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“Man, Don’t Feel Like a Woman”: Christian Scriptural Interpretations, the Binary Gender System, and How They Can Lead to Misogyny and Homophobia

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“Man, Don’t Feel Like a Woman”: Christian Scriptural Interpretations, the Binary Gender System, and How They Can Lead to Misogyny and Homophobia

Introduction

“I began running up steps two and three at a time, trying to get to manhood a little faster. You see, my father was a pastor who didn’t teach me that being a man meant fearing God, but that being a man meant being God, and being God meant fearing nothing.” –Joseph Capeheart, excerpt from “Wolves”

Unsatisfied with letting something or somebody just “be,” the human mind often finds labels, categories, and definitions comforting. An “other” must define and counter a “standard.” Gender in dominant Western culture has one other, the feminine, and one standard, the masculine. This binary system calls for obvious distinctions necessary to differentiate between the two, and as a consequence, discomfort and sometimes even violence result as a reaction to deviance from how one is understood in relation to the other. This can be a complicated subject for followers of Christianity—called to love their neighbors, while interpretations of scripture that insert contemporary social rule prohibit wandering far from the binary system. When the masculine is mixed with the feminine or vice versa, or when one believed to be masculine wants to express femininity, the neat dichotomous structure of gender fails, often followed by confusion and conflict. In some cases, Christian scripture is used to uphold the binary. Insisting these two ways are the

only ways to be human is not only limiting, but also damaging. Categorizing the female as the “other,” unable to be comprehended without a male, implies women are inferior. By casting women as inferior, a binary society by association casts men who “act like women” as lesser as well. Thus, misogyny and homophobia are linked. The belief the feminine is the antithesis to the masculine combine with Christian tradition and foundational interpretation of scripture to exacerbate these forms of oppression.

Part I

Laying the Groundwork: Interpretation of Scripture and its Effect on Gender

*“beyond the love that from beyond being
has come to us:*

*Christ's ever unhearable
and thus always too bearable
scream.*

*In love and dread we learn to listen
for beloved dread*

*coming upon us like a whiplash rain
we watch through a window.” –Christian Wiman, excerpt from “More Like the Stars”*

This investigation of the link between homophobia and misogyny in a Western, binary, predominantly Christian culture requires a mode in which to interpret Christian scripture.

Biblical scholars define different ways to read the Bible, one of them being Dale B.

Martin. Foundational interpretation of scripture, as defined by Martin, is as follows:

The text of the Bible is taken to be a relatively firm basis from which we can derive all sorts of knowledge, about doctrine or ethics, by simply reading the text and passively ‘hearing’ its message. The idea is that the text of the Bible is a stable, reliable source for certain kinds of knowledge... (Martin 2)

In his book *Sex and the Single Savior*, Martin both explores and deplors ideas that the Bible can act as an instruction manual, handing its readers step-by-step guides to a good, moral life (1-2). According to Martin, believing that the Bible is active in one's life, rather than passively interpreted, is a belief wrought with ignorance. Martin believes one cannot ignore the impacts of one's personal experience and immersion in a social and political society outside the realm of Christian scripture that may be impacting one's interpretation of said scripture (5). God's own voice is not rising from the Bible to tell all people the same message. "Nonfoundationalists," as Martin coins the group of people who believe in his hermeneutics, can find that the Bible can mean whatever one wants it to mean. All too often, this means an already firmly established dominant way of thinking can reinforce itself in American Christianity as well as other areas of culture and society. For the "others" in society, including women and those who deviate from the gender binary such as the LGBTQA+ community, this can result in Biblical backlash regarding their identities and modes of self-expression.

Margaret Farley takes Martin's hermeneutics a step further in her article "Feminist Consciousness and the Interpretation of Scripture." Like Martin, Farley takes issue with the usage of Biblical texts for teaching under the assumption that the text is free of the biases of the interpreter (Farley 52). Farley understands this view of scripture can not only unsettle but also dismantle entire foundations of Christian belief, rendering core values and beliefs for Christian individuals and institutions alike impossible to discern (52). In order to simultaneously believe in equality of different genders and study scripture, one must reform one's way of pulling philosophies from scripture. Farley suggests feminist thinkers operate with two principles in mind: "(1) the principle of equality (women and men are

equally fully human and are to be treated as such) and (2) the principle of mutuality (based on a view of human persons as embodied subjects, essentially relational as well as autonomous and free)” (53). Bringing these principles into their practice of Christianity, Farley suggests that feminists can bring meaning to Biblical texts that battle sexism and patriarchal ideals. Through a consciousness that perceives and rejects inequality found in conventional, patriarchal interpretations of scripture, new ideas recognizing women as fully human can be brought to Biblical texts (56). A feminist analysis and the scripture come together to form a nonfoundational interpretation of the Bible: the feminist recognizes she is the one speaking, using the Bible as a tool, as much as the oppressor uses the Bible as a tool against her full rights or humanity.

Though at first glance such a method may be trying to “use the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house,” that is not the case. Rather, nonfoundational hermeneutics invite an open dialogue versus an absolute truth. While lack of absolute truth may prove frustrating to many people, this openness to the unknown is essential for unpacking historically and socially rooted (and then Biblically reinforced) discrimination and hatefulness.

Part II

How Does a Foundational Reading of Scripture Lead to Misogyny?

*“You are a woman now
but you have always had skin.*

*Here are some ways in which
you are not free: the interiors*

*are all wrong, you are a drought
sprawling. When you see god*

you don’t like what you see.” –Morgan Parker, excerpt from “Everything Will Be Taken Away”

To a contemporary American Christian, God is referred to as one's "Father." God is a He, with a capital H. Many translations of the Bible used in contemporary American Christian churches refer to His will, His love, His way: His, He, Him. However, in her book that returns to the fourth century to learn more about God and God's gender, April D. DeConick asks one to think otherwise before viewing God as masculine or a man. DeConick writes in *Holy Misogyny: Why the Sex and Gender Conflicts in the Early Christian Church Still Matter*:

Gregory of Nyssa, another fourth-century theologian...suggests a way out of God's gender crisis. In a famous passage...of his commentary on the Song of Songs, he writes that both words "father" and "mother" must be understood to mean the same thing while referencing God. Why? Because the divine is neither male nor female.

(DeConick 37)

DeConick goes on to give other examples of the idea of the genderless or gender-fluid God in other fourth century interpretations, emphasizing how prevalently God's gender was not easily defined in the Latin or Hebrew languages of ancient scripture. She then notes, "A genderless God never became the norm, perhaps because humans find genderless entities difficult to relate to" (DeConick 37). From the discomfort of the dominant, standard group, it does not appear that in contemporary American Christianity there is much of a compromise to keep all genders represented. Instead, God is defaulted to the standard, a He. This makes men comfortable, more closely related to God, and the closest in proximity to God and God's image. This is a result not of the Bible "telling" anyone that God is male, but of patriarchy. One must note that patriarchy is itself a system, not just any acts of men (Johnson 25-26). Patriarchy affects contemporary Christian interpretations of scripture. Its

readers, immersed in Western patriarchal culture, place it onto the text, and that is how God is a “He.”

This is a major issue, affecting individual’s identities and self-images. It can perpetuate gender-based violence. Even on a subconscious level, patriarchal reading of scripture places women and those of genders besides male farther away from morality and humanity. Women and other genders are deemed less worthy of respect. James Newton Poling writes in “The Cross and Male Violence”:

Given the negative and conflicting images of women in many churches and their responsibility to be obedient to an all-loving Father God and his Son Jesus, Christian faith means...that the proper relationship of women to men is subservience, and that the traditional values of submission and obedience are the essence of Christian faith. (Poling 477).

Poling proposes these designated roles combined with a patriarchal God make it possible for male accountability for gender-based violence to soften or to justify violence towards women and children, since women are “supposed to” live under the authority of men (477). The giant, capital H He shadows the ideals of all-encompassing Christian love.

In his article “Patriarchy, the System: An It, Not a He, a Them, or an Us” Allan G. Johnson expounds the breadth of this shadow further, in both secular and religious contexts:

Going deeper into patriarchal culture, we find a complex web of ideas that define reality and what’s considered good or desirable. To see the world through patriarchal eyes is to believe that women and men are profoundly different in their basic natures, that hierarchy is the only alternative to chaos, and that men were

made in the image of a masculine God with whom they enjoy a special relationship (29-30).

God as masculine sets up readers of the Bible immediately with a patriarchal foundation of reading scripture, in which God is the Father and only the Father. Only He is capable of creation, judgment, unconditional love, self-sacrifice, mercy, etc. This language implies then that women and other genders are not as directly related to these qualities, that these qualities may not be innate to them as they are to men. Moreover, to define the male “standard,” God as masculine can also imply that women and other genders are in fact the opposite of these qualities.

The result of both a masculine God and a scriptural interpretation founded in patriarchy has multiple misogynistic effects. For example, 1 Timothy 2.12-15 reads:

I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

(New International Version, 1 Tim. 2.12-15).

Reading this passage without questioning a default masculine God reinforces the idea men are intellectually superior to women. Men (the Adams) are the standard models of humanity, and women, (the Eves) are the secondary models, further from God.

Not only that, but a foundational reading also indicates that the Bible is “saying” women should be submissive, and that women and men have specific roles they must fill—specifically, that women must be mothers. However, one can see that this foundationalism fails when the Bible appears to contradict itself in Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor

Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (New International Version, Gal. 3.28). Here, a reader of the Bible must admit that given a passage that succinctly defines men and women’s roles, and then given another passage that appears to abolish any construct of gender altogether, one cannot know for sure what is an absolute truth about the genders and how they should behave. Similarly, one may question whether gender exists innately, as one might believe them to in a contemporary, mainstream American cultural setting.

Therefore, one may ask what they are supposed to make of 1 Timothy 2:12-15 should they reject the idea that all women should be submissive mothers. In her article “Eve Through Several Lenses: Truth in 1 Timothy 2:8-15,” theologian Beverly J. Stratton invites her readers to navigate the Bible through a hermeneutic similar to Martin’s. Stratton calls upon Paul Hanson’s “hermeneutics of engagement”: “...Hanson proposes a communal, dynamic enterprise that recognizes the authority of Scripture by being committed to God’s purposes and by critically engaging with both tradition and issues of the contemporary world” (Stratton 271). In other words, both Stratton and Hanson believe readers of the Bible must first educate themselves the context in which passages were originally written, and take these contexts as history, not present, everlasting instruction. With this in mind, they then may also acknowledge the Bible is fluid in meaning. Its meaning can be shifted by readers to apply to a contemporary context in the best way they can see fit when it comes to loving one another. Stratton suggests the meaning of 1 Timothy 2:12-15 in a contemporary context can be the following:

Perhaps the time has come to consider...what the community should do to live quiet and peaceable lives...we need to shift the emphasis in our interpretations of this

passage and perform a more imaginative reading of the text. Instead of denying women's teaching and mandating their submission, we need men to lift their holy hands in prayer, rather than abusing their partners. Moderation and appreciation of our bodies should be our aim, rather than the display of women as 'trophy wives', or their use as seductive advertising temptresses. The good works...should be understood as providing an education for girls and boys of all races that improves their self-images and encourages everyone to speak and think creatively...Women, in this most troublesome verse, can be understood not only as bearers of those beloved miracles, children born from our bodies. Rather...we are also teachers and examples to beloved and true children...of faith. (Stratton 272-273)

For one to reject the gender binary is to think more creatively about one's life as a human being. Rejecting a system of "women are like this" and "men are like that" is not to reject the Bible and Christianity, but to understand and grow more comfortable with the idea that Bible verses are not deeply rooted in some sort of absolute meaning, but flow alongside of people and where they exist in time. People can then apply verses to particular problems of their time, as Stratton suggests. In the passage of her article above, Stratton argues it is not right to silence women, as a foundational interpreter may glean from 1 Timothy 2:12-15, but for communities of Christians to recognize women's specific pain resulting from gender-based violence and objectification, and work together to eradicate abuse and hyper-sexualization.

However, like Martin's nonfoundationalism, Hanson's "hermeneutics of engagement" may provide one with frustrations concerning scriptural ambiguity. One can however concretely determine the negative effects that patriarchy, the valuing of the

masculine over the feminine, does to all genders. In order to maintain a patriarchal system that the Bible can be used both to support and refute, everyone suffers. In her article, “The Cult of Virginitly,” Jessica Valenti describes American culture’s tendency to connect a woman’s virginitly with her morality:

Present-day American society—whether through pop culture, religion, or institutions—conflates sexuality and morality constantly. Idolizing virginitly as a stand-in for women’s morality means that nothing else matters—not what we accomplish, not what we think, not what we care about and work for. Just if/how/whom we have sex with. That’s all. (Valenti 142).

Valenti goes on to point out that in a religious context, women often refer to their decision not to have sex as “saving themselves” for marriage (142). This expression in itself is troubling, and reinforces what Valenti asserts—women are literally referring to their virginitly as “themselves,” implying that the entirety of their being is their decisions about sex.

Christians may turn to scripture to try and craft sexual ethics based on their religion, but as one can note through the writings of Martin and Stratton, a *sola scriptura* argument is difficult to build. For example, 1 Peter 3:1-2 reads, “Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives” (New International Version, 1 Peter 3.1-2). In this contemporary culture, it is easy for people to see the word “purity” and immediately assign the term to a woman’s virginitly. To condense a much larger discussion: Patriarchy simultaneously demands that for a woman to be worthy of respect, she is to be asexual, and

for a woman to be worthy of attention, she is to be overtly sexual. It makes sense that Christianity then, attempting to be driven by love and devotion to God, but also influenced by secular culture, wants women to seek respect rather than attention. However, this just contributes to an overall culture that attributes a woman's worth to her virginity or lack thereof.

Valenti points out that "virginity" itself is an indefinable social construction rooted in heteronormativity, and that it is also unequally associated with women when it takes both a man and a woman to engage in heterosexual sex (140). Nonetheless, a woman's "purity" is both praised and policed in secular and religious spheres. Specifically in Christianity, scripture such as 1 Peter 3 may be aimed at young girls to enforce cultural expectations of young women. This, as Dale Martin would agree, would be done under the false assumption that "God says" women (or those of any gender) must remain chaste. However, even if it is true that God wants people to remain chaste before marriage, foundational interpretations of Christian scripture still contribute to a culture that unfairly places emphasis on *women's* sexual choices as a mark of their merit, versus stressing equal accountability among all genders to remain abstinent. Passages such as 1 Peter 3 may be used to perpetuate such inequality and sexism. Aforementioned, one may see the word "purity" in the text and immediately think the term relates to sexuality. However, the Bible verse continues as follows:

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in

God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. (New International Version, 1 Peter 3.3-5).

The author of this passage does not mention sex or sexuality. Rather, he follows up his reference to a woman's purity by discussing how she chooses to present herself. In these verses, modesty is not related to sex, but rather wealth, and how a woman must place her value in her spirit, not her outward appearance and how fancy or elaborate she can look with clothes and jewelry. Therefore, one may ask how the word purity gets conflated with sexuality so often within the Christian church. The answer lies in Western culture's patriarchal influence that permeates all institutions. Patriarchy fears the "others" (women's) sexuality and seeks to control it in order to calm this apprehension. Christianity in and of itself does not necessarily do so. Therefore followers of Christianity must be cognizant about the influence social and cultural norms outside of scripture affect readings and interpretations of the Bible.

According to patriarchal ideals, man is closer to God. One must have an understanding how Western patriarchal culture and Christianity combine to influence the way one reads and interprets scripture. There is scripture refuting that men are closer to God, as well as ample evidence that God Godself is not a gendered being, yet it remains that women in many Christian communities are not granted the same rights as men. Misogyny is prevalent in Western culture and has the capacity to be exaggerated within Christianity, specifically through foundational interpretations of the Bible. Women are more closely judged than men based on their sexuality and appearances rather than their character and abilities, and patriarchy is prevalent enough that this judgment exists in Christian spheres under the guise of "God's Word." Also, through this patriarchal system, all other genders

outside man and woman are erased. Men and women and all people have designated, gendered traits limiting their abilities to comfortably act as full humans with full ranges of emotions and desires.

Part III

How Does Patriarchal-Constructed Misogyny within Christianity Lead to Homophobia?

“Lie to yourself about this and you will forever lie about everything.

Everybody already knows everything

so you can lie to them. That's what they want.

But lie to yourself, what you will

lose is yourself. Then you turn into them.

*

For each gay kid whose adolescence

was America in the forties or fifties the primary, the crucial

scenario

forever is coming out— or not. Or not. Or not. Or not. Or not.

*

Thank you, terror!

You learned early that adults' genteel fantasies about human life

were not, for you, life. You think sex

is a knife driven into you to teach you that.” –Frank Bidart, excerpt from “Queer”

When a man is homosexual, he may perform passive sexuality as the archetypal woman would. He is consequently scorned, most vehemently by other men, because this man is freely denying the privilege of his closer proximity to God. He is also admonished concerning his sexuality because he is “making himself more like a woman” in the heterosexual model of sex by being penetrated instead of the penetrator.

So far, this investigation of Biblical interpretation and misogyny has determined that men as the “standard” and women as the “other” may be imposed on Christian scripture through secular patriarchal culture. No interpretation of scripture is free of one’s perceived ideas of a society in which they live that may be unrelated to God and God’s will. Thus, if one is willing to question the validity of the gender binary within a Christian context, it is also worth exploring the legitimacy of homophobia in the same realm.

Dale B. Martin grapples with heterosexism and homophobia in his book *Sex and the Single Savior*. In a chapter titled, “Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32” Martin writes, “My purpose is not to argue that Paul approves of homosexual sex or would consider it acceptable behavior for Christians. I will demonstrate, however, that modern scholars are being disingenuous or self-deluding when they claim that their position—the heterosexist position—is simply an appropriation of ‘the biblical view’” (Martin 51). Martin defines heterosexism as a system that encourages the view that “heterosexuality is the normative form of human sexuality. It is the measure by which all other sexual orientations are judged” (Jung and Smith qtd. Martin 51).

Martin writes not to prove the opposite of the widely held view that homosexuality is a sin, but rather to propose that there is a grey area, not a simple “right” or “wrong” when it comes to complex human sexuality. He cites what he believes many of his fellow scholars

believe homosexuality to be: “Homosexuality is no more (but no less) than a symptom of the depravity of all human nature due to humanity’s rebellion against God” (Martin 52).

Martin does not agree with this assessment, suggesting that it is a lazy interpretation that fits too well into contemporary cultural fears of homosexuality. An excerpt from the Biblical passage Martin discusses is as follows:

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. (New International Version, Romans 1:24-27)

When reading this passage, Martin warns, “...it is a mistake to read into these comments the kind of modernist dichotomy between homosexual and heterosexual desire, in which a difference in kind—between an unnatural, abnormal desire and a natural, normal desire—is assumed” (Martin 56). Martin further argues room for ambiguity in Romans 1—the sin Paul is referring to is not explicitly the fact that there are same-sex relations, but rather people are engaging in excess of sexual desire. Martin asserts “Degree of passion, rather than object choice, was the defining factor of desire,” (57) and the same-sex relations Paul refers to are considered unnatural “not because they have perverted desires...but because they have indulged their desires to excess, thus losing control of them” (57). Martin’s

alternative interpretation of Romans 1 opens the Christian discourse on the morality of homosexuality wider, allowing scholars and followers of Christianity alike to question literal, foundational readings of the Bible of homosexuality as sin. His analysis makes it possible for Christians to consider their definition of homosexuality as a sin may not be what Paul is referring to in Romans I.

However, Martin pushes contemporary Christian convention even further from its comfort zone by going on to state that Paul could also very well be condemning men who prefer to have sex with men rather than women. Martin asserts that Paul may believe this because Paul is a product of a patriarchal, misogynist society (59). The Bible is not exempt from critique because it was not written in a vacuum. Every passage was written in its own original social and societal context. Paul may believe that homosexuality is unnatural because he is steeped in Greco-Roman culture, an Aristotelian culture that widely believed: "A man's desire to be penetrated was considered unnatural because he thereby renounced his natural position of male superiority and honor: his desire frustrated the gender hierarchy of 'nature'" (58). Similar to how it is defined in modern American culture, Martin theorizes Paul condemned homosexual behavior based on his own internalized beliefs. These beliefs being women are the "other" the inferior, and men are the "standard," the superior. He is uncomfortable with his constructions of gender being challenged. This discomfort may have lead him to place his own preconceived notions about gender into his writings, therefore condemning a sexuality that Christians can not be sure that God Godself disapproves of.

The "love the sinner, hate the sin" "Christian" approach to homosexuality is rooted in misogyny. When examined beyond the surface level, the discomfort, fear and backlash

towards homosexuality is less about private sex acts and more about the disruption of gender roles and the gender binary. Martin expands on these ideas in a chapter in *Sex and the Single Savior* called “*Arsenokoites and Malakos: Meanings and Consequences.*” He returns to original translations of Paul’s condemnation of homosexual behavior and points out Paul condemns those who are “*malakos,*” which can be translated to effeminate. Martin writes, “The real problem with being penetrated was that it implicated the man was feminine, and *malakos* referred not to the penetration per se but to the perceived aspects of femaleness associated with it. The word *malakos* refers to the entire ancient complex of the devaluation of the feminine” (47). The writers of the Bible are not free from the influence of the circumstances in which they were raised, and Paul is no exception. Paul grew up in a culture that viewed the feminine as lesser to the masculine. The worst position a man could put himself in was that of the woman: the penetrated, the sexually dominated, the second-class citizen.

In regards to contemporary society, that principle of misogyny from Paul’s time remains. A majority of the insults men can hurl at another are female gendered: pussy, sissy, cunt, bitch. The feminine is feared and hated, and as mentioned previously, female sexuality is placed behind closed doors, closely policed and regulated. To read the Bible and not ask oneself if the writer could be coming from a place of hatred or fear of the feminine is to perpetuate patriarchy and a patriarchal God. While Martin or any other theologian may not have concrete answers about the morality of homosexuality, an undeniable link exists between homophobia and misogyny as demonstrated by the very existence of the word *malakos* and its negative connotation in Greco-Roman society.

In her article “Misogyny and Homophobia: The Unexplored Connections” Beverly W. Harrison takes the stance that the Bible is anti-body. This means in contemporary American Christian culture, to be a good follower of God one must deny their sinful, bodily desires (these being over-indulgence in passions such as sex, food; passion for anything that is not focused on God and the afterlife) (Harrison 331). Utilizing Harrison’s “anti-body” interpretation, if one applies secular ancient Greco-Roman beliefs about men and women to Christianity, one finds that men are “closer” to God and less predisposed to sin: Men are associated with rationality and the mind, women are correlated with the body and the earth (hence the expression “Mother Earth”). Because homosexual sex is not procreative, it must be an act motivated by passion, bodily desire. Thus, Harrison suggests, “Homosexuality then becomes a metaphor for active, freely expressed sexuality” (332). If sin equals excess of passion, as Martin suggests Paul proclaims, then surely homosexuality is sinful. Not only because it is an excess of passion, but also because excess of passion and lack of rational thinking are assigned to the feminine. Sin is associated with being female, accordingly explaining homosexuality’s particularly vehement backlash in contemporary *misogynistic* Western culture. No one sees protesters standing with picket signs that say “God hates divorcees” even though many interpretations of scripture have determined divorce as sinful. But one does see signs at protests reading “God hates fags” because for a man to put himself in the role of a woman is appalling in social, societal, and religious contexts all at once.

Viewed as individuals, not all homosexual men are effeminate. On the contrary, regardless of their interests, outward expression, and personality traits, they will be written off as effeminate due to their desire to be in sexual relationships with other men.

Ronald E. Long writes in his article “The Sacrality of Male Beauty and Homosex,” “Unfortunately, to the extent the assimilation of gay and feminist perspectives tends to root homophobia in a devaluation of the feminine, profeminist gay thought perpetuates that old stereotype of the gay man as effeminate queen” (Long 406). However, one could argue perspectives conflating homophobia and misogyny do not perpetuate this stereotype, but rather that the stereotype is borne out of narrow views of what is “feminine” and “masculine.” Related to this debate, Harrison writes:

Homoerotic men are perceived as failed men, no better than females. The widespread but empirically mistaken equation of male homosexuality with effeminacy is further evidence that the stigma of male homosexuality involves association with females and the “feminine.” Though any connection between homoeroticism and “effeminate” personality characteristics has been totally discredited through social scientific research, the stereotype persists tenaciously in the nongay community. (Harrison 334-335)

Harrison insists “By conforming rigidly to ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ roles, we learn, at a foundational level, to tolerate inequality” (339). Here, one can see how the gender binary damages and insults the ability for humans to be complex, existing outside of culturally or historically assigned labels.

Conclusion

While one cannot be sure whether God condemns or approve the gender binary, one can see the harm and oversimplification it places onto to men, women, and all genders. Sex is feared, bodily desire is entrenched in guilt, the feminine is consciously and unconsciously deemed weak, and no one can determine where God’s influence ends and begins regarding

all of these topics, and where imperfect human influence ends and begins among these subjects as well. It may be frustrating for one not to have absolute truths and definitions at hand, but such is the nature of texts written by people. Perspective and bias never cease influencing people's writings, and the misogynistic histories of ancient Greco-Roman and contemporary Western culture provide possible explanations for the rampant homophobia and misogyny that continue today.

In order to move away from a hateful society, and by association, a hateful Christianity, one must first admit that scripture is contextual. The writers of the Bible did not sit in bubbles, away from society and its influences. This means societal norms of the writers affect the scripture. As scripture is internally affected by social context, it is then externally affected by social context when contemporary readers of the Bible find scripture showing support for their specific social norms. This why in practice, though Christianity attempts to be based in love for all people, misogyny and homophobia prevail in Christian domains. The first step towards more loving social and cultural norms and attitudes is admitting that what is presumably the Word of God is both written and interpreted by flawed humans, not God Godself. At the least, entertaining notions and wrestling with ideas that perhaps homosexuality is not a sin, and that women and men do not have to fill roles and traits simply because of the chromosomes they were born with, is a good place to start when it comes to creating a more harmonious, loving society. Perhaps this is what God intended all along. An unending challenge of convention and truth, motivated by love.

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