

Review of M. D. Perkins “Dangerous Affirmations: The Threat of ‘Gay Christianity’”



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OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

In his book, Review of “Dangerous Affirmations: The Threat of ‘Gay Christianity’” M. D. Perkins analyzes the movement of what he terms “gay Christianity.” In his forward to the book, Stephen Black notes that revisionists’ expressions of “gay Christianity” include:

- A person who identifies as “gay” is simply part of God’s plan for a diverse church.
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT)-identified persons are free to serve in any capacity within the church without restriction.
- Sexual orientation is innate and immutable.
- To truly “love our neighbours,” Christians must fight for LGBT causes, including allowing LGBT persons to serve openly within the church, marry, and adopt children.

According to Black, these expressions reject and revise traditional biblical sexual ethics. While admitting nuances, Perkins broadly summarizes “gay Christian” theology into separate categories: gay Christian theology, affirming theology, queer theology, and gay celibate theology (side B theology). These categories ultimately contrast what Perkins refers to as a “legitimate biblical interpretation” (p. 29) (See “Legitimate biblical interpretation” section below). According to Perkins, other than a “legitimate biblical interpretation,” any of these would be a “threat” to the church. In addition to being an elder at the Lawndale Presbyterian Church (PCA), Perkins identifies as a research fellow for the American Family Association (AFA), the book's publisher. The AFA is an American conservative protestant non-profit organization that focuses on traditional pro-family agenda and media activism. The AFA is not without scrutiny and disdain by some LGBT advocacy groups, notably the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), which has accused AFA of being an anti-gay hate group. In a sense, this book puts iron into an existing cultural war.

Affirming Theology (Revisionist theology)

Revisionists believe re-interpretations of the Bible should be based on a current societal backdrop. For example, “when affirming theologians argued that Paul spoke against homosexuality because he only knew about exploitative or violent forms of homosexual behaviour – he didn’t know about committed, monogamous, same-sex relationships.”¹

The comparisons of traditional theological thought and revisional theological thought were outlined in my review of DeYoung and are worth reading to better help understand the dichotomy.² Because of a renewed idea about same-sex behaviour and gender expression, revisionists have found ways to welcome and affirm LGBT persons within their congregations without hindrance regarding service and marriage. These ideas were isolated to smaller congregations such as the Metropolitan Community Church, but Perkins notes that these ideas are increasingly migrating to larger denominations and churches. This has become a hotly contested issue, and has created issues where some churches have split as a result.³

In his critique, Perkins says that “affirming theology seeks to *revise* the established teaching of the Bible by first considering what LGBT people want to hear.”⁴ He concludes that affirming theology is “deception” and “opposition” to God’s design for human sexuality.⁵

Queer Theology

Queer theology (anything outside of heterosexual or gender norms) is an “expression of crossing set boundaries and pushing against social norms,”⁶ and “it sees its purpose as one of disruption, defiance, resistance, and liberation”⁷ from heteronormativity. Queer theory has deep connections with liberation theory and feminist theory, and the goal of queer theology is the “total destruction of orthodoxy”.⁸

In Perkins’ critique, queer theology “deconstructs” orthodoxy and is not a “serious study of Scripture”,⁹ and “believing theology to be a tool of self-empowerment rather than understanding it, moves beyond affirmation to full-on scoffing.”¹⁰

Gay Celibate Theology (Side B theology)

In gay celibate theology, “*gay*” and “*Christian*” are not competing for identity labels but are coexisting experiences. Gay celibate theology holds the tradition that homosexual behaviour is forbidden, but homosexual orientation is fixed and is a unique burden that the “gay Christian” must steward. For many “Side B Christians,” while remaining committed to conservative Christian prohibitions on gay sexual activity, they may or may not identify with the “LG” initialisms that highlight the connection to the wider community.

In his critique, Perkins says, “Gay celibate theology wants to *essentialize* homosexuality temptation to the point it is left untouched by the work of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹

¹ M.D. Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity.”* Tupelo, MS: American Family Association, 2022, 13.

² James E. Phelan “Review of Kevin DeYoung’s What does the Bible really teach about Homosexuality?” *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies*, 8 no.8 (2022): 212-215. <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.2022881>

³ Peter Smith, “United Methodists are breaking up in a slow-motion schism,” *AP News* (October 10, 2022). <https://apnews.com/article/religion-gay-rights-f3fc3ec9e1f39501495d227d5a0963f8>

⁴ Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 34.

⁵ Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 34.

⁶ Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 17.

⁷ Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 18.

⁸ Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 21.

⁹ Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 35.

¹⁰ Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 35.

¹¹ Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 35.

Legitimate Biblical Interpretation

Perkins clings to what he refers to as a “legitimate biblical interpretation.” “Scripture really is clear on these issues”¹² he says, and “the sources to which gay Christians constantly appeal...are not sufficient to guide us into all truth.”¹³ Perkins furnishes a chapter on what the Bible says about sex and marriage. See also my review of DeYoung¹⁴ and the contrast of biblical hermeneutics to those of contemporary revisionists as it relates to homosexuality throughout the Bible. Thinking about this further, I reflect on Gagnon’s¹⁵ analysis of the topic:

...there exist no valid hermeneutical arguments, derived from either the general principle of biblical interpretation or contemporary scientific knowledge and experience, for overriding the Bible’s authority [on the matter of the Bible and homosexuality practice]. In sum, the Bible presents the anatomical, sexual, and procreative complementarity of male and female as clear and convincing proof of God’s will for sexual unions.¹⁶

Rethinking

The book emphasizes intently what the author calls “rethinking” biblical theology, the church, identity, and outlines what he refers to as “problems.” For example, one *rethinking* within the revised church is that LGBT people should see other LGBT people expressing themselves within the church, and being affirmed, so they will “come out” and increase their self-worth. But to Perkins, the *problem* is “there is no way to make a defiling act [homosexuality] an expression of holiness and integrity.”¹⁷ These connections are prevalent throughout the book.

Activism

In the chapter devoted to “creating activists,” Perkins says, “...collectively ‘gay Christianity’ fits perfectly within the larger political agenda of the LGBT movement to change societal attitudes and responses toward homosexuality (as an idea/condition) and homosexuals (as a social group).”¹⁸ He sees the church being used as a motor to advance gay activism toward radical queer theology and radical acceptance thereby promoting modern psychological thought about homosexuality as an innate and immutable condition and a reduction of a belief that the Holy Spirit can transform the homosexual (cf: “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (English Standard Version, 2001, 1 Cori. 6:11). He rhetorically asks, “If the church only has a gospel without power to transform, then what does it truly have?”

“Call to Faithfulness”

In his concluding section, Perkins links “gay Christianity” as a mechanism for appealing to the senses rather than the authority of the scriptures which he interprets as traditional biblical sexual ethics. He asserts,

“...Peter links false teaching with sensuality. False teachers always appeal to our senses, to our emotions, and to our base instincts. They minimize scripture, reframe it, change the emphasis, and twist it until it is forced to confess a lie.”¹⁹

¹² Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 32.

¹³ Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 32.

¹⁴ Phelan, "Review of Kevin DeYoung's *What does the Bible really teach about homosexuality?*"

¹⁵ Robert A. J. Gagnon *The Bible and homosexual practice: Texts and hermeneutics.* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 37.

¹⁶ Gagnon, *The Bible and homosexual practice: Texts and hermeneutics,*" 37.

¹⁷ Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 122.

¹⁸ Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 179.

¹⁹ Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 208.

Perkins concludes that the teaching of the “gay Christian” is “false and must be exposed for what it is – a ‘destructive heresy.’”²⁰ In the end, according to Perkins, sharing truth can prepare an outcome of “rescue(ing) sinners.”²¹

Theology types, theory, and Perkins’ critique

| Theology | Theory | Perkins’ critique |
|--|--|---|
| Affirming theology (Revisionist theology) | Reinterpretations of the Bible are based on current societal standards. | <i>Revises</i> the Bible by considering what LGBT people want to hear. |
| Queer theology | Outside of heterosexual or gender norms; pushing against social norms; the purpose as one of disruption, defiance, resistance, and liberation from heteronormativity. Connections with liberation and feminist theory. The goal is “total destruction of orthodoxy.” ²² | “Deconstructs” orthodoxy; not a “serious study of Scripture;” “...a tool of self-empowerment rather than understanding, it moves beyond affirmation to full-on scoffing.” ²³ |
| Gay celibate theology (Side B theology) | “Gay” and “Christian” are not competing for identity labels but coexisting experiences. Homosexual behaviour is forbidden, but homosexual orientation is fixed and is a unique burden that the “gay Christian” must steward. | “Essentialize(s) homosexuality temptation to the point it is left untouched by the [intervention] of the Holy Spirit.” ²⁴ |
| Legitimate biblical interpretation | “Scripture really is clear on these issues” and “the sources to which gay Christians constantly appeal...are not sufficient to guide us into all truth.” ²⁵ | |

CONCLUSION

Perkins analyzes the movement of what he terms "gay Christianity," and in the end, accuses it of being problematic, heresy, and contrary to “legitimate biblical interpretation.” The book will validate much of what the person with a traditional conservative biblical sexual ethic generally ascribes. The author is not shy of accusing the “gay Christian” of explaining “false” and “sensual” understandings that counter a “legitimate biblical interpretation.” The book will help other readers understand some of the underpinnings of conservative biblical sexual ethics. The reader will understand how Perkins

²⁰ Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 213.

²¹ Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 213.

²² Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 21.

²³ Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 35.

²⁴ Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 35.

²⁵ Perkins, *Dangerous affirmations: The threat of “Gay Christianity,”* 32.

categorizes some of the nuances of “gay Christianity” whether these are agreed upon or not. In the end, Perkins provides recommended resources and an exclusive scriptural index representative of his views.

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