate the pure and impure, the wheat from the weeds. All are imperfect and all are in need of the love of God, whether straight, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender, or ... other. (I’m sure there is an “other”... just give it time.)

¹¹⁸ Cheng. 79

Sex and Gender

Jesus also queers the lines between sex and gender by embodying the agape love of God. Agape love can best be understood as a self-sacrificing love, a love based on service, which is usually constitutive of a woman's love and care for her family.¹¹⁹ Jesus queers these lines of gender precisely because he is male and yet embodies a stereotypically (essentialist) female type of self-giving and self-sacrificing expression of love. Jesus, as agape love, queers the cultural expectations of which gender should express self-sacrificing love. In most patriarchal cultures, women would be called to this expression of love.

The call to serve by sacrificing is a call meant for all people. Jesus, as God's agape and radical love, is the self-sacrificing love made flesh. If Jesus is truly the enfleshed, sacrificial love of God, then Jesus can be said to embody all persons regardless of gender or sex, since all are called to love in this way. Jesus, as God's agape love, calls both men and women to love, service, and self-sacrifice for the good of the other. Moreover, when looking at the Trinity, it is agape, infinite giving and receiving that is constitutive of the mutuality within the Trinity.¹²⁰ Jesus is the embodiment of that mutuality and carries that infinite, divine, self-giving and receiving within himself, and extends it to all of existence through his life, death, and resurrection. His very personhood is the essence of infinitely giving and receiving or being "actively receptive."¹²¹

Jesus dissolves gender boundaries because he is agape and radical love. "Actively receptive" he embodies the "perfection of both male and female," while being biologically

¹¹⁹ LaCugna. 279

¹²⁰ Elizabeth A. Johnson. *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*. The Continuum International Publishing Group. New York. 2008. 218

¹²¹ LaCugna. 280

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male.¹²² Cheng dovetails this idea and extends the boundary crossing of social constructs to how Jesus erases the line between homosexuality and heterosexuality.¹²³ Jesus, like the in-between category of bisexuality, unsettles the static binaries that divide. Jesus, like bisexuality, calls to question the social constructs that look to reduce persons to their sexual acts rather than their personhood. Jesus, like the bisexual person, refuses to fit neatly into patriarchy's oppressive and reductionist system by being open to intimate encounters with all persons. In his earthly ministry, Jesus touched and healed all who were ill, men and woman and was in communion with all, especially the "impure."

Jesus also dissolves the socially constructed boundaries of gender. Shawn Copeland states that "queering" the flesh of Christ functions in the same manner as re-imagining Christ as the black Christ.¹²⁴ Both serve to heal the oppressed and impoverished bodies of the marginalized communities. Jesus heals through embodying the entire scope of gender and race, transcending "every limit condition including ...gender, where gender means sex-role."¹²⁵ Issues of gender and sex are often ignored when speaking of the cosmic body of Christ. Somehow, the community of faith can comfortably say that all persons are made in the image of God, while ignoring the possibility that "all persons" includes those whose gender may not adhere to societal expectations. Gender must be highlighted in order to show how Jesus liberates through his omni-genderedness.

Saint Paul's writing that in Christ "there is no longer male and female" provides a reimagining of boundaries that Jesus, through his very being, erases in order for persons to be

¹²² Ibid. 282

¹²³ Cheng. 80

¹²⁴ Copeland. 78

¹²⁵ LaCugna. 282

who they are and not who society deems them to be.¹²⁶ Jesus, in his ministry, healed and shared meals with those deemed impure, which is to say that Jesus took part in socially taboo behavior. Jesus is taboo in the same way a transgender person is because he partakes in behavior that upsets the binary categories set by society.

The humanity of Jesus allows him to share in every person's experience. This is also true for the transgendered person. The similarities are glaring and assist in making a more vivid connection between the transgender experience and Jesus. Like transgendered persons who have been rejected by society, Jesus too was rejected by his society and like many transgendered persons who are pushed away from their homes and who suffer from violence, Jesus had nowhere to lay his head and was eventually unjustly killed for embracing who he was.¹²⁷ The experience of being pushed away, to suffer from some type of violence is something in which all of humanity shares, whether directly or indirectly. Jesus shares in the experience of every person including the transgendered person.

Stretching the boundaries, but still offering an interesting interpretation, is the work done in regards to Jesus' genetic makeup as a man born through a virgin birth. If Jesus was born from a virgin pregnancy, the birth would be what biologists call parthenogenetic which would result in Jesus having two X chromosomes, since the Y chromosome that would normally be contributed by the man, would have been absent. Based on the virgin birth, Jesus would technically, chromosomally, be female while being phenotypically male.¹²⁸ Based on this theory, then Jesus would most certainly embody the transgender and even the bi-sexual experience since he would actually be both male and female. The apex of humanity, the new Adam, the perfect human being created in the image of God, encompasses all possibilities within Him/Her-self.

¹²⁶ Cheng. 82

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 83

Finally, if we all make up the cosmic body of Christ then, I believe, it must be recognized that it is a body that is made of all sexualities, genders, ethnicities, and races. We are Christ's very own flesh, a flesh whose existence breaks open the binary categories that label and catalogue people in order to reduce them to a single, simple characteristic of their existence. This system is reductionistic and does not coincide with who Jesus was and continues to be. In Christ, all boundaries are dissolved. In Christ, all differences come together in the one Word made flesh. As Copeland states, "In Christ, "there is neither male nor female, neither gay/lesbian nor straight, neither heterosexual nor homosexual. We are all transformed in Christ: we are his very own flesh."¹²⁹

Where do we go from here?

The Queer person shares in the experience of Christ in many facets. Vice Versa, Christ shares in the experience of the Queer person. The Church must include the Queer community because in doing so, the Church includes another face of Christ himself embodied by the Queer person. The love Jesus showed to the sick, poor, and outcast in his earthly ministry is a love that extends through time to all persons who are marginalized. It is because Jesus shared in their experience that the Church is called to invite "in" all those who are "left out." That call is ever evolving and reaching out to the whole of creation and Jesus proclaims: "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Copeland. 82

¹³⁰ Matthew 19:14

Conclusion

In the prior section, I made connections between Jesus Christ and the Queer experience as it is manifested in its many forms. I presented a Jesus who takes part in the queering of society, sex, gender, and race by embodying the transgressive nature within him. Jesus crosses the boundaries between the divine and the human, the female and male, the pure and impure, living and the dead, and in doing so effectively dissolves the static binary systems that oppress. Jesus erases all boundaries by embodying all people in himself and declares freedom for all to be who God has made them to be.

I have shown the shortcomings of Ratzinger's argument in "The Care of the Homosexual Person" by taking implicitly axiomatic biblical interpretations of Old and New Testament texts and placed them in dialogue with the exegesis of others who have not accepted the overarching hetero-normative interpretation that has been detrimental to the Queer community. The first section involved defining the term "homosexual" and the problems with its anachronistic use with regard to interpreting passages from Genesis, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. The second section involved a close analysis of the letters of Paul by placing him in dialogue with Ratzinger's argument by way of a dream. The focus was on their contextual differences and on how each defined what was natural. These first two sections focused on the works of Victor Paul Furnish, M. Shawn Copeland, Margaret Farley, Nancy Wilson, Lisa Sowell Cahill, Jeffery Siker and J. Paul Sampley. The final section focused on the transgressive Jesus, drawing parallels between his experience and that of the Queer person to show that as followers of Christ, the Church is called to full inclusivity of the Queer community. This section focused on the work of Patrick Cheng in dialogue with my own thoughts and interpretations.

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I have presented alternative interpretations and have raised issues of language and context to, hopefully, posit other possible ways in which the passages could be read. I focused on the so-called “texts of terror,” so that they may become informative in shaping a new inclusivity within the Catholic Church. It is only in engaging these texts and re-defining them that they can become a catalyst for further inquiry and conversion of the Church.

Jesus is the reason that the Catholic Church must provide full inclusivity of the Queer community. Full inclusivity must be defined as inviting all Queer persons into the Church community recognizing that their love and expression of that love is a valid example of the many ways God’s radical love is expressed. This is to say that each person, regardless of gender or sex, is called to live a life that embodies who Jesus was and continues to be. This call is not only to be answered by heterosexuals, but by persons of all sexualities. By doing this, the Cosmic body of Christ is then truly comprised of all persons. No one is excluded. In doing so, the Catholic Church, as a more complete community, can move forward in healing a broken world.

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