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## **A Book Not To Be Embraced: A Critical Review Essay on Stacy Johnson's *A Time to Embrace***

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I wish that I could commend William Stacy Johnson's book, *A Time to Embrace*,<sup>1</sup> as a rigorous and fair assessment of Christianity and homosexuality from a homosexualist perspective.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, Johnson so regularly violates scholarly standards for honesty and accuracy in representing secondary literature, conceals from readers the most important counterarguments to his position, and shows gaps in logic, that I cannot embrace *A Time to Embrace*. Given space constraints, it is impossible to give a systematic presentation of the book's errors in fact or argumentation. I refer readers to my website for material that could not fit here [see links at the end of this article]; and for a rejoinder to Johnson's response that will appear shortly after Johnson's response is published (<http://www.robgagnon.net/ArticlesOnline.htm>).

Johnson's book is organized into an introduction and two major parts. The introduction consists of brief discussions of analogies to racism and misogyny (5-12), homosexual relationships in history (13-19), and socio-scientific study of homosexuality (20-36). In Part One: Religion, Johnson develops his scheme of seven theological viewpoints (39-108), where he discusses biblical issues in an organizationally choppy fashion, and then continues the same under the rubrics of companionship, commitment, and community (109-55). In a smaller Part Two Johnson treats law and politics. This essay focuses on Part One.

### **I. The Tone of Johnson's Book**

Johnson trumpets his tone: 'I try to positively engage people from across the spectrum' (3). Homosexualist 'advocates need to maintain a consistently affirming posture themselves' and not 'demonize those who disagree by accusing them of bigotry' (224; cf. 207).

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<sup>1</sup> *A Time to Embrace: Same-Gender Relationships in Religion, Law, and Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). A pedantic observation is that Johnson's book has the worst compiled 'Index of Names' I have seen in any scholarly work.

<sup>2</sup> By 'homosexualist' I mean an ideology that espouses the legitimacy of one or more forms of homosexual practice. I characterize the anti-homosexualist position as the complementarity position.

Despite such remarks, Johnson often charges those who disagree with bigotry, as well as hypocrisy, hatred, and irrationality. He compares opposition to homosexual practice with racism and sexism (7-12). Laws that prevent a special privileging of homosexual practice among other practitioners of immoral sexual behavior ‘are motivated only by irrational prejudice and animosity’ (168). To deny gay marriage or civil unions ‘is irrational’ (186), nothing more than ‘traditional prejudice’ and ‘a narrow brand of conservatism’ (214). ‘The truth is that there are no cogent legal arguments of a secular nature for refusing to grant some form of relationship rights to gay couples’ (189). Those who disagree with his views are ‘anti-gay polemicists’ (22, 125, 278 n. 30). Those who allow membership for homosexually active persons but not ordained office do so merely to ‘appease the prohibitionists’ (54). Efforts by the PCUSA majority to support a ‘byzantine’ two-sexes prerequisite for sexual relations in the *Book of Order* have been ‘harshly hypocritical’ (265-66 n. 26). ‘Prohibitionists’ take only a ‘textualist approach’ to the Bible rather than a ‘contextualist’ one. They do only a ‘strict’ and ‘literal’ reading of the ‘face of the text’ of Scripture and take no account of the historical and literary contexts (56, 129). ‘Rarely do prohibitionists acknowledge biblical or historical facts that would call into question their premises or conclusions.... They pay little attention to empirical or scientific study’ (52). ‘Non-affirming’ persons do not offer any ‘distinctively *theological*’ argument; rather, they merely offer ‘a selective quoting of Scripture’ (101).

Johnson has a right to make such statements—but only if he can prove his accusations. As it is, they are far more accurate of Johnson’s work in relation to affirming the homosexualist agenda. Johnson and others feel that when the kinds of attack that they direct at others are directed at them it is not in the spirit of ‘dialogue’ and use this as a pretense for excluding from ‘dialogue’ the persons who make them. Apparently the same rules do not apply to themselves.

To claim, as Johnson does, that all this amounts to a ‘positive engagement’ with opposing views is doubly abusive. If this is positive engagement, give me negative.

## II. Johnson’s Misrepresentation of Scholarly Work

The most serious charge that can be leveled at Johnson is that he repeatedly misrepresents the work of others or misleads readers into thinking things about the work of others that is inaccurate. In most of these instances it appears highly unlikely that Johnson was unaware of what he was doing. Space does not permit an exhaustive enumeration.

First, Johnson has worked hard to conceal from readers the fact that most of the best scholars who have studied the biblical texts on homosexual practice in their historical context disagree that the Bible condemns *only* exploitative forms of homosexual practice such as pederasty, prostitution, or sex with slaves (what I call the exploitation argument). Revealing this fact would have devastated the credibility of his exploitation argument, given that Johnson is not a specialist in biblical studies or the Greco-Roman world. Yet this would have been better than risking his scholarly integrity. Two of many examples suffice to make the point.

Johnson cites Louis Crompton’s 500-page *Homosexuality and Civilization* as ‘the single best book-length introduction to the subject’ of how ‘same-gender relationships

have meant very different things ... in divergent times, places, and social contexts' (12, 252 n. 46). Johnson makes this the key pillar of his exploitation argument. Yet Johnson neglects to tell readers that Crompton comes to a radically different conclusion:

According to [one] interpretation, Paul's words were not directed at "bona fide" homosexuals in committed relationships. But such a reading, however well-intentioned, seems strained and unhistorical. Nowhere does Paul or any other Jewish writer of this period imply the least acceptance of same-sex relations under any circumstance. The idea that homosexuals might be redeemed by mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any other Jew or early Christian.<sup>3</sup>

Johnson puts the Crompton book at the top of a list of 'must-reads' so he must have read these remarks. His unwillingness to disclose them contrasts sharply with his zeal to cite an evangelical preacher, John Stott, who says that 'the biblical prohibitions by themselves say nothing about [committed same-sex] partnerships' (50, 264 n. 17).

Similarly, Johnson calls Bernadette Brooten's *Love Between Women* 'the definitive work on female homoeroticism in antiquity' (271 n. 35).<sup>4</sup> He cites her favorably for his own treatment of the meaning of 'nature' (82, 268 n. 11). Yet Johnson fails to tell readers of Brooten's rejection of an exploitation argument. Brooten, a NT scholar and self-identified lesbian, states: 'The sources on female homoeroticism' in antiquity indicate that the early church 'opposed homosexual behavior per se,' 'regardless of age' and 'mutuality.' Johnson does mention that Brooten interprets Rom 1:26 as a reference to lesbianism but Johnson, who declares this to be only a 'possible' reading (90), keeps readers ignorant of the overwhelming case for it.<sup>5</sup> Such a referent would devastate Johnson's exploitation argument since lesbianism in antiquity did not normally emulate male exploitative practices. Johnson also ignores what Brooten and I have to say about Greco-Roman orientation theories concerning *tribades* (the active female partners in a female homosexual bond) and *kinaidoi* (the passive male partners in a male homosexual bond)<sup>6</sup> and claims falsely that the New Testament writers could not even have 'anticipate[d] the category of sexual orientation' (64).

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<sup>3</sup> *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 114.

<sup>4</sup> Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 11, 253 n. 106, 244, 257, 361.

<sup>5</sup> This includes the facts that: (1) the 'likewise also' of Rom 1:27 parallels 'the natural use of the female' in 1:27 with 'the natural use [i.e. of the male]' in 1:26; (2) lesbian intercourse is the form of female intercourse most commonly labeled 'contrary to nature' in antiquity; (3) male homosexual practice is far more often paired with female homosexual practice than any other female behavior; (4) lesbian intercourse is elsewhere used in a manner similar to Rom 1:26, i.e. as a clinching argument against male homosexual practice; (5) it would be historically absurd to assume that Paul would take a different stance on lesbianism than that which prevailed nearly universally among men in the ancient world; and (6) lesbianism is the dominant interpretation of Rom 1:26 in the patristic period.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 149, 156-59; Gagnon, 'Does the Bible Regard Same-Sex Intercourse as Intrinsically Sinful?' in *Christian Sexuality: Normative and Pastoral Principles* (ed. R. E. Saltzman; Minneapolis: Kirk House, 2003), 106-55 (online notes at <http://robgagnon.net/articles/homoPowellRespNotes.pdf>), here pp. 141-46. See also the comment by classicist Thomas K. Hubbard: 'Homosexuality in [the early imperial age of Rome] may have ceased to be merely another practice of personal pleasure and began to be viewed as an essential and central category of personal identity, exclusive of and antithetical to heterosexual orientation' (*Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003], 386).

Second, Johnson misrepresents John R. Clarke's *Roman Sex: 100 B.C. to A.D. 250*<sup>7</sup> when he says it confirms his exploitation argument (18, 255 n. 72). What Johnson doesn't tell readers is that Clarke's chapter on 'Gay Sex' (pp. 76-93) focuses almost exclusively on two pictorial representations that Clarke himself views as illustrating 'equal, reciprocal, male-to-male sex': the famous 'Warren Cup' (15-30 C.E.) and a lesser-known, large agate gemstone housed in Leiden (1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E.). The Leiden gemstone offers a particularly powerful image, showing a man anally penetrating another man, with the man on the bottom having a large erection and both men gazing directly into each other's eyes.

Third, Johnson misrepresents work done on Gregory of Nyssa when he claims that two articles show that Gregory understood the implications of Gal 3:28c for eliminating any significance to gender complementarity, which for Johnson includes the allowance of homosexual relations. So, Johnson claims, 'the "it's-always-been-read-that-way" argument ... is not true' (152, 295 n. 115).<sup>8</sup> Yet both articles show that Gregory understood 'no male and female,' when applied to sexual behavior, as meaning abstinence from sexual relations, *not* the allowance of homosexual relations. So long as humans have sexually differentiated bodies and engage in sexual relations a male-female prerequisite remains binding.

Fourth, as regards my work Johnson follows a strategy of mostly ignoring and occasionally misrepresenting it. Johnson shows no awareness of the arguments in 80 percent or more of my first book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*,<sup>9</sup> or in virtually any of the hundreds of pages that I wrote afterward. This is especially stunning in view of the fact that he wrote a review of my first book in *Theology Today* that appeared a couple of months after his book came out.<sup>10</sup>

On the rare occasion when Johnson treats my work there is a tendency toward misrepresentation. For example:

(1) Johnson reduces my complementarity argument to 'the body parts fit' (115, 120, 275-76 nn. 14, 16; Review 390) even though I repeatedly state that complementarity is to be taken in a holistic sense involving not only anatomy but also physiology and psychology—the whole package of what it means to be male and what it means to be female.<sup>11</sup> He also claims that there is no evidence for the idea of anatomical complementarity in antiquity despite the fact that I provide just such evidence. As Hubbard rightly states, 'basic to the heterosexual position [in the first few centuries C.E.]

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<sup>7</sup> New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Verna E. F. Harrison, 'Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology,' *JTS* 41 (1990):441-71; Sarah Coakley, 'The Eschatological Body,' *Modern Theology* 16 (2000): 61-73.

<sup>9</sup> Nashville: Abingdon, 2001 (500 pgs.). Johnson ignores completely my treatment of the ancient Near Eastern background; the Sodom story and related texts such as the story of Ham and Noah, the story of the Levite at Gibeah, the Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic references to the *qedeshim* (cult figures that engaged in receptive male-male intercourse), and the back references to Sodom in Ezekiel, Jude, and 2 Peter; the witness of early Judaism; the witness of Jesus; and the witness of Paul in 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10. He omits most of my main arguments as regards the creation texts, the Levitical prohibitions, and Rom 1:24-27; the few arguments that he addresses he tends to distort or truncate (see below). He skips over nearly all of my 145-page chapter on 'The Hermeneutical Relevance of the Biblical Witness.'

<sup>10</sup> 63 (2006): 388, 390, 392 (hereafter: Review). *Theology Today* published this distorted piece five years after my book came out.

<sup>11</sup> *Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 139; cf. 459-60 and often.

is the characteristic Stoic appeal to the providence of Nature, which has matched and fitted the sexes to each other.’<sup>12</sup>

(2) Johnson claims that by ‘sleight of hand’ I ‘omit to tell the reader’ how *tô ‘ēbâ* (‘abomination’) is used outside the Levitical Holiness Code (285 n. 59). Yet I devote a full three pages to this in a section entitled ‘The Meaning of *tô ‘ēbâ*’ (117-20). Two of the texts that Johnson emphasizes (Gen 43:32-34; Exod 8:26) I mention only in passing because they report what *Egyptians*, not Israelites, considered to be ‘abominations.’

(3) Johnson states: ‘Gagnon gives us no persuasive reason why we should break with tradition and ordain women but at the same time genuflect to tradition in being anti-gay [read: anti-homosexualist]’ (294 n. 107). Johnson omits telling readers the main arguments that I raise briefly in my first book (443) and expand on elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> Simply put, affirmation of homosexual practice represents a radical break with Scripture whereas the ordination of women merely carries further a process already begun in Scripture. Already in the OT and especially in the NT there are a number of women-affirming texts. We see nothing like this kind of openness in Scripture’s stance toward homosexual practice; indeed, we see the opposite. Moreover, while OT and NT writers were generally *more* affirming of women than was the norm for the ancient Near East and Greco-Roman world, respectively, they were much *less* accommodating to homosexual practice. Finally, an attempt at equating sex or gender with a homosexual impulse confuses categories. Being a woman, unlike a homosexual impulse, is 100% congenitally determined and essentially immutable. Moreover, it is not a direct or primary desire for behavior that is incompatible with embodied structures and strongly prohibited in Scripture. Homosexual desire is. Scripture rightly views sex or gender as closer to the condition of ethnicity than to persistent sexual desires. As we shall see (sec. VI), a more appropriate analogy to affirming committed homosexual unions would be an argument to support committed adult incest or sexual bonds involving three or more persons.

(4) In his Review, Johnson makes explicit what in his book is implicit; namely, that ‘he [Gagnon] assumes that there is one monolithic thing called homosexuality, which is the same yesterday, today, and always’ (388, 390). Johnson implies, ridiculously, that I am unaware of the existence of pederasty or coercive sex with slaves in the ancient world.<sup>14</sup>

### **III. Johnson’s Main Argument (Exploitation-Hedonism) and His Lack of Firsthand Knowledge of Greco-Roman Primary Sources**

Johnson’s main thesis is that the

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<sup>12</sup> *Sourcebook*, 444. See further: *Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 257-59, 364-84; with new material, along with quotations from Craig Williams and William Schoedel, in my ‘A Comprehensive and Critical Review Essay of *Homosexuality, Science, and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture*, Part 2,’ *HBT* 25 (2003): 179-275, here 249-56 (also online: <http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homoBalchHBTReview2.pdf>).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 46 with online ‘Notes,’ 2-3 (<http://www.robagnon.net/2Views/HomoViaRespNotesRev.pdf>); ‘Why the Disagreement over the Biblical Witness on Homosexual Practice? A Response to Myers and Scanzoni,’ *What God Has Joined Together?’ Reformed Review* 59 (2005): 81-82, 93-94 (online: [http://www.westernsem.edu/files/westernsem/gagnon\\_autm05\\_0.pdf](http://www.westernsem.edu/files/westernsem/gagnon_autm05_0.pdf)).

<sup>14</sup> Contrast Johnson’s claim with what I have to say in *Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 414, 347-61.

biblical prohibitions [that refer to homosexual practice] were addressed specifically to hedonistic or exploitative forms of sexual conduct, such as prostitution or the sexual exploitation of slaves, in which mutuality and concern for the other were absent. These biblical passages are silent about mutually and exclusively committed same-gender love. (225 and often)

A favorite example of Johnson's is that of 'a Roman soldier exploiting his boy-slave sexually' (12, 49-50; Review 392). It never occurs to Johnson that Rom 1:27 refers to males 'inflamed with yearning for *one another*,' which stresses mutuality of affections rather than a coercive master-slave relationship. For Johnson's argument to be valid, one would have to suppose the historically absurd theory that, had two men or two women approached Paul and expressed their desire to be in a committed, egalitarian sexual relationship, Paul would have responded, 'Yes, I support that kind of sexual union.'

Although Johnson alleges that 'prohibitionists' and I do not understand the Greco-Roman milieu, it is Johnson who gives no indication that he has worked directly with the primary source material, let alone translated relevant texts. He hasn't even bothered to use Hubbard's convenient *Sourcebook*.

Johnson claims in his Review that my citations from Aristophanes' speech in Plato's *Symposium* (ca. 380 B.C.E.) and the speech of Callicratidas in the pseudo-Lucianic *Affairs of the Heart* (ca. 300 C.E.) are irrelevant because they are too distant from Paul's time and because 'both are satirical' and non-egalitarian (390).<sup>15</sup> The *Symposium*, however, was well known in the first century. Philo of Alexandria cites it but still dismisses *all* forms of homosexual practice as unnatural: 'Nearly the whole of Plato's *Symposium* is about love, not merely about men mad after [i.e. madly in love with] men—for *these desires pay tribute to the laws of nature*—but about men (mad) after males, differing from them only in age' (*Contemplative Life* 59).<sup>16</sup>

Johnson ignores my point that even if Aristophanes' speech were taken as satire it would still 'reflect or play off of the positive view of same-sex eroticism expressed by Phaedrus and Pausanias and current among some in antiquity.'<sup>17</sup> Aristophanes refers to men who are lovers of males as those 'who continue with one another throughout life. . . . desiring to join together and to be fused into a single entity with his beloved and to become one person from two' (192E). Pausanias, who was a lover of Agathon (a relationship that began when Agathon, now 31, was 18 years old), similarly emphasizes that lovers who love rightly 'are prepared to love in the expectation that they will be with them all their life and will share their lives in common,' 'as if having been fused into a single entity with' the soul of the beloved (181D, 183E). Consistent also with Aristophanes' image of exclusive homosexual desire as an inherent trait is this remark of Pausanias: Men who love males 'are not inclined by nature (*phusei*) toward marriage and the procreation of children, yet are compelled to do so by the law or custom (*nomos*)' with the result that two joined males 'live their lives out with one another unmarried' (192A-B; my translations). As for Callicratidas' speech, one may charge Callicratidas

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<sup>15</sup> *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 350-60.

<sup>16</sup> My translation. Philo's qualifying comment, 'differing from them only in age,' underscores that the age differential was a mitigating, not exacerbating, factor in condemning the bond. A sexual bond between two age-equal adult men would be more problematic, not less so, because adult males have outgrown the 'softness' of immature adolescence.

<sup>17</sup> *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 354.

(the defender of male-male love) with falling short of the philosophical ideal in his personal conduct but not with attempting to lampoon loving same-sex male relationships. Were it otherwise, Lycinus, the arbiter of the debate with Charicles (the defender of male-female love), would not have declared Callicratidas the winner (51).

The space constraints of this essay permit here only a few examples of loving homosexual relationships in the Greco-Roman world. In Plutarch's *Dialogue on Love* (late 1<sup>st</sup>- early 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E.) Protogenes argues that man-male love is superior, not because it is more hedonistic but because, instead of having 'as a net result the reaping of the fruits of pleasure (*hēdonēn*),' it 'comes through friendship to the end and goal of virtue' (750D; 4). Pisia infers that while 'it is doubtless fitting (for women acting) with discretion and moderation neither to love passionately nor to be loved passionately,' it is a different matter with a male beloved (752C; 6). Daphnaeus, defending the superiority of male-female love, concedes that homosexual relationships are not necessarily exploitative, for 'sexual intercourse that is contrary to nature with males does not do away with, nor damage, a lover's kindness [or: amorous goodwill]' (751C; 5). Yet, he declares, even when 'the (intercourse) that comes about from (the joining of) males' is done 'willingly,' it remains 'shameful' (*aschēmōn*) since males are, 'with softness (*malakia*) and effeminacy (*thēlutēs*), surrendering themselves, according to Plato, "to be mounted in the custom of four-footed animals" and to be sowed as if to produce children (*paidosporeisthai*), contrary to nature' (*para phusin*; 751D-E; 5; my translations).

Two second-century C.E. romances—Xenophon of Ephesus' *An Ephesian Tale* (3.2) and Achilles Tatius's *Leucippe and Clitophon* (1.7-8, 12-14, 33-34)—both include tragic love stories about similar-aged, male lovers. Relationships of a different sort but still attesting to commitment are reported in Rome by the epigrammatist Martial (ca. 40-104 C.E.; 1.24; 12.42) and by the satirist Juvenal (early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. C.E.; *Satire* 2): effeminate men who willingly commit themselves as 'brides' to another man. For example, Gracchus, 'a man renowned for his family background and his wealth,' became the 'bride' to a common cornet-player and signed semi-official documents (*Satire* 2.119, 125, 129).<sup>18</sup> Lucian of Samosata (mid-2<sup>nd</sup> c. C.E.) tells of two rich women who regard themselves as married, the masculine Megilla of Lesbos and her 'wife' Demonassa the Corinthian (*Dialogues of the Courtesans* 5). The astrologer Ptolemy of Alexandria (2<sup>nd</sup> c. C.E.) refers to manly women born under a certain constellation who are 'lustful for sexual relations contrary to nature' and take the active sexual role with women whom they sometimes call their 'lawful wives' (*Tetrabiblos* 3.14; §171-72). Several rabbinic texts forbid marriage of a man to a man; one referring to Egyptian practices even forbids marriage of a woman to a woman (*Sifra* on Lev 18:3).<sup>19</sup> Clement of Alexandria likewise referred to 'women ... contrary to nature ... marrying women' (*Paidagōgos* 3.3.21.3). These marriage texts presume that some in the ancient world are seeking a committed same-sex relationship.

Hubbard notes that Greco-Roman 'literature of the first century C.E. bears witness to an increasing polarization of attitudes toward homosexual activity, ranging from frank acknowledgment and public display of sexual indulgence on the part of leading Roman

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<sup>18</sup> Johnson might retort that these are not good examples because they do not illustrate a marriage between two masculine men. Yet Johnson's own support for the GLBT cause shows no particular alarm over very effeminate behavior by males.

<sup>19</sup> *Sifra* on Lev 18:3; *Genesis Rabbah* 26.6; *Leviticus Rabbah* 23.9; *b. Hullin* 92b. Cf. Brooten, *Love Between Women*, 65.

citizens to severe moral condemnation of *all* homosexual acts.<sup>20</sup> If even sectors of the ‘pagan’ world were beginning to develop absolute opposition to all forms of homosexual practice, what is the likelihood that any Jew or Christian would have made exceptions for committed homosexual unions, given the absolute opposition of Jewish Scriptures?

#### IV. Johnson on Genesis 1:27 and 2:18-24

Johnson argues that ‘male and female’ in Gen 1:27 refers *only* to the fact that ‘both male and female are created in God’s image,’ connoting ‘inclusivity and not sexuality per se’ (116, 277 n. 20). Johnson cites 38 other times in the OT where the phrase allegedly has only this inclusive sense. It turns out that nearly all of these either use the phrase “male *or* female” (אָדָם, ’ōd) <sup>21</sup> or don’t even use the words for “male” (זָכָר [zākār]) and “female” (נְקֵבָה [nēqēbā]) but instead distinct words referring to male slave(s) and/or female slave(s),<sup>22</sup> male goats and female goats,<sup>23</sup> or female donkeys and male donkeys.<sup>24</sup> A few of his references use the Hebrew words for male and female but with intervening prepositions with or without the conjunction “and.”<sup>25</sup>

The only verses that use the precise formula זָכָר וְנְקֵבָה (zākār ûnēqēbā): Gen 5:2 and 6:19; 7:3, 9, 16. The last four appear in the story of the Flood and refer to the animals going into the ark by twos, ‘male and female,’ whereas 5:2 introduces a genealogy from Adam to Noah’s children that fulfills the command in Gen 1:28 to ‘be fruitful and multiply’ (5:3-32; cf. 6:1). The reference to sexual pairing can scarcely be denied. In fact, Johnson unknowingly admits as much when he declares that Gal 3:28c alludes to Gen 1:27 and overturns ‘not just one’s status as male *or* female’ but ‘the pairing of male *and* female’ (150).

Johnson misreads things when he argues that ‘reducing “image of God” to sexuality’ is wrongheaded because animals too are characterized by sexual differentiation or gender complementarity (275 n. 16). It is not a question of reducing the ‘image of God’ to sexual differentiation but rather of recognizing that in Gen 1:27 *human sexual differentiation and pairing are uniquely integrated into God’s image*. This integration makes it possible for humans to enhance or to efface that image through their sexual behavior in a way that is not possible for animals. Also misguided is Johnson’s argument that connecting the ‘image of God’ with sexual differentiation leaves out single persons, including Jesus (115-16, 276 n. 16). It is legitimate to speak of the two sexes as complementary, and so incomplete, representations of God’s image *in the restricted sphere of sexuality* without

<sup>20</sup> *Sourcebook*, 383 (my emphasis).

<sup>21</sup> Lev 3:6; 12:7; Deut 4:16. Lev 3:1 uses an equivalent expression: ‘if his offering is a sacrifice of well-being and if he offers from the herd, whether a male or female (אָדָם־זָכָר אִם־נְקֵבָה) . . .’

<sup>22</sup> עֶבֶד (‘ebed) and/or שִׁפְחָה (šipkhā) or אָמָה (‘āmā): Gen 12:16; 20:14; 24:35; 30:43; 32:5; Exod 20:10; 21:20, 26, 27; 31:32; Lev 25:6, 44; Deut 5:14 (twice), 21; 12:12, 18; 16:11, 14; 28:68.

<sup>23</sup> תֵּיִשִׁים (tēyāšīm) and עִזִּים (‘izzīm): Gen 30:35; 32:14.

<sup>24</sup> אֲתֹנוֹת וַעֲרִים (ātōnōt wayārim): Gen 32:15.

<sup>25</sup> Lev 15:33: ‘this is the law *for* the male and *for* the female (לְזָכָר וְלְנְקֵבָה) who has a discharge’; Lev 27:5 (cf. vv. 6-7): ‘the valuation (or: fixed sum) shall be the male 20 shekels and *for* the female 10 shekels (וְלְנְקֵבָה) . . . (הַזָּכָר)’; Num 5:3: ‘*from* the male *to* a female (עַד־נְקֵבָה) you shall put outside the camp all unclean persons.’



denying the broader integrity of an individual's creation in God's image. Both Jesus and Paul viewed the single state as a non-moral deficit, not a sin (Matt 19:10-12; 1 Cor 7:7-8, 25-40). However, active entrance into a structurally incongruous union *is* a moral violation that assaults the image of God stamped on humans. The logic of a same-sex sexual bond is that each partner is only half his or her own sex, which unites to form a whole male or a whole female. Such a union dishonors the integrity and completeness of one's maleness, if male, or femaleness, if female.

Jesus obviously predicated his opposition to after-divorce remarriage and, by implication, polygyny on the 'twoness' or binary/dimorphic character of human sexuality (contra Johnson, 139). There is no other reason for Jesus to cite from Gen 1:27 just the clause 'male and female he made them.' Two and only two, Jesus insisted, become one flesh: 'so they are no longer two but one flesh' (Mark 10:8). That Jesus derived the number two from the God-ordained twoness of the sexes given at creation is evident from a similar move by the Essene community at Qumran. It rejected 'taking two wives in their lives' because 'the foundation of creation is "male and female he created them" [Gen 1:27]' and because 'those who entered (Noah's) ark went in two by two into the ark [Gen 7:9]' (CD 4.20-5.1).<sup>26</sup> For Jesus the twoness of the sexes in sexual pairing, 'male and female,' was prior to and foundational to any insistence that sexual bonds be limited to two persons.

Paul clearly had Gen 1:27 in view behind his main indictment of homosexual practice in Rom 1:24-27. There are eight points of correspondence, in a similar tripartite order, between Rom 1:23, 26-27 and Gen 1:26-27: *human, image, likeness; birds, cattle, reptiles; male, female.*

**Gen 1:26-27**

**Rom 1:23, 26-27**

***A. God's likeness and image in humans***

- |     |                               |                              |     |
|-----|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-----|
| (1) | human ( <i>anthrōpos</i> )    | likeness ( <i>homoiōma</i> ) | (3) |
| (2) | image ( <i>eikōn</i> )        | image ( <i>eikōn</i> )       | (2) |
| (3) | likeness ( <i>homoiōsis</i> ) | human ( <i>anthrōpos</i> )   | (1) |

***B. Dominion over the animal kingdom***

- |     |                             |                                 |     |
|-----|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-----|
| (4) | birds ( <i>peteina</i> )    | birds ( <i>peteina</i> )        | (4) |
| (5) | cattle ( <i>ktēne</i> )     | quadrupeds ( <i>tetrapoda</i> ) | (5) |
| (6) | reptiles ( <i>herpeta</i> ) | reptiles ( <i>herpeta</i> )     | (6) |

***C. Male-female differentiation***

- |     |                          |                             |     |
|-----|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|
| (7) | male ( <i>arsēn</i> )    | females ( <i>thēleiai</i> ) | (8) |
| (8) | female ( <i>thēlus</i> ) | males ( <i>arsenes</i> )    | (7) |

This intertextual echo back to Gen 1:26-27 is reinforced by the fact that the context emphasizes God's role as 'Creator' (1:25) and the knowledge about God and ourselves

<sup>26</sup> David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 61-63.

culled from observation of ‘nature’ (1:19-20, 26-27). What is the point of this echo? Idolatry and same-sex intercourse constitute an assault on the work of the Creator in nature. Those who suppress the truth about God transparent ‘since the creation of the world’ are more likely to suppress the truth about the complementarity of the sexes, male and female, transparent in nature. This echo also makes clear that Paul’s main problem with homosexual practice was not that it was typically exploitative or promiscuous, as Johnson claims, but that it was *a violation of God’s will for male-female pairing established in creation.*<sup>27</sup>

As regards Gen 2:18-24, Johnson argues that the ‘*ādām*’s exclamation at the creation of woman (2:23) ‘does not celebrate her otherness but her sameness’ (120): ‘This one at last is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh! To this one shall be given the name “woman” (אִשָּׁה, *iššā*) for from man (אִישׁ, *iš*) this one was taken.’

Johnson’s argument makes an either-or out of a both-and. The first half of Gen 2:23 does stress, in part, human sameness in contrast to the animals, among which God had not found ‘a helper as [the ‘*ādām*’s] counterpart.’ Yet Johnson ignores the repeated references in 2:21-23 to woman being formed by a ‘taking from’ ‘*ādām*. As a ‘counterpart’ or ‘complement’ to man (כַּנְגִדוֹ, *kənegdô*), woman is both similar as human (‘corresponding to him’) and different as a distinct sex extracted from him (‘opposite him’). There is also some basis for translating Hebrew אֵצֶל (*tsēlā*) as ‘side’ rather than ‘rib’<sup>28</sup> or at least as an indeterminate amount of bone and flesh on one of *ādām*’s sides, from which is formed man’s sacred side or complement, woman.<sup>29</sup> The principle of two sexes becoming one flesh is correlated with the picture of two sexes being formed from one flesh. It is not another man that is the missing part or sexual complement of a man but rather a woman, a point reflected in several early Jewish texts (Philo of Alexandria, *Allegorical Interpretation* 2.19-21 and *Creation* 152; 4 Macc 18:7; *Apocalypse of Moses* 29:9-10).

Johnson argues that ‘one flesh’ in Gen 2:24 has the asexual meaning ‘the same family’ since the formula ‘you are my bone and my flesh’ is ‘more about kinship than sexuality’ (Gen 29:14; et al.; 145-47). In response:

First, introducing a sexual dimension in some covenantal relationships violates the covenant. An obvious case in point is the very example that Johnson uses to validate homosexual unions, Ruth and Naomi. Had Ruth and Naomi engaged in sexual intercourse they would have committed a capital offense of incest between parent and daughter-in-law, irrespective of their loving commitment (Lev 18:15; 20:12). *Sexual* bonds have their own distinct set of requirements.

Second, context dictates meaning. When we use the comparable phrase ‘you are my flesh and blood,’ it means something different when spoken by a husband to his wife (a

<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Paul cites Gen 2:24c (‘... the two shall become one flesh’) in close proximity to his indictment of ‘men who lie with males’ in 1 Cor 6:9 (cf. 6:16). Although the immediate point is to show the ‘one body’ defiling character of immoral sexual intercourse, Paul could not have missed the relevance of Gen 2:24a-b (‘a man shall . . . become joined to his woman’) for his rejection of male homosexual intercourse in 1 Cor 6:9, especially given his appeal to Gen 1:27 and 2:21-22 later in the same letter as a basis for retaining traditional markers of sexual differentiation (11:7-12).

<sup>28</sup> See my ‘Old Testament and Homosexuality: A Critical Review of the Case Made by Phyllis Bird,’ *ZAW* 117 (2005): 367-94, esp. 387-89.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Heinz-Josef Fabry in *TDOT* 12:402; John H. Walton, *Genesis* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zonderan, 2001), 177.

sexual context) than when spoken by a parent to a child, a brother to a sister, or a friend to a friend.

Third, the specific expression ‘one flesh’ does not appear anywhere else in the OT or in early Jewish or early rabbinic texts apart from a reference to Gen 2:24. This makes it unlikely to have been an expression for denoting covenant bonds outside a context of man-woman marriage.

Fourth, it takes a determined effort to ignore the fivefold reference in 2:21-23 to forming woman by *taking from* the ‘*ādām*’ a part of him. The ‘*ādām*’ declares not merely that the woman ‘is my bone and my flesh’ but, more, that the woman ‘is bone *from my bones* and flesh *from my flesh* ... for *from man* this one *was taken*’ (2:23). What is missing from the ‘*ādām*’ (human), who is now an ‘*iš*’ (man), is the part that God has built into a woman. In this context ‘one flesh’ clearly implies the restoration of the two divisible parts into an indivisible whole, not just ‘the same family.’

This is certainly how Jesus and Paul understood Gen 2:24. The meaning ‘same family’ would not restrict the number of participants to two, since families are not limited to two members. Yet both Jesus and Paul (1 Cor 6:16) understood ‘one flesh’ unions as properly restricted to two. Having additional sexual partners violates the principle that a man-woman sexual bond creates a self-contained whole that ought to admit of no third parties. In this context talk of ‘cleaving’ must have its deepest sense of reuniting through a committed sexual bond what was once a single entity: the two, ‘male and female’ or ‘a man’ and ‘his woman/wife.’

## V. Johnson on Gal 3:28c: ‘there is no “male and female”’

According to Johnson Gal 3:28, which alludes to Gen 1:27c, makes sexual differentiation irrelevant *in the sphere of sexual relations* (147-52). Problems for Johnson’s interpretation arise not just from the fact that the early church would have unanimously abhorred any link between this baptismal formula and homosexual practice; or from the fact that not even Johnson takes the parallel antinomy ‘there is no Jew nor Greek’ absolutely. The chief problem is that applying ‘no “male and female”’ to sexual relations spells the end of such relations altogether, not the irrelevance of a male-female prerequisite.

Jesus defined Gen 1:27 and 2:24 as foundational *for sexual relations*. One could choose to opt out of a male-female marital bond. But then the only other option would be to become like ‘eunuchs who were born thus from their mother’s womb’ or ‘eunuchs who were made eunuchs by humans’; that is, as people who are not having *any* sexual relations (Matt 19:11-12). Similarly, those who opt out of male-female marriage would be like the angels who ‘neither marry nor are given in marriage’ (Mark 12:25; cf. Luke 20:34-36).

The Corinthians likely understood ‘no “male and female”’ to mean not only a greater openness to women’s roles in the church (a point with which Paul partly agreed) but also a celibacy requirement (cf. 1 Cor 7).<sup>30</sup> There is also evidence that later proto-gnostic circles similarly interpreted an alleged saying of Jesus about making the two sexes one so that there is no longer any male and female (*Gospel of Thomas* 22:1-4; *Gospel of the*

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. William Loader, *Sexuality and the Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 188-92, 198.

*Egyptians* 5b, cited in Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.92; and *2 Clement* 12:2-3).<sup>31</sup> Paul agreed that if applied to sexual relations ‘no “male and female”’ would mean ‘no sexual intercourse.’ Indeed, this view may have influenced Paul’s choice of celibacy. Paul disagreed with the Corinthian pneumatics, however, that application to sexual relations was *mandatory* this side of the eschaton; that is, prior to receiving sexually undifferentiated resurrection bodies.

As William Loader argues, for Paul Gal 3:28c ‘is not a negation of either gender or sexuality [in the present], but a statement of equal worth before God in Christ.’<sup>32</sup> ‘Ultimately, ... when marriage and sexual relations, which belong to the order of the present age, pass away (as in Mark 12:25) ... maleness and femaleness ... will also cease to play a role.’<sup>33</sup> Allowance of male-female marriage and encouragement of sexual relations within marriage represented for Paul an *abeyance* or temporary suspension of ‘no “male and female”’ in the sphere of sexual relations, not an implementation. Consequently, Paul can contend with perfect consistency that ‘men who lie with males’ risk not inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10).

## VI. Johnson’s Rejection of Formal or Structural Prerequisites for Sexual Relations

Although Johnson rejects analogies between adult-committed homosexual practice on the one hand and adult-committed incest and polyamory on the other, his own arguments pave the way for such an analogy by eliminating any consideration of prerequisites for sexual intercourse based on formal or structural bodily correspondences. A centerpiece of his thesis is his claim that ‘gay couples are just as capable as straight couples of embracing all three’ of the ‘fundamental realities’ that marriage is designed to promote: ‘companionship, commitment, and community’ (110; cf. 111-13, 121-23, 136-37). Johnson likes the repetition of three C’s but unfortunately leaves out one: ‘complementarity,’ understood as formal compatibility or congruence in the embodied structures of the participants. Johnson’s main problem lies in treating ‘companionship, commitment, and community’ not only as *necessary* but also as *sufficient* for sexual relationships.

Faithful polyamorous sexual bonds and adult incestuous bonds would also qualify under Johnson’s truncated test for valid sexual relationships. Indeed, faithful polyamorous bonds provide a greater amount of companionship and bring the community into the covenanted relationship through a larger number of committed sexual partners, while incestuous bonds tie a double family knot by combining blood ties with sexual union. When Johnson cites the covenant relationship between Ruth and Naomi as a paradigm for same-sex *sexual* bonds (143-47), he appears not to realize that had Ruth and Naomi introduced sex into their adult-committed covenant relationship, they would manifested covenant *disloyalty* (even though no procreative problems could have arisen from the incest). Homosexual relations similarly violate structural prerequisites for a complementary other. Two men or two women can enter into a covenant bond as siblings

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 199-207.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 201; cf. 193, 207, 214, 243.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 196-97.

(in the case of David and Jonathan; cf. 2 Sam 1:26: ‘my brother Jonathan’)<sup>34</sup> or as parent-child (in the case of Naomi and Ruth) but not as sexual lovers.

Many other arguments used by Johnson could easily be applied to acceptance of committed, adult polyamory and incest. According to Johnson: ‘To posit a single “order” [of creation] that is supposed to hold true for all time ... is at best a quixotic dream’ (50-51). ‘To reduce the relationship ... to the sexual intimacy they may (or may not) be sharing is just as offensive and wrong-headed as declaring that heterosexual marriage is all about sex and nothing else’ (63). ‘[O]ne cannot learn about the meaning of sexuality merely from examining nature’ or ‘merely from examining the sex act’ (100). ‘Sin does not reside in orientation or behavior per se but in whether one’s life is rightly ordered’ (108; cf. 101). ‘God defies our ordinary religious categories’ and ‘acts contrary to what seems natural’ to accept those who are ‘sexually unclean,’ asking them only to put aside ‘sexual hedonism’ (98-99). ‘We know that Jesus’ way of keeping the law defied convention’ (105). One has ‘the right to marry the person one loves’ (182).

It is important to note here that I am not making just a ‘slippery slope’ argument, though Johnson is providing both the slope and the grease. The argument that I am making is that, if Johnson finds the acceptance of adult-committed polyamory and incest offensive, he should find adult-committed homosexual bonds even more offensive. The twoness of the sexes ordained by God at creation was the foundation for Jesus’ limitation of the number of persons in a sexual bond to two. Similarly, the prohibition of incest is analogically derived from the prohibition of same-sex intercourse. Incest involves an attempted sexual merger with someone who is already too much of a formal or structural same on a familial level. The degree of formal or structural sameness is felt even more keenly in the case of homosexual practice because sex or gender is a more integral component of sexual relations, and more foundationally defines it, than is and does the degree of blood relatedness.

Johnson makes only sparse and convoluted attempts at explaining why committed adult incest and polyamory do not deserve to be validated on the same grounds that he is validating homosexual unions. Counting endnotes he gives no more than three paragraphs to the question of incest (258 n. 107, 282-83 n. 52, 289 n. 69) and two paragraphs to the question of polygamy (169-70, 301 n. 51). Johnson appears to be opposed to incest only where a non-adult is involved or where conception is possible, for these are the only circumstances that his discussion addresses. By this test any adult homosexual-incestuous union should be allowable (cf. Johnson’s analogy of Ruth and Naomi). As regards polyamory, he ignores its roots in a male polysexual orientation and claims, falsely, that polygamy is *intrinsically* harmful. Johnson’s naïveté about the disproportionately high rates of harm that attend homosexual practice is in inverse proportion to his hyper-criticism of harm attending committed polyamorous bonds.

## VII. Johnson’s Scheme of Seven Theological Viewpoints

Johnson puts forward a scheme of ‘seven theological viewpoints’ on same-gender relationships in chs. 1-2 (39-108) that consists of three ‘non-affirming viewpoints’

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<sup>34</sup> See my discussion of kinship terminology for this relationship in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 146-54.

(prohibition, toleration, accommodation), three ‘welcoming and affirming viewpoints’ (legitimation, celebration, liberation), and, not surprisingly, his own viewpoint, which he calls the ‘welcoming, affirming, and ordering viewpoint’ (consecration) and presents as the ideal Hegelian synthesis of the best of the thesis and antithesis.<sup>35</sup> The scheme is essentially a reworking of a typology developed by L. R. Holben seven years earlier:<sup>36</sup>

<u>Holben</u>	<u>Johnson</u>
Condemnation	Prohibition
A Promise of Healing	(Ditto)
A Call to Costly Discipleship	Toleration
Pastoral Accommodation	Accommodation
(Ditto)	Legitimation
Affirmation	Celebration
(Ditto)	Consecration
Liberation	Liberation

One can see some doubling-up on each side. Holben’s unlikely attempt at distinguishing between ‘condemnation’ and ‘a promise of healing’ is combined in Johnson’s ‘prohibition’ viewpoint. Johnson splits Holben’s ‘pastoral accommodation’ into ‘accommodation’ and ‘legitimation’ but these two categories in Johnson’s scheme amount to essentially the same thing, despite Johnson’s protests to the contrary. The same applies to Johnson’s failed attempt to split Holben’s ‘affirmation’ position into a ‘celebration’ viewpoint and a ‘consecration’ viewpoint.

Johnson discusses how each viewpoint intersects with the themes of *creation*, *reconciliation*, and *redemption* (41-43). He regards this as the particularly innovative element of his approach (ibid., 262 n. 3). However, Johnson is merely asking: (1) how does homosexual orientation originate; and what does (2) repentance and (3) transformation look like. This doesn’t strike me as particularly innovative. Nor are the terms ‘creation,’ ‘reconciliation,’ and ‘redemption’ accurate. ‘Creation’ is not an apt designation for a sinful impulse. As for ‘redemption,’ Johnson applies it in a way that differs from the two primary NT uses (past and future-eschatological senses). It also bears little practical difference to the way he interprets ‘reconciliation.’ Reconciliation and redemption in the NT are also things that *God* does whereas Johnson frames these concepts as something that humans do. It would be better to replace these three terms with what Johnson really means: *origination* and *repentance/transformation*, with the latter two elements understood as flipsides of the same coin.

Johnson claims that ‘in presenting this typology’ he simply wants ‘to promote understanding’ and to take ‘something of value’ from each (41). Yet what Johnson really wants is to undermine the notion that there are only ‘two views on the subject, a biblical view and a nonbiblical view’ (ix), so that he can take the main focus off of the anti-scriptural character of all homosexualist readings. Indeed, by placing the ‘prohibition’ view on one end of a seven-view spectrum he creates the illusion for readers that this

<sup>35</sup> See esp. his Table 6 on p. 108.

<sup>36</sup> *What Christians Think about Homosexuality: Six Representative Viewpoints* (North Richland Hills, Tex.: Bibal Press, 1999). Johnson buries in an endnote (262 n. 3) that Holben’s typology was one of three that ‘informed’ his own approach but does not tell readers what Holben’s scheme looks like.

view represents an *extreme* position even though, properly understood, it not only embodies the scriptural position but also remains the dominant position of the worldwide church. By contrast, Johnson treats his own view (consecration) as a category distinct from the ‘welcoming and affirming viewpoints’ and falsely claims that it takes the best from both the non-affirming and affirming views (95, 97, 108).

A person who buys into this scheme could be brought to a position on homosexual practice similar to Johnson’s without ever having to give serious consideration to numerous arguments against a homosexualist interpretation. Such a person will not want to appear to hold an ‘extreme’ view on the subject and so will choose what the scheme itself treats as centrist, namely, Johnson’s own ‘welcoming, affirming, and ordering’ ‘consecrationist’ viewpoint. But Johnson’s scheme is all smoke and mirrors. Here are the five main problems with this scheme.

First, various forms of sexual immorality, including adult-committed incest and polyamory, could be made to look reasonable by the adoption of this kind of tendentious scheme, which artificially stretches out the number of viewpoints from two basic ones to seven, places the scriptural and historic position of the church at an extreme end, and offers a ‘rightly ordered’ viewpoint as embracing the best of all possible worlds.

Second, Johnson’s so-called ‘consecration’ viewpoint should not be treated as a ‘new,’ distinct, and bridge-building seventh viewpoint but rather as the usual mode for expressing any of the other homosexualist viewpoints. Few in the mainline denominations have been advocating for ‘hedonistic’ homosexual behavior over the past decades so there is nothing new or distinctive in Johnson’s position. Nor is it any more bridge-building than an ‘ordered’ stance on polyamory or incest would be bridge-building between pro- and anti-positions. Espousing faithful polyamory, incest, and homosexual practice does not ‘preserve the best’ of a stance against these behaviors, as if the need for formal or structural prerequisites were not essential to such opposition.

Third, Johnson’s attempts at characterizing differences between so-called ‘prohibitionist’ and ‘tolerationist’ positions lead to absurdities.

	<u>Prohibitionists</u>	<u>Tolerationists</u>
<i>Creation</i>	Homosexual desire a deliberate choice	No choice involved in homosexual desire
<i>Reconciliation</i>	Repent even of homosexual desire	Repent only of homosexual behavior
<i>Redemption</i>	Homosexuals must become heterosexuals	Homosexuals live a life of Stoic abstinence

None of these positions make sense as alternative views. The causes of homosexuality are multifactorial and can include: congenital influences (usually indirect), micro- and macrocultural influences (family, peers, broader society), personal psychology, and incremental choices (some blind and some deliberate). Neither a total ‘free will’ model nor a total ‘predestination’ model accurately reflects current scientific evidence (as Johnson himself has to admit). Furthermore, the idea that one must repent for the mere experience of sinful desire is as absurd as the idea that one need not repent of entertaining sinful desire in one’s thought life. Equally absurd are the alternatives ‘all homosexuals must become heterosexuals’ or ‘no homosexuals can ever experience any shift in same-sex attractions.’

There are indeed differences among those who uphold a male-female prerequisite for sexual relations regarding such things as membership, ‘homophobia,’ ‘gay rights,’ and how serious a sin homosexual practice is. However, these differences cannot be traced to

identifiable groups that follow their own distinct pattern of interconnected positions on ‘creation,’ ‘reconciliation,’ and ‘redemption.’ Certainly so-called ‘tolerationists’ do not dispense with an argument from creation/nature (contra Johnson). Nor is it the case, as Johnson supposes, that the more opposed to homosexual practice one is the more ignorant one must be of the literary and historical contexts for Scripture or of what science tells us. In addition, the labels ‘non-affirming,’ ‘prohibition,’ and ‘toleration’ are all in different ways skewed to advance Johnson’s argument. Finally, if Johnson is going to pretend that most ‘affirming’ positions do not have ‘ordered’ relationships in view, he could just as well add a ‘God-hates-homosexuals’ viewpoint on the extreme end of ‘non-affirming’ (read: complementarian) views. The ‘prohibitionist’ approach can then be correctly viewed as taking a moderate, loving approach to homosexual persons that rejects the living out of same-sex attractions as harmful and self-dishonoring to the participants.

Fourth, Johnson’s ‘accommodation’ viewpoint is neither significantly distinct from his ‘legitimation’ viewpoint nor rightly listed as a ‘non-affirming’ view. A position that offers support for committed homosexual relationships and permits the ordination of homosexually active candidates is *functionally* little different from any other homosexualist position.

Fifth, Johnson’s attempt at distinguishing a ‘celebration’ view from a ‘liberation’ view purely on the basis of an essentialist versus social-constructionist distinction is unjustified. No material difference exists between ‘celebration’ and ‘liberation’ in Johnson’s ‘reconciliation’ and ‘redemption’ vectors; only ‘creation’ is affected. Moreover, both essentialists and social constructionists can be found among the ‘accommodation,’ ‘legitimation,’ and ‘consecration’ viewpoints.

In short, Johnson’s scheme of seven viewpoints is too tendentious and flawed to be of any heuristic value.

## Conclusion

In this short review essay we have not come close to delineating all the problems with Johnson’s book. However, the subjects that we have covered—examining the inconsistency of Johnson’s rhetoric and tone, his frequent misrepresentations of secondary literature, his lack of knowledge about committed homosexual relationships in Greco-Roman primary source material, his misunderstandings about the creation texts and Gal 3:28, his apparent rejection of the concept of formal or structural prerequisites for sexual relationships, and his tendentious scheme of seven theological viewpoints—raise serious issues regarding Johnson’s scholarship.

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