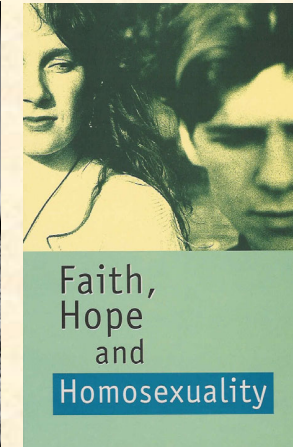
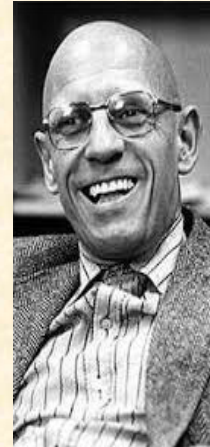




Responding to Revisionist Theologies of Sexuality

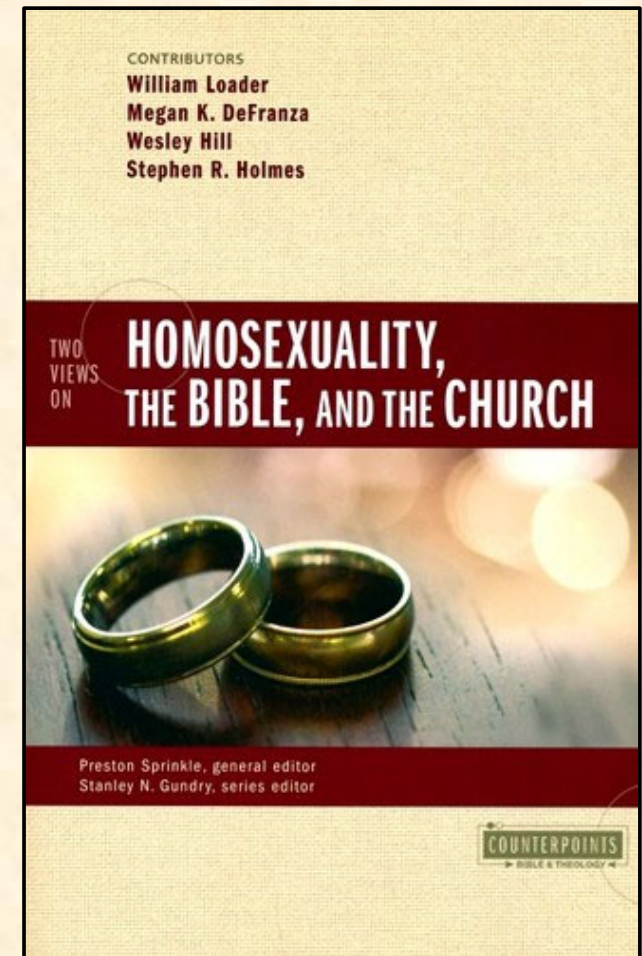
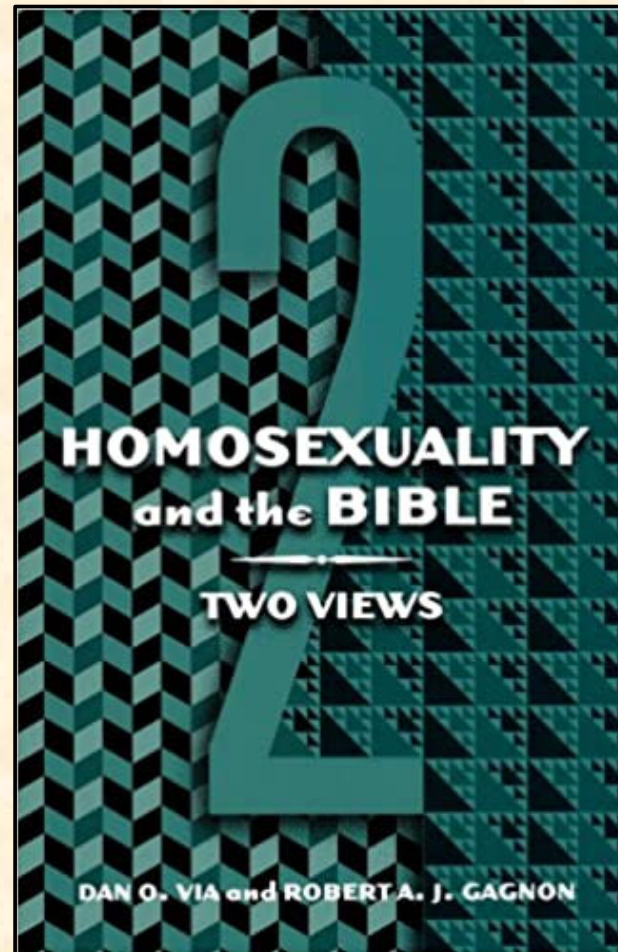
European Leadership Forum 2023

David Hilborn





1.1 Historic Dichotomies: 'Traditionalist' versus Revisionist' Theologies of Sexuality



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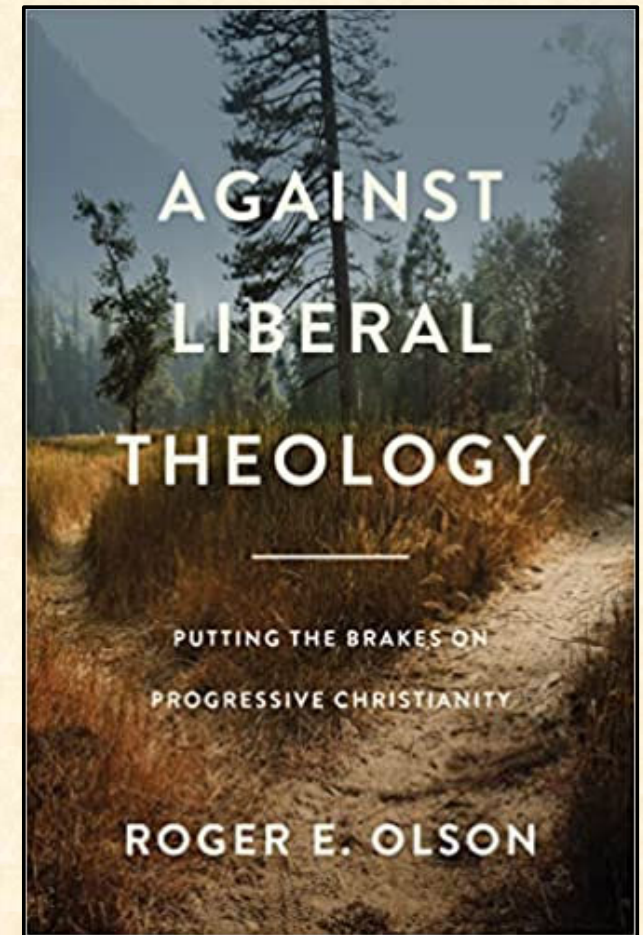
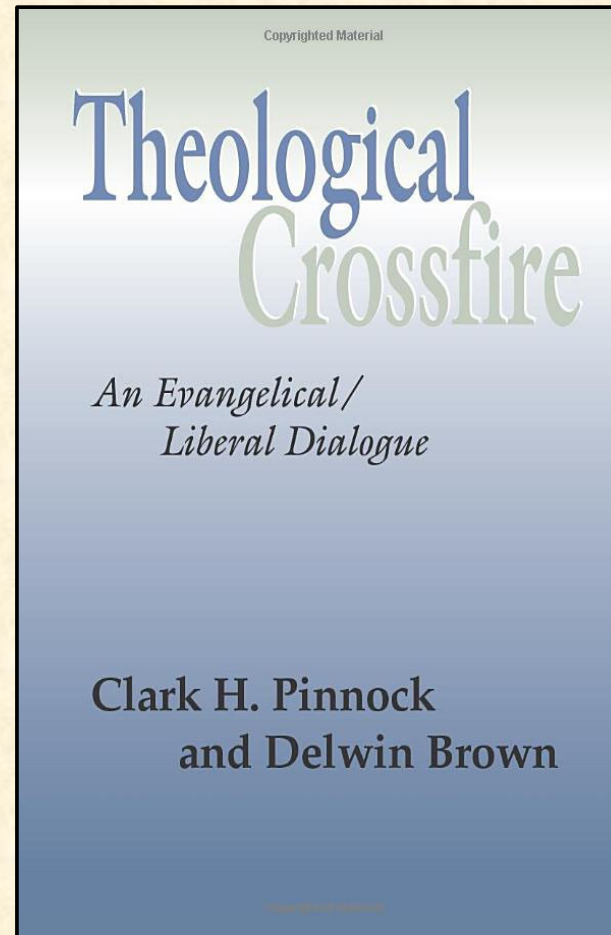
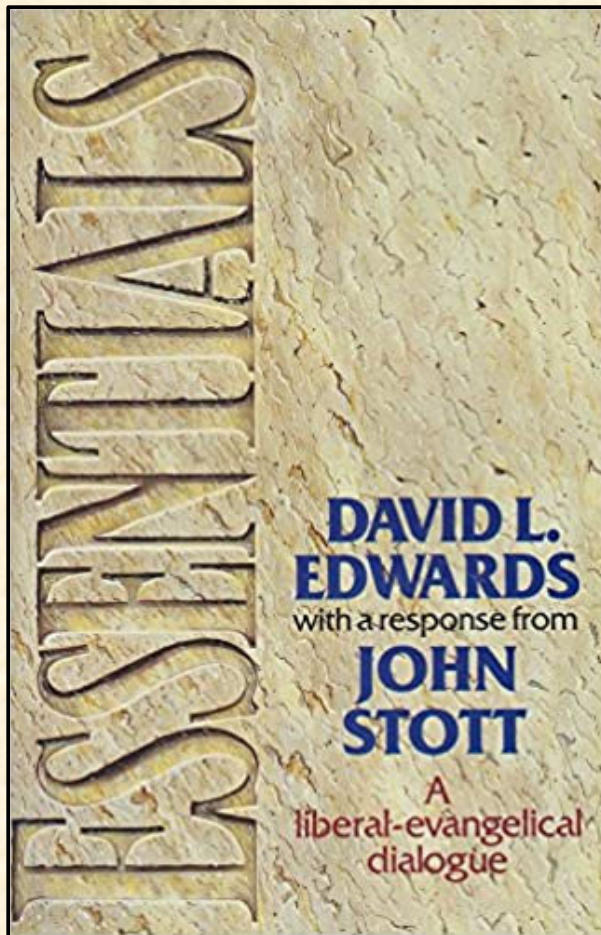
James V. Brownson

Foreword by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson

Bible Gender Sexuality

Reframing the
Church's Debate
on Same-Sex
Relationships

1.1 Historic Dichotomies: Evangelicals as Traditionalists v. Liberals as Revisionists





The Dichotomy as an Ecclesial Reality: Polarised Denominations

Traditional

- FIEC
- Presbyterian Church NI
- United Methodists
- Free Church of Scotland
- Free Church of England
- Southern Baptist Convention

Revisionist


- Quakers
- URC
- Presbyterian Church USA
- Episcopal Church USA
- Methodist Church GB
- Church of Scotland



From Traditionalism to Revisionism?

The Church of England & Global Anglican Division

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND



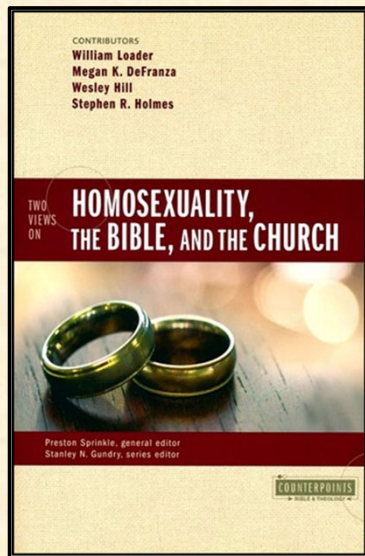
LIVING IN LOVE & FAITH

Christian teaching and learning about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage

Foreword by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York



1.2 Attempting to Dissolve Historic Dichotomies: 'Affirming' Evangelicalism

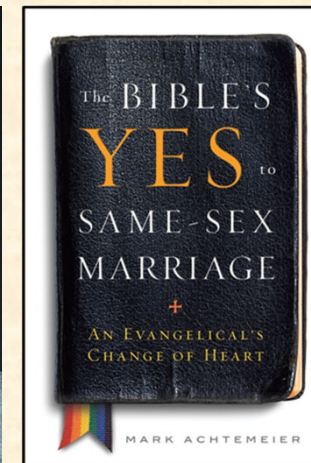
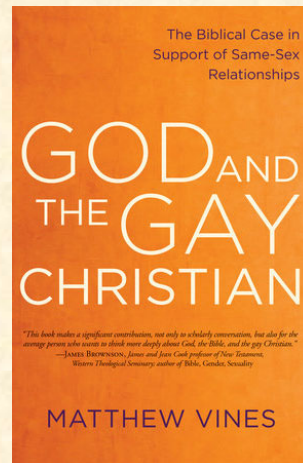
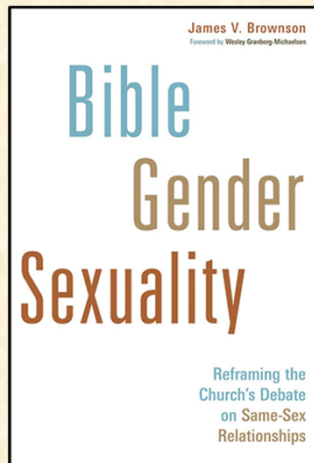
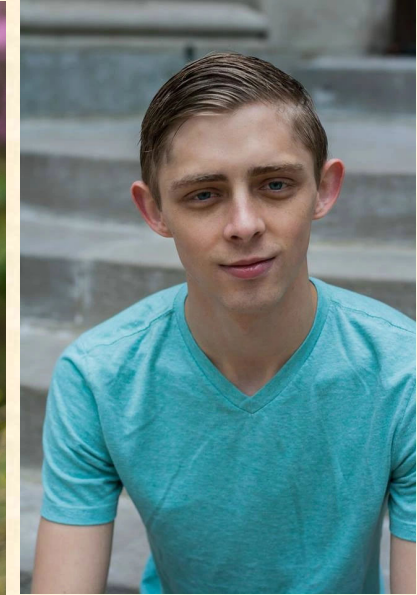


‘Until recently, there was only one view of homosexuality within evangelicalism: the so-called non-affirming view.

Conservatives may protest or disagree, but the fact is that there are a growing number of...evangelicals who are either exploring the **affirming view** [of certain same-sex relationships] or who have embraced it and aren’t looking back.’

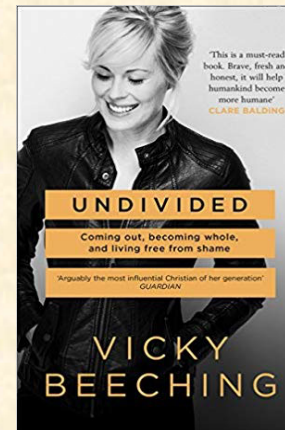
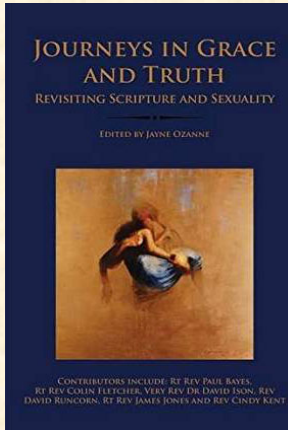
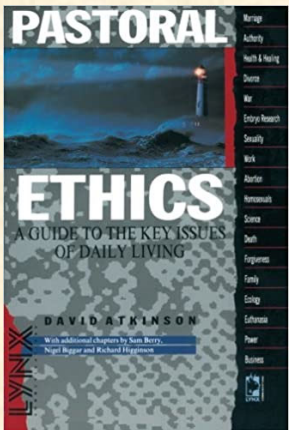
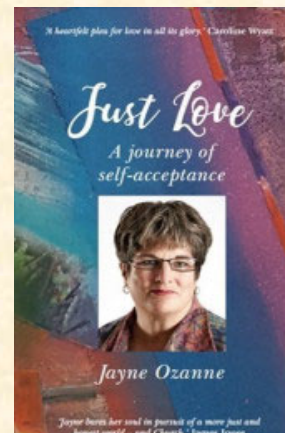
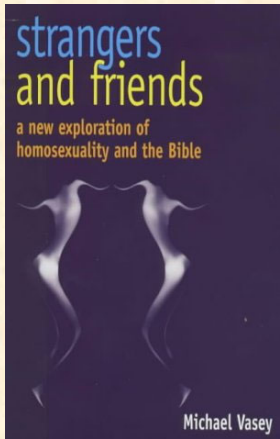
Preston M. Sprinkle (ed), ‘Introduction’, in *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016, p.11.

'Affirming' Evangelicals (US)





'Affirming', 'Including' & 'Accepting' Evangelicals (UK)



Steven Croft



Together in Love and Faith

Personal Reflections and Next Steps for the Church



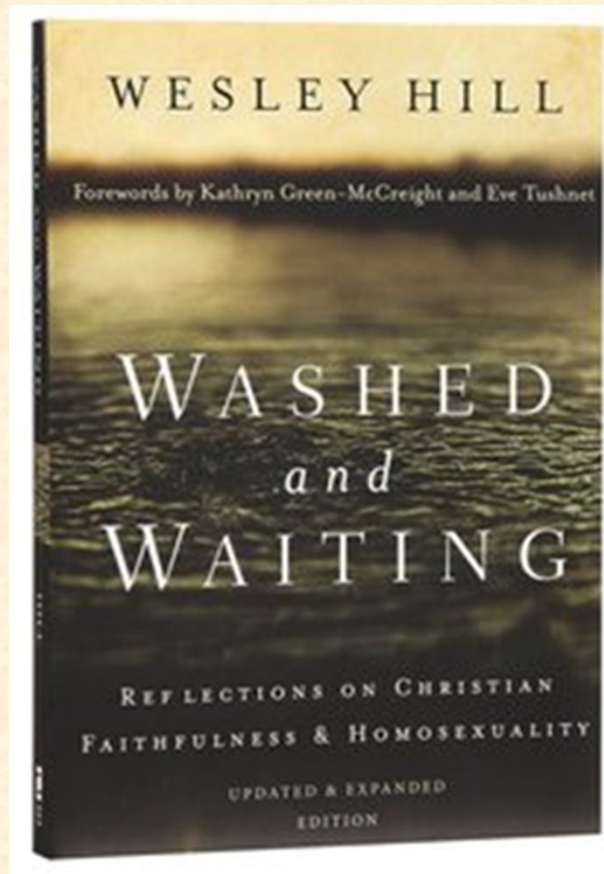
I write, deliberately, as someone who has changed their mind on these issues, very slowly (with hindsight too slowly) moving from a position where I found it difficult to accept the blessing of same-sex partnerships and marriage, to one where I believe the Church should embrace and bless these unions. This perspective will, I hope, make what is written helpful and relevant to others who are on a similar journey.

Bp Steven Croft, *Together in Love & Faith*, 2022, p.2

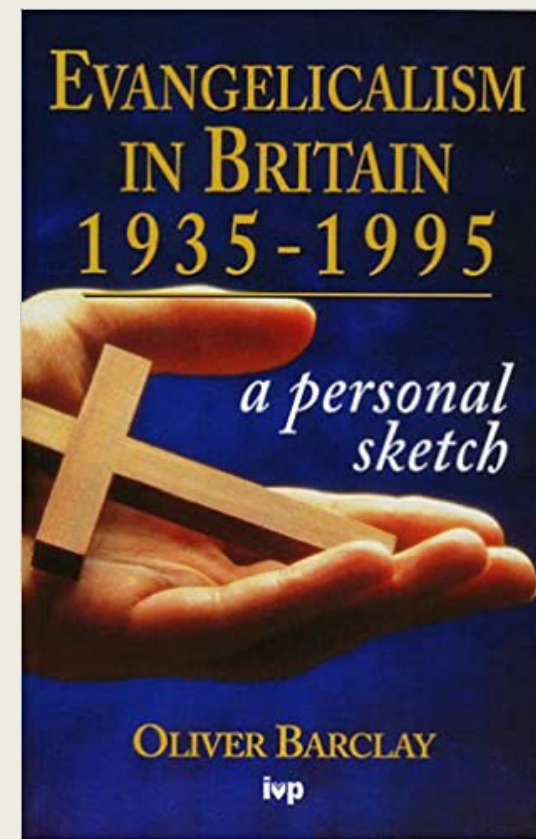
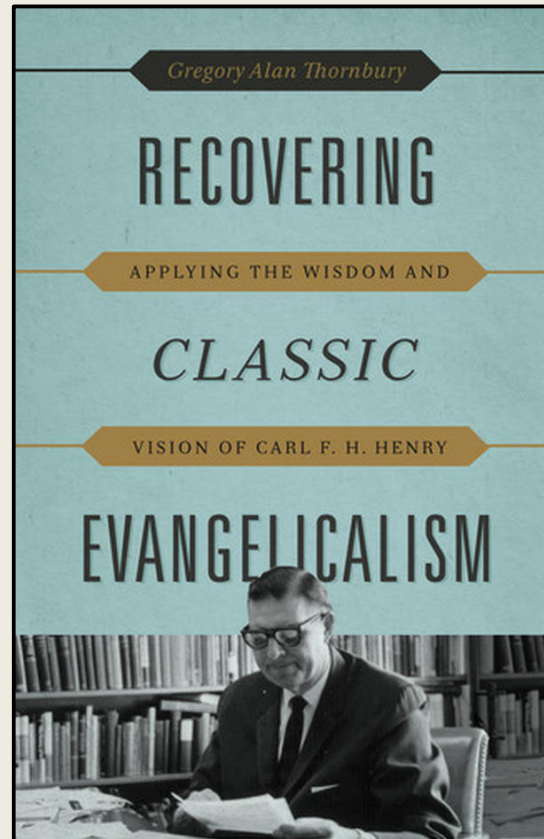
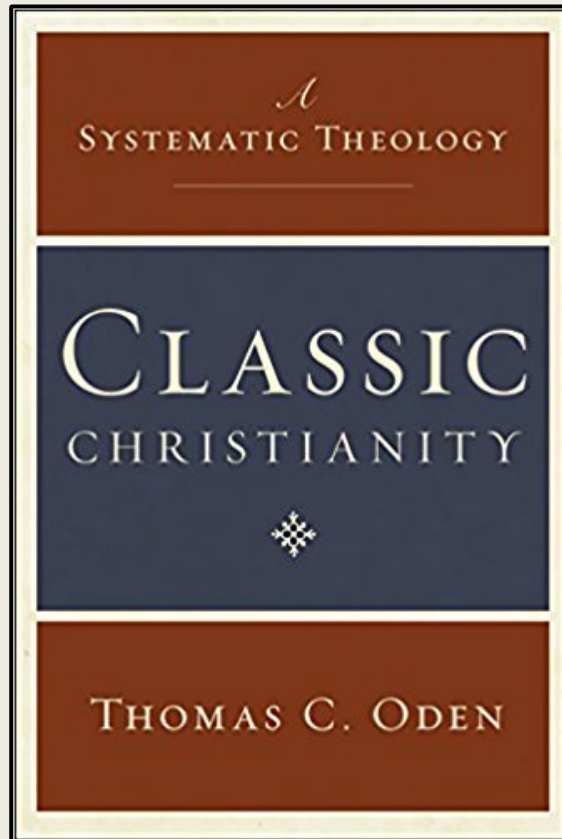


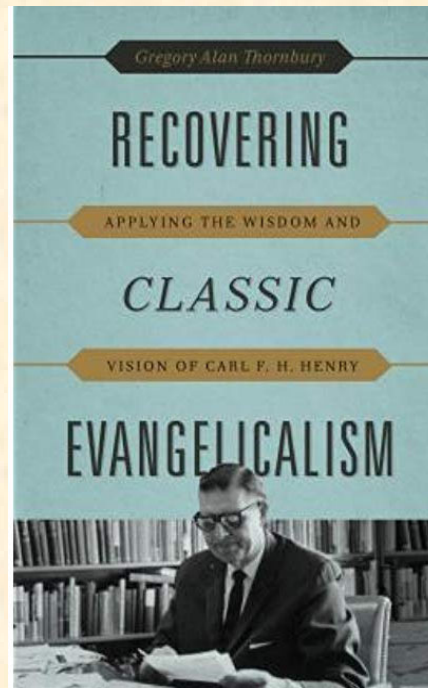
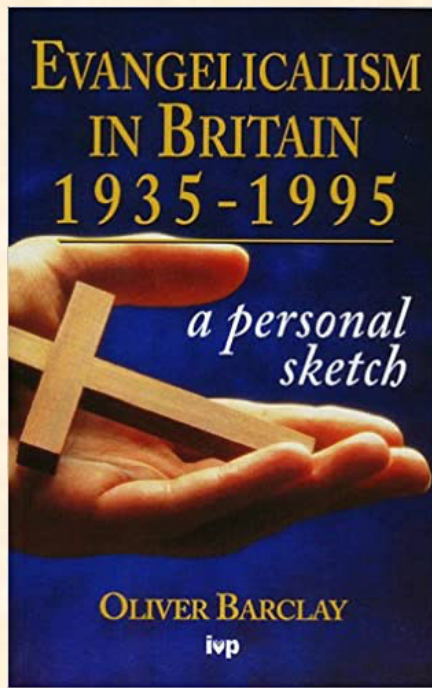
Welcoming v. Affirming

Stanley Grenz, Wesley Hill...& Andy Stanley?



1.3 Responding to the Challenge: **Classic Evangelicalism** as a richer term than Traditional Evangelicalism





Classic[al] Evangelicalism in Barclay and Thornbury as:

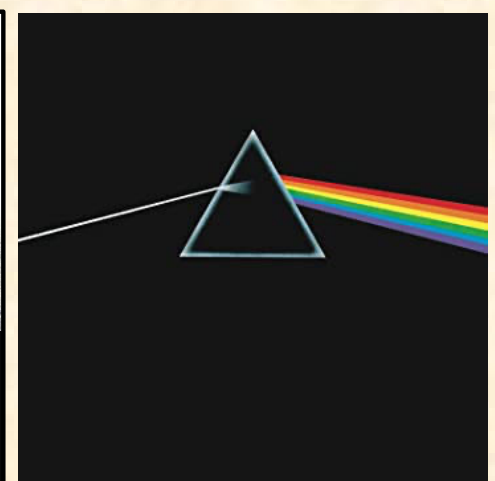
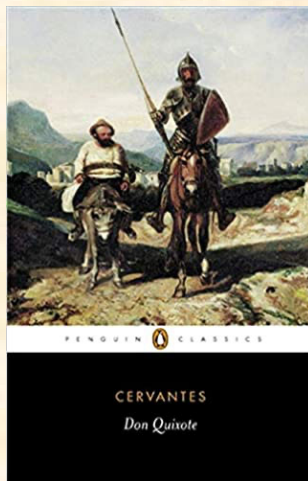
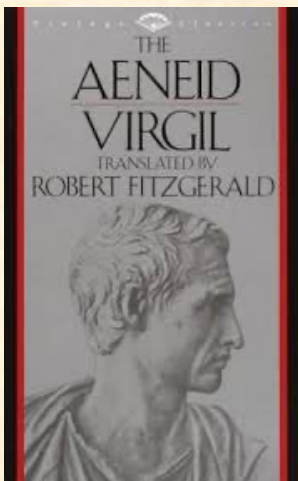
- Original, biblical, apostolic Christianity (cf. John Stott, Michael Reeves)
- Christocentric – gospel focused
- Rooted in the Reformation
- Biblicist, Crucicentric, Conversionist, Activist (Bebbington)
- Inerrantist/Infallibilist
- Focused on New Birth
- Trans-denominational (cf. Stackhouse)
- Substitutionary re: Atonement
- Apologetic (cf. Carl Henry)
- Distinct from Fundamentalism



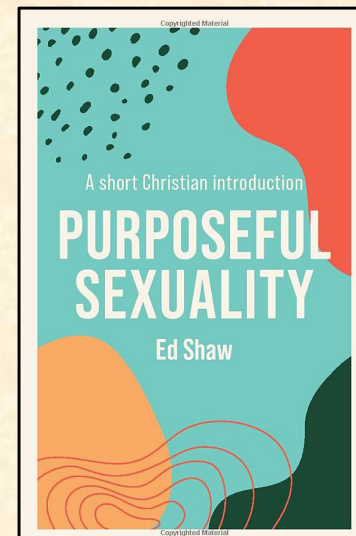
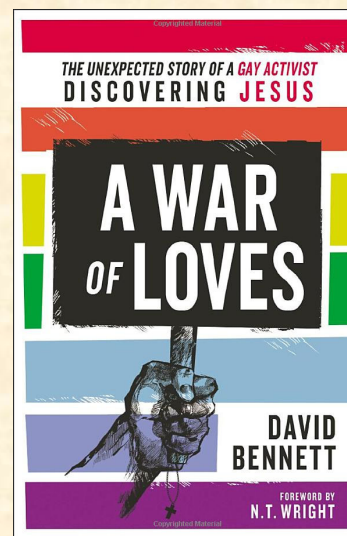
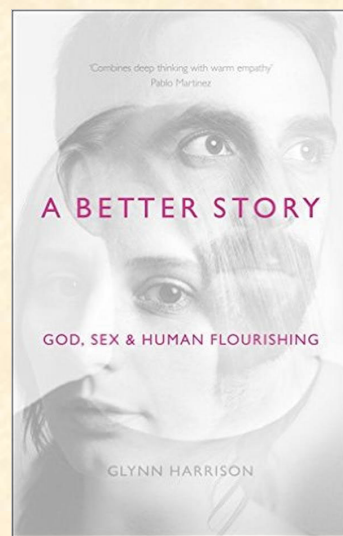
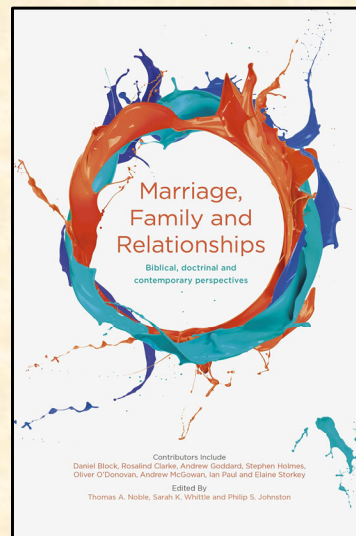
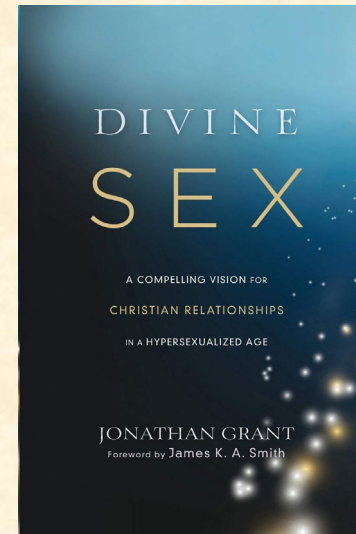
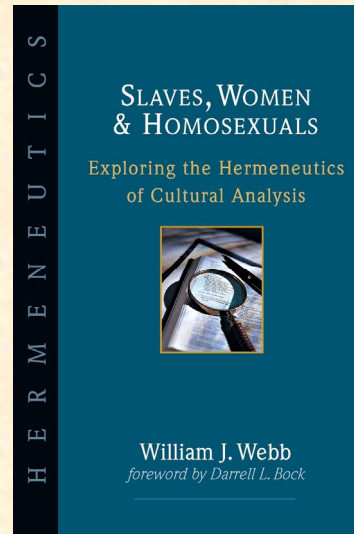
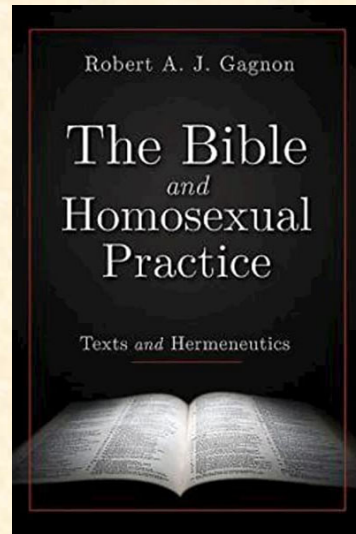
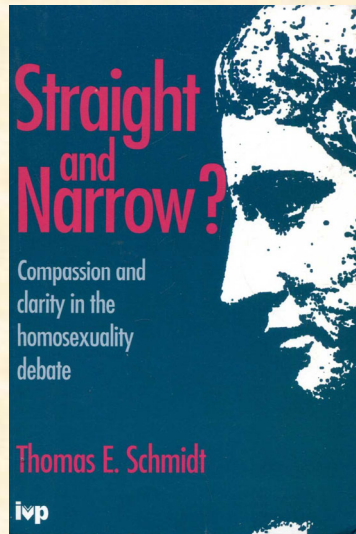
1.4 Advantages of 'Classic' as a Qualifier of Evangelicalism

Etymology and Semantics

- Avoids blanket elision with partisan *political* conservatism
 - Lat. *Classicus; classici* – of the prime or default class
- Effortlessly contemporaneous with all ages (Augustin Saint-Beuve)
- A mature representation of something, 'with history behind it' (T.S.Eliot)
 - A phenomenon refined over time/through **history** (T.S. Eliot)...



2.0 Classic Evangelical Approaches to Sexuality and Gender from Recent Years

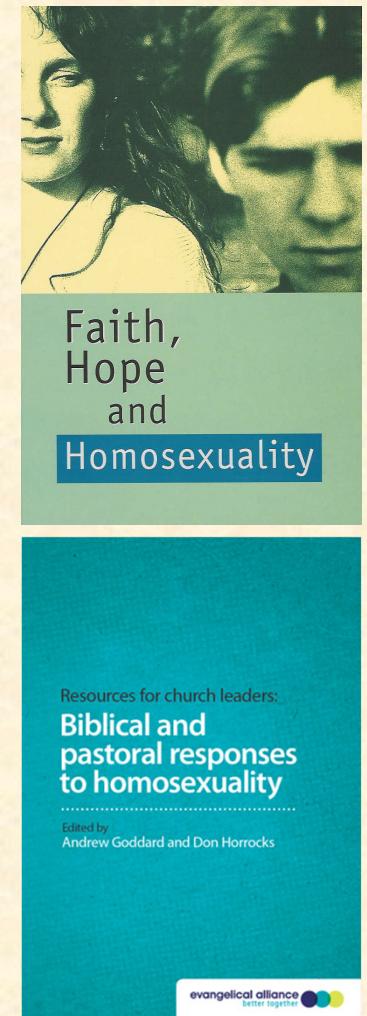




2.1 Evangelical Alliance UK Statements Exemplifying the Classic Evangelical Approach

‘...**marriage** is an institution created by God in which **one man and one woman** enter into **exclusive relationship for life**. Marriage is the only form of partnership approved by God for sexual relations and **homoerotic sexual practice is incompatible with His will as revealed in Scripture**...We commend and encourage all those who experience same-sex attraction and have committed themselves to **chastity** by refraining from homoerotic sexual practice.’

Biblical & Pastoral Responses to Homosexuality, 2012, Affirmations 3 & 7





2.1 Evangelical Alliance UK Statements Exemplifying the Classic Evangelical Approach

We affirm God's love and concern for all humanity, but believe that **God creates human beings as *either male or female***. Authentic change from a person's given sex is not possible and an ongoing transsexual lifestyle is **incompatible with God's will as revealed in Scripture** and in creation.

Transsexuality, 2000, p.85

Whilst we seek to support those struggling with **gender dysphoria**, we can **resist and oppose forms of transgender ideology which offer alternative, radically secular ideas** about what it means to be human.

Transformed, 2018, p.29



2.2 Key Biblical Texts Taken as Underlying Classic Evangelical Approaches

- Genesis 1-2
- Genesis 19:1-29
- Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13
- Deuteronomy 22:5
- Deuteronomy 23:1
- Matthew 19:3-12
- Matthew 22:23-33
- Romans 1:26-27
- I Corinthians 6:1-11
- 1 Timothy 1:10



3.0 Revisionist Approaches and Classic Evangelical Responses (See Handout)

1. Exegetical Revisionism
2. Thematic Revisionsm
3. Canonical Revisionsm
4. Therapeutic Revisionism
5. Illuministic Revisionsm
6. Intrad denominational Revisionism

Type	Revisionist Argument	Classic Evangelical Response
1 Exegetical	Contested biblical texts do not mean what they have traditionally been taken to mean. Homoerotic relations and depictions of transgendered practices in biblical contexts are more limited in type, more fleeting, more promiscuous or more overtly idolatrous than faithful, stable same-sex bonds or transgender identities today. Also, certain texts (e.g., Matt. 22:30) suggest that marriage and sex are subject to eschatological change. <i>Advocates: Countryman, Helminiak, Loader, Sharpe, Thatcher, Brownson, Vines, Song, Davison, De Foye.</i>	A sufficient number of contested biblical texts prohibiting homoerotic relations and transgender identities do in fact bear universal and timeless application, and cannot be discounted in pursuit of an LGBTQ+-affirming theology. Marriage may develop or change in the eschaton, but there is no evidence that sexual relations deemed sinful now will be sanctified then. <i>Refuters: Gagnon, Schmidt, Grenz, Hays, Webb, Paul, Yarhouse, Walker.</i>
2 Thematic	Biblical macro-trajectories of love, justice, compassion, equality, fidelity etc. supersede micro-exegesis of a limited number of contested texts on sexuality and gender. <i>Advocates: John, Stuart, Vasey, Davison, Brownson, Tuma, Scott King.</i>	Such macro-trajectories are misconstrued if taken to exonerate practices that Scripture more specifically condemns as sinful. This would undermine the authority and plenary inspiration of the Bible, and would raise serious problems for the doctrine of God with respect to divine constancy and/or immutability. <i>Refuters: Webb, Gagnon, Grant, O'Donovan.</i>
3 Canonical	Contested biblical texts do mean what they have traditionally been taken to mean. Scripture can be homophobic/transphobic. Yet those texts can be bracketed off as culturally captive to outmoded mores. All biblical application <i>de facto</i> deploys 'canons within the canon', biblical texts on sexuality and gender are no exception, and when uniformly condemnatory of homoerotic relations and trans identities, can be consigned to history. God can speak through contemporary culture as well as Scripture. <i>Advocates: Ho, Wink, MacCulloch, Johnson.</i>	Unless specifically abrogated by later biblical texts, we have no right as Christians to 'decommission' culturally incongruent verses or passages. All Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16), and God's Word stands forever (1 Pet. 1:25). In any case, subsequent cultural trends might deem such decommissioning misguided. <i>Refuters: Gagnon, Schmidt, Webb, Paul.</i>
4 Therapeutic	Overarching biblical imperatives of wholeness, healing and human flourishing must take precedence when people who might be LGBTQ+ suffer illness, distress or suicidality through seeking to accord with classic Christian sexual morality. God would not want them to suffer, as such, they must be affirmed and supported in embracing an LGBTQ+ lifestyle or identity. <i>Advocates: Achtemeier, Vines, Chaika, Bechings.</i>	This model falls foul of a consequentialist ethical reasoning that presumes to associate <i>humanistically</i> -construed therapeutic 'ends' with divine intentions towards, and definitions of, wholeness/wellbeing as defined in Scripture. It also aligns suffering too readily with virtue, when it can, in fact, be a corollary or outworking of sin. Christians, however, are called to care for those who suffer in any case. <i>Refuters: Butterfield, Hill Perry, Quid, Shane.</i>
5 Illuministic	God can directly speak to or otherwise directly convince people who might be LGBTQ+ oriented to embrace an LGBTQ+ lifestyle or identity. <i>Advocates: Grenz, Bechings.</i>	Prophecies, visions, pictures, dreams and other theophanies can only be deemed divine if they accord with Scripture, which is superior in authority. <i>Refuters: Harrison, Grant.</i>
6 Intrad denominational	Biblical imperatives of bodily unity apply to local, national and international churches (denominations). To preserve this unity at a higher level, such churches/denominations might formally accommodate divergences on sexuality and gender between different congregations, networks and parties through such measures as local options, conscience clauses and alternative oversight. <i>Advocates: Green, Welby, Croft.</i>	Such theological reasoning presumes that matters of sex, gender and marriage are 'secondary' by comparison with imperatives of ecclesial unity. Yet Jesus, took marriage to be at least as crucial to Christian community and society (Matt. 19: 1-12). Besides, the unity of a particular denomination is not the same as the unity of Christ's body/the Church as a whole. 'Agreeing to disagree' on a matter of core doctrinal orthodoxy is in any event a false prospectus. <i>Refuters: GAFCOM, CEEC.</i>

1. Exegetical Revisionism

Revisionist Argument	Classic Evangelical Response
<p data-bbox="129 387 1133 1198">Contested biblical texts do not mean what they have traditionally been taken to mean. Homoerotic relations and depictions of transgendered practices in biblical contexts are more limited in type, more fleeting, more promiscuous or more overtly idolatrous than faithful, stable same-sex bonds or transgender identities today. Also, certain texts (e.g., Matt. 22:30) suggest that marriage and sex are subject to eschatological change.</p> <p data-bbox="129 1246 994 1449"><i>Advocates: Countryman, Helminiak, Loader, Sharpe, Thatcher, Brownson, Vines, Song, Davison, De Franza</i></p>	<p data-bbox="1180 387 2110 1118">A sufficient number of contested biblical texts prohibiting homoerotic relations and transgender identities do in fact bear universal and timeless application, and cannot be discounted in pursuit of an LGBTQ+-affirming theology. Marriage may develop or change in the eschaton, but there is no evidence that sexual relations deemed sinful now will be sanctified then.</p> <p data-bbox="1180 1270 2033 1398"><i>Refuters: Gagnon, Schmidt, Grenz, Hays, Webb, Paul, Yarhouse, Walker</i></p>

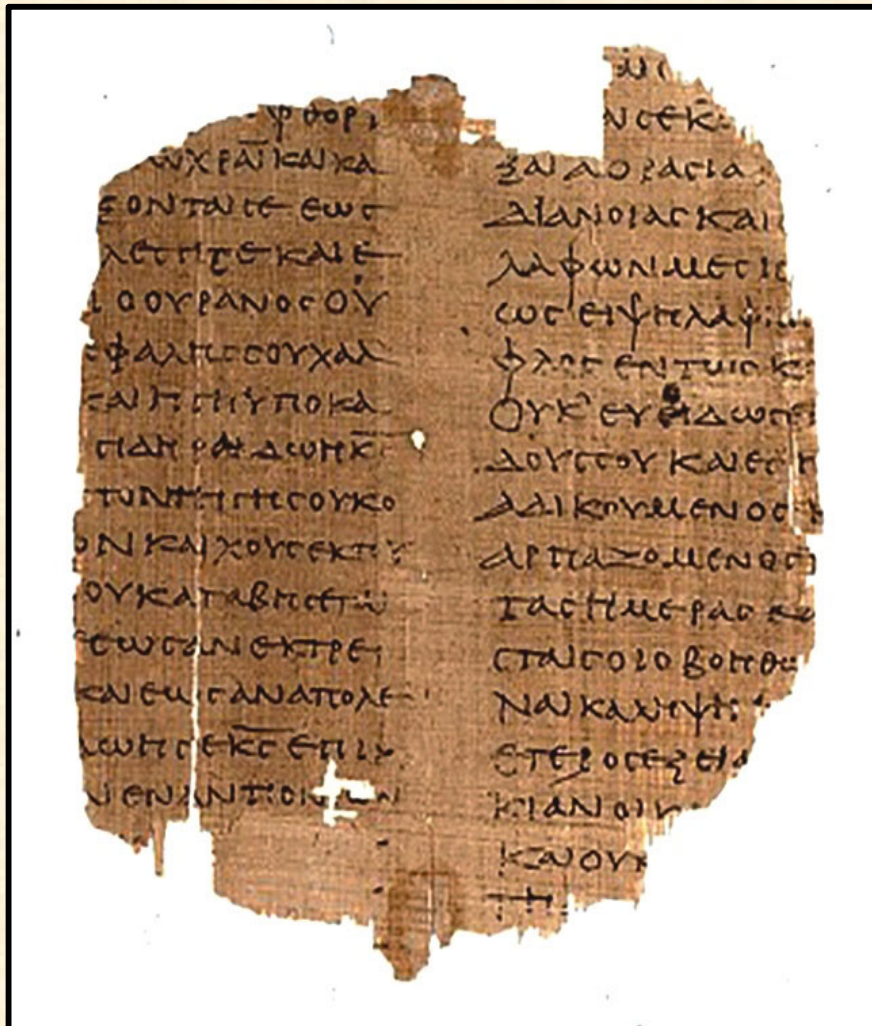
1. Exegetical Revisionism & Response

Example: Genesis 1-2



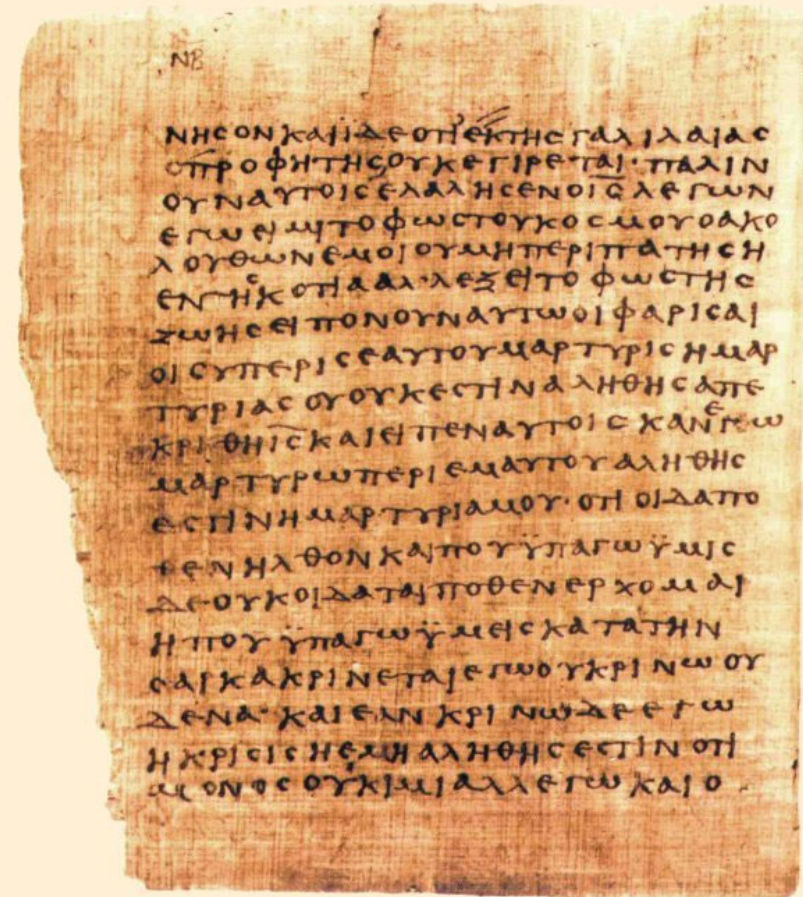
1. Exegetical Revisionism & Response

Example: Matthew 19:3-12; 22:23-33



1. Exegetical Revisionism & Response

Example: Romans 1:26-7



2. Thematic Revisionism

Revisionist Argument

Biblical macro-trajectories of love, justice, compassion, equality, fidelity etc. supervene micro-exegesis of a limited number of contested texts on sexuality and gender.

Advocates: John, Stuart, Vasey, Davison, Brownson, Tutu, Scott King

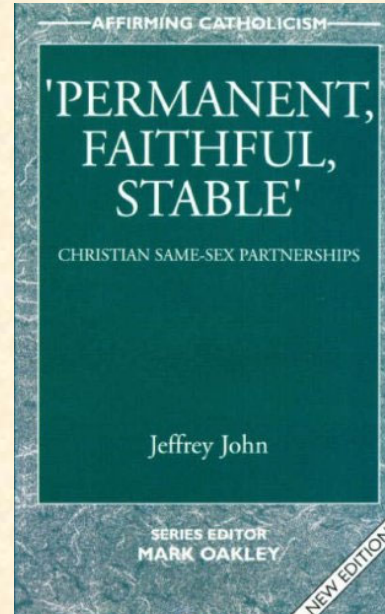
Classic Evangelical Response

Such macro-trajectories are misconstrued if taken to exonerate practices that Scripture more specifically condemns as sinful. This would undermine the authority and plenary inspiration of the Bible, and would raise serious problems for the doctrine of God with respect to divine constancy and/or immutability.

Refuters: Webb, Gagnon, Grant, O'Donovan

2. Thematic Revisionism

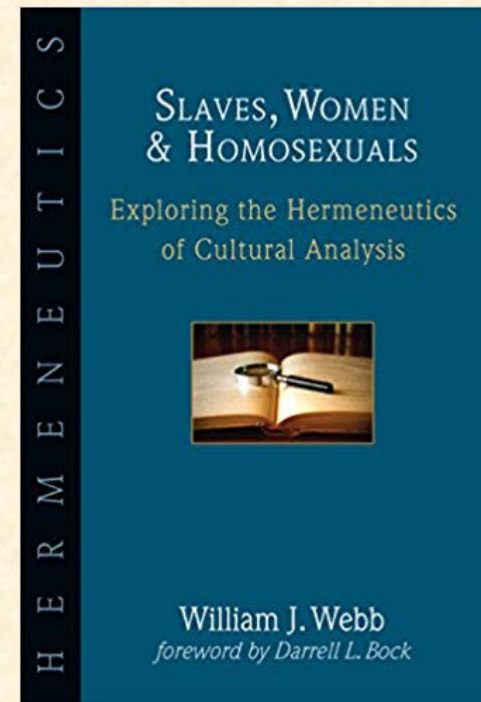
- Overarching biblical imperatives of love, justice, fidelity etc. as trumping 'homophobic' application of a few 'lobber texts'
- Analogies with hermeneutic re-evaluation of patriarchy and slavery



Resisting Thematic Revisionism: William Webb

‘The same canons of cultural analysis, which show a liberalising or less restrictive tendency in the slavery and women texts relative to the original culture, demonstrate a more restrictive tendency in homosexuality texts relative to the original culture... **There is no significant dissonance within the biblical data.**’

William Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*, p.250.



3. Canonical Revisionism

Revisionist Argument

Contested biblical texts *do* mean what they have traditionally been taken to mean: Scripture can be homophobic/transphobic. Yet those texts can be bracketed off as culturally captive to outmoded mores. All biblical application *de facto* deploys ‘canons within the canon’; biblical texts on sexuality and gender are no exception, and when uniformly condemnatory of homoerotic relations and trans identities, can be consigned to history. God can speak through contemporary culture as well as Scripture.

Advocates: Vio, Wink, MacCulloch, Johnson

Classic Evangelical Response

Unless specifically abrogated by later biblical texts, we have no right as Christians to ‘decommission’ culturally incongruent verses or passages. All Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16), and God’s Word stands forever (1 Pet. 1:25). In any case, subsequent cultural trends might deem such decommissioning misguided.

Refuters: Gagnon, Schmidt, Webb, Paul

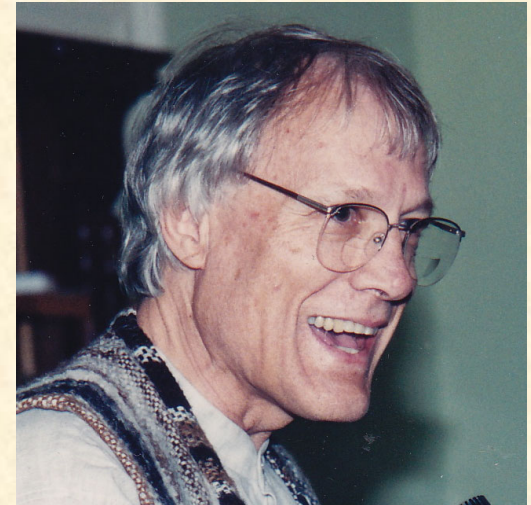
3. Canonical Revisionism

‘Where the Bible mentions homosexual behaviour at all, it clearly condemns it. I freely grant that. The issue is more precisely whether that biblical judgement is correct.’

Walter Wink, *Homosexuality and the Bible*. New York: Fellowship Bookstore, 1996.

‘I have little patience with efforts to make Scripture say something other than what it says, through appeals to linguistic or cultural subtleties...I think it is important to state clearly that we do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good.’

Luke Timothy Johnson,
<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/homosexuality>



4. Therapeutic Revisionism

Revisionist Argument

Overarching biblical imperatives of wholeness, healing and human flourishing must take precedence when LGBTQ+ people suffer illness, distress or suicidality through seeking to accord with classic Christian sexual morality. God would not want them to suffer; as such, they must be affirmed and supported in embracing an LGBTQ+ lifestyle or identity.

Advocates: Achtemeir, Vines, Chalke, Beeching

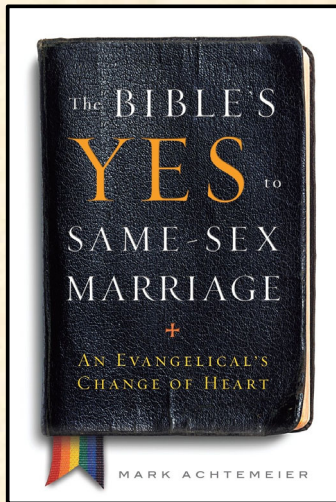
Classic Evangelical Response

This model **falls foul of a consequentialist ethical reasoning that presumes to associate humanistically-construed therapeutic 'ends' with divine intentions towards, and definitions of, wholeness/wellbeing** as defined in Scripture. It also aligns suffering too readily with virtue, when it can, in fact, be a corollary or outworking of sin. Christians, however, are called to care for those who suffer in any case.

Refuters: Butterfield, Hill Perry, Ould, Shaw

4. Therapeutic Revisionism

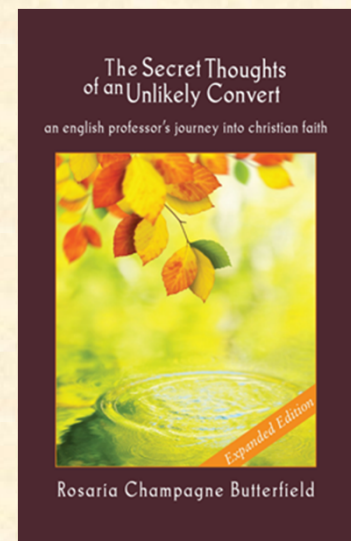
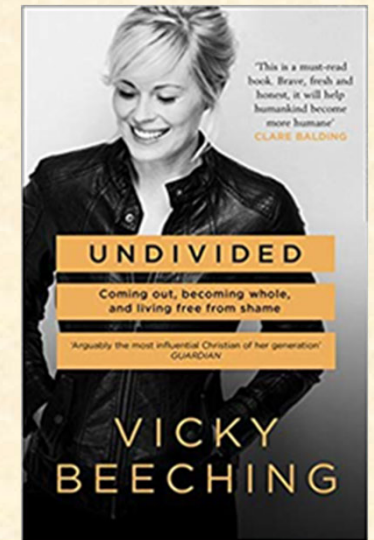
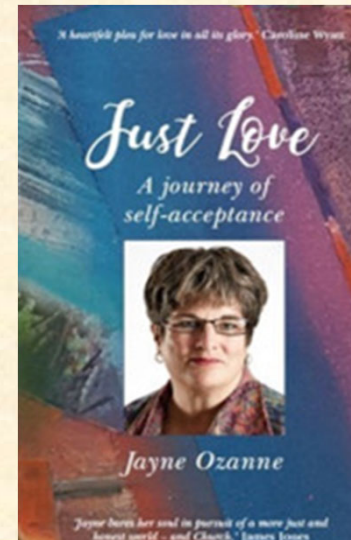
Mark Achtemeir on Kirsti



‘If a person’s life departs in a serious way from God’s will, one would not expect the result to be a flourishing spiritual commitment. John’s Gospel records Jesus’ clear teaching on this: ‘I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers...’ (John 15:5-6). Seeing Kirsti’s vibrant faith and strong commitment re-emerge as a result of her newfound openness made as deep an impression on me as her former despair. I couldn’t help wondering if this really was the path God intended for her... (pp.6-7).

4. Therapeutic Revisionism as Equivocally Consequentialist

- Pain and suffering on both 'sides':
 - Achtemeir, Beeching & Ozanne (Revisionist)
 - Hill Perry, Butterfield & Bennett (Classic)



5. Illuministic Revisionism

Revisionist Argument

God can directly speak to or otherwise directly convince people who might be LGBTQ+-oriented to embrace an LGBTQ+ lifestyle or identity.

Advocates: Ozanne, Beeching

Classic Evangelical Response

Present-day prophecies, visions, pictures, dreams and other theophanies can only be deemed divine if they accord with Scripture, which is superior in authority.

Refuters: Harrison, Grant

5. Illuministic Revisionsm



Vicky Beeching on Acts 10:

‘God was letting me in on a new perspective, one of radical acceptance and inclusion. “Do not call unclean what I have made clean” echoed around my head and heart. The person I’d always been—a gay person—was not something to be ashamed of. God accepted me and loved me, and my orientation was part of his grand design. There was nothing unclean about it, and nothing to run away from. Just as the Gentiles could fully join God’s family, now LGBTQ+ people could too.’

Undivided, pp. 170-72

5. Illuministic Revisionsm

Jayne Ozanne on charismatic
'awakening' to lesbian identity:

'...so much of my life to that point had been determined by 'the witness in my spirit' of what I believed was the Holy Spirit. I just 'knew in my knower' that some things were either right or wrong. It's what makes so many godly people, despite all the evidence they are presented with, continue to believe that same-sex relationships are wrong – they just say that 'they know'. So, my testimony here is that the moment I broke that homophobic spirit off me – the one spirit that I should always have had deliverance from – my inner spiritual life changed.'

Just Love, Kindle loc 3313-18



6. Intrad denominational Revisionism

Revisionist Argument

Biblical imperatives of bodily unity apply to local, national and international churches/denominations. To preserve this unity at a higher level, such churches/denominations might formally accommodate divergences on sexuality and gender between different congregations, networks and parties through such measures as local options, conscience clauses and alternative oversight.

Advocates: Green, Welby, Croft

Classic Evangelical Response

Such theological reasoning presumes that matters of sex, gender and marriage are 'secondary' by comparison with imperatives of ecclesial unity. Yet Jesus, took marriage to be at least as crucial to Christian community and society (Matt. 19: 1-12). Besides, the unity of a particular denomination is not the same as the unity of Christ's body/the Church as a whole.

'Agreeing to disagree' on a matter of core doctrinal orthodoxy is in any event a false prospectus.

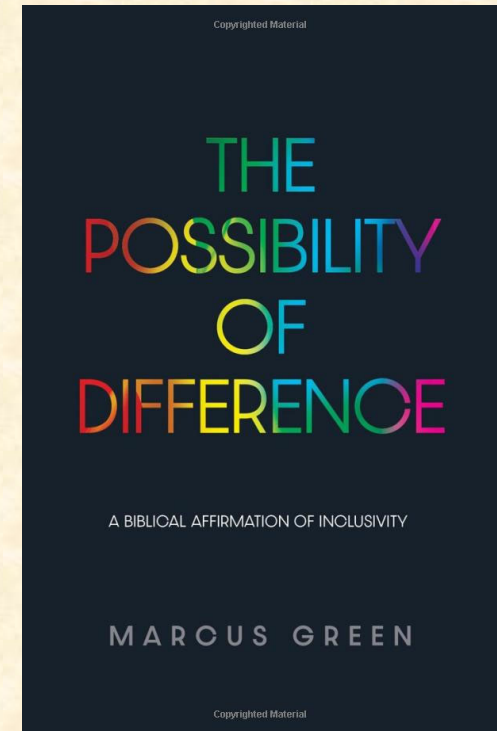
Refuters: GAFCON, CEEC

6. Intrad denominational Revisionism

Marcus Green after Justin Welby on 'Agreeing to Disagree'

Justin Welby's words are worth reading... 'If Christ's flock can more or less stay together, it's hope for a world that tears itself apart – a sign of what can happen with the love and the mercy of God through Jesus Christ.' In a world where everyone seems to hate everyone else, where political opponents are now enemies, where divisions are bigger than ever before, we in the Church have to hear those words of Archbishop Welby. We are all very different folk, but very much loved by the same Lord. This is the revolution. St Paul's revolution of the one new humanity in Christ. Now of all times is the time to live it out.

The Possibility of Difference: A Biblical Affirmation of Inclusivity, p.172.



6. Challenging Intrad denominational Revisionism: GAFCON

'[Some] propose that the way ahead for the Anglican Communion is to learn to walk together in 'good disagreement'. However, we reject the claim that two contradictory positions can both be valid in matters affecting salvation. **We cannot 'walk together' in good disagreement with those who have deliberately chosen to walk away from the 'faith once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 3).** The people of God 'walk in his ways', 'walk in the truth', and 'walk in the light', all of which require that we do not walk in Christian fellowship with those in darkness (Deuteronomy 8:6; 2 John 4; 1 John 1:7).'

Kigali Statement, Global Anglican Future Conference, April 2023





4. Conclusion: Imperatives

- The need to identify varied forms of revisionism
- The need to respond to different forms of revisionism with appropriate counter-arguments (2 Cor. 10:5)
- The need to engage in debate on sex and gender with theological integrity and pastoral grace

To Consider

- Is this framework of revisionist approaches to sexual ethics helpful for formulating classic evangelical responses?
- If so, are there any further types of revisionism that you think should be added to the framework?
- How have personally, and/or your church corporately, sought to navigate between 'welcome' of same-sex-attracted/LGBTQ+ people, and 'affirmation' of associated sexual behaviours?
- In what ways does this issue highlight the challenges faced by classic evangelicals in theologically 'mixed' denominations?

Questions

