

HOMOSEXUALITY AND RELIGIOUS FAITH IN COMBAT: X-RAYING THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS THERAPIES

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Abstract

Homosexuality and religious faith in combat: X-raying the socio-religious therapies stands as the subject matter of this research. Homosexuality is an abominable form of sexual intercourse between male and male or female and female. This research investigates the longstanding conflict between homosexuality and religious faith, analyzing both the historical roots and modern impacts of this clash within religious and homosexual communities. Traditional doctrines in major religions, including Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, have generally viewed homosexuality as incompatible with their teachings. These views, reinforced over centuries, have influenced societal attitudes, leading to exclusion, discrimination, and significant personal struggles for homosexual individuals who seek to reconcile their sexual orientation with their religious beliefs. The consequences are profound, affecting mental health and well-being, as homosexual individuals experience stigmatization, familial rejection, and internalized conflict within religious settings. To address these challenges, this paper explores remedies aimed at fostering reconciliation, acceptance, and support for homosexual individuals within religious contexts. Theological reinterpretation by progressive scholars advocates for new interpretations of scripture that embrace inclusivity and compassion. Counseling services and support groups offer resources that respect both faith and identity, while interfaith dialogues encourage understanding and shared values across diverse communities. Policy changes and anti-discrimination laws further support homosexual rights, prompting religious institutions to reconsider exclusive practices. Through these paths, faith and homosexual identity can coexist harmoniously, creating a more inclusive and compassionate future for all. This research utilized books, journals, internet sources, etc and employed the analytical method. It recommends that religious bodies should help in the transformation process of homosexuals since they are helpless and need a loving and caring community.

Keywords: Faith, Homosexuality, Interfaith, Reinterpretation, Religious

Introduction

Homosexuality and religious faith are two aspects of human identity that often intersect with great complexity, particularly in communities or regions where religious beliefs form a central pillar of cultural and social life. Around the world, many individuals who are identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) face unique challenges when their sexual orientation conflicts with the teachings of their faith. In religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, traditional interpretations of sacred texts often portray homosexuality as incompatible with the ideals of spiritual purity, family structure, or moral conduct. These religious doctrines have historically influenced societal attitudes toward homosexuals, often leading to marginalization, discrimination, and even criminalization of homosexuality in certain cultures. For homosexuals within religious communities, the struggle to reconcile these identities can lead to profound internal conflicts, strained family relationships, and broader social isolation.

In recent years, the clash between homosexuality and religious beliefs has taken on new dimensions as homosexual rights movements gain momentum worldwide. As society increasingly advocates for inclusivity and equality, religious institutions face a dilemma: how to maintain the tenets of their faith while acknowledging the rights and identities of homosexual individuals. This conflict is visible across both secular and religious settings, with religious groups differing widely in their responses. While some religious communities resist changes to long-standing beliefs, others actively seek ways to reinterpret or evolve their doctrines in support of inclusivity. This ongoing conflict between sexuality and faith raises questions about how individuals, communities, and institutions can find pathways to understanding, respect, and even reconciliation.

Biblical condemnation of same-sex acts reflects ancient cultural norms rather than an eternal moral principle, and he advocates for an inclusive reading of scripture (Vines, 2014). Religious

doctrines on homosexuality vary considerably, with some traditions maintaining strict prohibitions while others adopt more nuanced or inclusive interpretations. In Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, traditional teachings have often condemned homosexuality, yet modern re-evaluations are increasingly shaping new paths toward acceptance. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Indigenous beliefs generally exhibit greater tolerance, though acceptance levels vary based on cultural contexts. Understanding these diverse religious perspectives provides essential context for analyzing the complex relationship between religious beliefs and homosexual identities, which will be further explored in this research.

Religious Views on Homosexuality

Throughout history, major religious traditions have largely condemned homosexuality, shaping the attitudes and policies of societies in ways that persist today. While interpretations and practices vary across and even within religions, most religious doctrines have traditionally considered homosexual behavior to be morally incompatible with religious ideals of family, sexuality, and purity.

In Christianity, the dominant historical stance on homosexuality has been negative, with particular passages in the Bible frequently cited as evidence. Leviticus 18:22, for example, labels homosexual acts as an “abomination,” and Leviticus 20:13 prescribes severe punishment. The Apostle Paul’s letters, especially in Romans 1:26–27, also condemn homosexual acts as “unnatural,” presenting such behavior as a departure from God’s will. These verses have profoundly shaped Christian views, leading many Christian denominations to prohibit homosexual relationships or consider them sinful. However, interpretations vary, with some modern denominations re-examining these passages. For instance, scholars like Matthew Vines (as cited in Brownson, 2013), argue that biblical references to homosexuality should be

understood in their ancient cultural context, which differs significantly from contemporary understandings of sexual orientation.

In Islam, traditional views on homosexuality are also conservative, rooted in the teachings of the Quran and Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). Several verses in the Quran (e.g., Surah Al-A'raf 7:80-84) recount the story of the people of Lot, often interpreted as a condemnation of homosexual behavior. Islamic jurists have historically classified homosexual acts as sinful and have prescribed punishments ranging from fines to severe penalties under Sharia law, depending on the school of jurisprudence and historical period. However, like in Christianity, contemporary interpretations of Islamic scripture vary. According to Kugle (2014), these verses may not necessarily apply to consensual same-sex relationships as understood today. The Quran does not explicitly address consensual same-sex relationships as they are understood today. Kugle (2010) viewed that homosexuality in Islam suggests that the Quranic condemnation of the people of Lot focuses on issues like lust, inhospitality, and violence, rather than on consensual, loving relationships between individuals of the same gender. This is a very strong argument on the issue of homosexuality and religious acceptance.

Social Attitude towards Homosexuality

Religious teachings have not only shaped theological views on homosexuality but have also significantly influenced societal attitudes across historical periods and cultures. In regions where religious authority intertwined with governance, religious beliefs became embedded in social norms and legal codes, often leading to widespread stigmatization and criminalization of homosexuality. In 2006, the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly issued a ruling allowing same-sex relationships and ordination of homosexual rabbis, though individual congregations retain

autonomy in their practices. This approach reflects the Conservative movement's commitment to both tradition and contemporary ethical values, (Herdt & Howe, 2007).

In medieval Europe, Christian doctrine heavily influenced laws and social attitudes toward homosexuality. Homosexual acts were criminalized under laws enacted by Christian rulers and were punishable by severe penalties, including imprisonment or death. This condemnation of homosexuality persisted through the Middle Ages and the early modern period, where acts perceived as morally deviant were harshly punished, particularly in Christian states, (Vines, 2014).

In Islamic societies, traditional interpretations of Sharia law shaped legal and social norms around sexuality, often leading to the criminalization of homosexual acts. Many Muslim-majority countries maintain laws prohibiting homosexuality, influenced by both religious teachings and colonial-era legal codes that were often retained post-independence. In certain Islamic societies, homosexuality remains highly stigmatized, with punishments ranging from imprisonment to, in extreme cases, the death penalty. However, societal attitudes vary, with some countries and regions adopting more lenient approaches, particularly where secular governance coexists with religious influence. In Orthodox communities, traditional views on homosexuality often result in stigmatization and exclusion of homosexuals, (The Interfaith Alliance, 2020).

Homosexuality and Religious Faith in Modern Society

As society has shifted toward greater secularization and advocacy for human rights, attitudes toward homosexuals have evolved significantly, often coming into conflict with traditional religious beliefs. While secular movements have championed homosexual rights, some religious groups continue to resist these changes, holding on to doctrines that view homosexuality as incompatible with their faith. The 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed significant

secularization in many parts of the world, as well as a growing emphasis on individual rights and freedoms. Secular movements have played a pivotal role in advancing homosexual rights by advocating for separation of religious doctrine from civil law and emphasizing the importance of human rights and equality.

1. Secularization and Legal Reforms:

As societies have become more secular, laws based on religious morality have increasingly been re-evaluated and, in many cases, removed from the legal system. In the United States, for example, the landmark 2003 Supreme Court case *Lawrence v. Texas* struck down laws criminalizing homosexual conduct, setting a precedent for the legal recognition of homosexual rights. This case marked a significant shift in how the law approached issues of personal morality, reflecting secular values of privacy and equality over religiously motivated prohibitions, (Keshet, 2018). Similarly, in countries like the United Kingdom and Canada, secular values have influenced the decriminalization of homosexuality, marriage equality, and anti-discrimination protections. These changes highlight the shift from religious-based law to secular legal frameworks that prioritize individual freedoms and equality for homosexuals.

2. Human Rights Movements and Homosexual Advocacy:

Human rights movements have been instrumental in promoting homosexual rights by framing discrimination based on sexual orientation as a violation of fundamental human rights. Organizations like Amnesty International, the Human Rights Campaign, and Out Right Action International advocate for homosexual rights globally, often challenging laws that are based on religious beliefs, (Johnson & Vanderbeck, 2014). In the international arena, bodies such as the United Nations have increasingly recognized homosexual rights as human rights. The UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been used to advocate for the decriminalization of

homosexuality worldwide, underscoring the principle that all individuals are entitled to dignity and equality. This secular human rights framework is instrumental in challenging laws in regions where religious beliefs continue to shape negative attitudes toward homosexuals.

3. Public Opinion and Cultural Shifts:

Secularization has also led to changing cultural norms, particularly in Western societies, where public opinion on homosexual issues has become more favorable. This shift is reflected in media representation, educational initiatives, and the rise of pride movements, all of which have helped normalize diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. This cultural shift is particularly evident among younger generations, who are generally more accepting of homosexuals and less influenced by traditional religious teachings. As secular values become more mainstream, these changes further reinforce acceptance and inclusion, (Greenberg, 2004).

Religious Resistance to Social Change

Despite the growing secular acceptance of homosexual rights, many religious groups continue to resist these changes, often based on doctrinal teachings that regard homosexuality as abomination, sinful or morally unacceptable. This resistance manifests in both public opposition to homosexual rights and internal policies that uphold traditional beliefs on sexuality.

1. Opposition to Marriage Equality:

One of the most visible forms of religious resistance to homosexual rights is opposition to marriage equality. In the United States, for example, conservative Christian organizations like the Family Research Council and Alliance Defending Freedom have actively lobbied against same-sex marriage. They argue that marriage should remain defined as a union between one man and one woman, based on their interpretation of biblical teachings, (Dehlin, Galliher, Bradshaw & Crowell, 2015). In countries with strong religious influence, such as Russia and many Muslim-

majority nations, marriage equality is not recognized, and religious authorities often lead the opposition. In these societies, religious beliefs are often intertwined with national identity, and opposition to homosexual rights is seen as a defense of cultural and moral values.

2. Conversion Therapy and "Reparative" Ministries:

Some religious groups promote conversion therapy, a practice that claims to “cure” homosexuals of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Organizations like Exodus International, before its closure in 2013, advocated for conversion therapy based on Christian teachings. Similarly, some Islamic and Orthodox Jewish groups have promoted conversion therapy practices in an attempt to align homosexuals with traditional religious norms. Conversion therapy has been widely criticized by Medical and Psychological Associations as ineffective and harmful. Despite these condemnations, certain religious groups continue to support such practices, viewing them as a means to “redeem” homosexuals from what they perceive as sinful behavior, (Barnard & Curry, 2012).

3. Religious Exemptions and Anti-Discrimination Laws:

In response to expanding homosexual rights, some religious groups have sought exemptions from anti-discrimination laws, arguing that being compelled to accept homosexuals violates their religious freedom. In the United States, for instance, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) has been used to defend businesses and religious organizations that refuse to serve homosexuals on religious grounds. This debate over religious exemptions highlights the tension between freedom of religion and the rights of homosexuals. Proponents argue that religious institutions should not be forced to act against their beliefs, while opponents maintain that religious freedom should not justify discrimination, (The World Council of Churches. (2022).

Implications for Homosexuals in a Socio-Religious Context

For homosexuals, family is often the first source of identity and support. However, when families hold conservative religious beliefs that denounce or marginalize homosexual identities, individuals may experience isolation, guilt, and internalized shame.

1. Internalized Shame and Religious Guilt:

Homosexuals from religious backgrounds frequently grapple with internalized shame, especially if their religious teachings label homosexuality as immoral, abominable or sinful. This internal conflict is often referred to as "cognitive dissonance," where the individual's personal identity is in direct opposition to religious beliefs. Research shows that this dissonance can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, and worthlessness, Barnes & Meyer (as cited in Barnard & Curry, 2012). Religious teachings can amplify these feelings, especially when homosexuals try to reconcile their identity with their faith. Some may attempt to change their orientation through prayer or counseling, hoping to "resolve" the dissonance. However, research shows that these attempts, often labeled "conversion therapy," can have detrimental effects on mental health, leading to increased anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

2. Family Rejection and Acceptance Struggles:

Homosexuals may also face significant challenges within their families, especially when coming out to parents or relatives with conservative religious beliefs. Family rejection, whether in the form of direct exclusion or indirect disapproval, has been associated with increased risks of substance abuse, depression, and even suicide (Ryan et al., 2009). Many homosexuals from religious families are at risk of being disowned or forced into environments that prioritize religious teachings over acceptance. Homosexuals whose families offer some level of acceptance, there is often a long period of negotiation, where family members attempt to balance

their beliefs with their love for their child. This negotiation can create an ongoing sense of tension and instability for the individual.

3. Pressure to Conform or Remain Closeted:

Many homosexuals raised in religious families face pressure to conform to heterosexual norms or remain closeted. This may manifest as pressure to pursue heterosexual relationships, attend religious counseling, or keep their orientation hidden. Hiding one's sexual orientation or gender identity can have long-term effects on self-esteem and identity development, leading to issues with self-worth and chronic stress (Herek et al., 1999).

4. Exclusion from Community Life:

Homosexuals often experience exclusion from religious practices and community life, including leadership roles, religious education, and sacraments like marriage. In Christian denominations, for example, many congregations limit LGBTQ+ participation, sometimes refusing membership or religious rites such as baptism for same-sex couples, (Boswell, 2024). This exclusion can lead to feelings of alienation and a sense of unworthiness. Homosexuals may struggle to find a sense of belonging in communities that reject their identity, often leading them to distance themselves from their faith entirely.

5. Discrimination in Religious Organizations and Schools:

Discrimination within religious organizations and schools is common, particularly in environments that uphold strict moral codes. Many LGBTQ+ students and employees in religious schools' face expulsion or termination based on their sexual orientation, creating an environment where they must choose between expressing their identity or being a part of their faith community Higa et al., (cited in Ryan et al., 2009). The secular educational arm of the church should be fortified with sound moral teachings, to meet children and youth needs. The

contemporary youth is such that is overly exposed through information & Communication Technology (ICT), to many things. Unless thorough teaching of the word of God is incorporated into their secular educational system, youths and children would be misinformed on the issue of homosexuality, and they would be overly expose and indulge in the practice. Youths should be made to understand potential threats and dangers posed by their indulging in homosexual practices. The danger inculcates such, affecting self and relationship between others and with God, (Onotere & Ufuoma, 2024).

6. Stigmatization and Social Ostracism:

Homosexuals in religious settings often face a form of social ostracism known as “shunning,” where community members avoid or exclude them based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. And this identity can be demeaning if not well guided (Okon and Ogbodo, 2022). In conservative communities, being openly homosexuals can lead to ostracism at social gatherings, public events, or within neighborhood networks, often leading individuals to feel isolated and disconnected. Stigmatization can manifest in indirect ways, such as gossip, avoidance, or silence on homosexual issues within the community. This creates a culture of unspoken discrimination, where LGBTQ+ individuals feel marginalized and unsupported. The fear of ostracism can lead to self-censorship, where individuals suppress their identity to avoid conflict or exclusion.

Mental Health Impacts on Homosexuals

The mental health consequences of homosexuals living within unsupportive religious environments shows the increased prevalence of depression, anxiety, and suicidal cases.

1. Increased Rates of Depression and Anxiety:

Homosexuals in conservative religious settings are more likely to experience higher rates of depression, higher levels of psychological distress and anxiety. The experience where individuals

face chronic stress due to societal stigma and prejudice, is particularly intense for LGBTQ+ individuals within religious communities. This stress is exacerbated by the added pressure to reconcile religious beliefs with personal identity, which can lead to persistent feelings of guilt and shame. This culminates in high risk of suicidal and self-harm. These feelings are often compounded by isolation and lack of access to supportive networks or mental health services, creating a cycle of distress that can be difficult to escape.

2. Family Rejection and Internalized Homophobia Impacts:

Family rejection has been identified as a major risk factor for poor mental health among LGBTQ+ youth. Studies by the Family Acceptance Project reveal that LGBTQ+ youth rejected by religious families are at significantly higher risk of depression, substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts (Ryan et al., 2009). Internalized homophobia, or the internalization of negative societal and religious beliefs about one's sexuality, is another significant mental health issue. homosexuals who internalize these beliefs may experience self-hatred, low self-esteem, and self-destructive behaviors, all of which contribute to poor mental health outcomes.

Homosexual Therapies: A Socio-religious Approach

1. Christian Reinterpretation and Inclusive Theology:

In Christianity, some theologians, such as Matthew Vines and James Brownson, advocate for reinterpretations of key Biblical passages commonly cited against homosexuality. In his book *God and the Gay Christian*, Vines argues that verses historically used to condemn homosexuality—like those in Leviticus and Romans—reflect cultural norms rather than God's eternal love and commands. He suggests these texts should be understood in the context of monogamous, loving relationships, which were less recognized in ancient times. Brownson (2013) says, in *Bible, gender, sexuality*, contends that the Bible's references to same-sex

relationships are not condemning committed, loving LGBTQ+ relationships. Instead, he highlights the historical context in which these verses were written, suggesting that the Bible's overarching message of love and acceptance should guide Christian attitudes toward LGBTQ+ inclusion.

2. Progressive Islamic Thought:

Islamic scholars like Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle (2014) offer reinterpretations of Quranic verses that have historically been used to denounce homosexuality. Kugle (2010) argues that the Quran's passages on homosexuality are open to interpretation and that the Quran itself contains themes of diversity and inclusion. Kugle's work encourages Muslim communities to focus on principles of justice and compassion rather than strict condemnation. These reinterpretations open up discussions within Muslim communities, where LGBTQ+ Muslims can find validation for their identities within the framework of Islamic faith.

3. Homosexual Acceptance in Jewish Thought:

Jewish scholars within Conservative and Reform Judaism have increasingly called for LGBTQ+ inclusion. Rabbi Steven Greenberg, an openly gay Orthodox rabbi, advocates for reinterpretations of Torah passages related to same-sex relationships, arguing that these references address specific behaviours rather than sexual orientation. His work supports LGBTQ+ acceptance within Jewish law, allowing observant LGBTQ+ Jews to reconcile their faith with their identity.

4. Faith-Based Counselling for Homosexual Acceptance:

Faith-based counselling programs, such as those offered by organizations like Beloved Arise or The Reformation Project, provide LGBTQ+ individuals with resources to process their experiences within a faith-based framework. These organizations prioritize non-judgmental,

inclusive counseling that respects both an individual's faith and sexual orientation. By focusing on self-acceptance and compassion, they provide support for homosexuals seeking to balance religious and personal identity. Programmes like these also offer guidance for family members and friends, helping them develop a deeper understanding and acceptance of loved ones who are homosexuals. By fostering open conversations about faith and sexuality, counseling services help bridge the gap between LGBTQ+ individuals and their religious communities.

5. Support Groups within Faith Communities:

Many LGBTQ+ affirming churches and faith communities offer support groups specifically designed for LGBTQ+ members. Groups like the United Methodist Church, Reconciling Ministries Network and the Catholic New Ways Ministry serve as inclusive spaces where LGBTQ+ individuals can discuss their experiences and find community within their faith, (Badgett, 2020). Support groups also empower them to engage with religious leaders, advocating for more inclusive practices within their faith traditions. By fostering collective understanding, these groups contribute to a broader cultural shift within religious settings.

6. Role of Mental Health Professionals with Religious Literacy:

Mental health professionals with an understanding of religious beliefs can offer specialized counseling for homosexuals from conservative religious backgrounds. Counselling and care are expected to inspire a new spirit of compassionate love for the ingenerated adherents of religion in Nigeria (Oko, 2015: 298). Therapists trained in both LGBTQ+ issues and religious dynamics are better equipped to help client's process religious guilt, shame, and internalized homophobia without compromising their spiritual beliefs.

Conclusion

The adversarial relationship between homosexuality and religious faith, highlighting historical roots, doctrinal interpretations, personal and social impacts experienced by homosexuals within religious settings have been examined. For centuries, many religious traditions, including Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, have maintained doctrines that conflict with homosexuals, often leading to exclusion, discrimination, and internalized struggles.

The paths to reconciliation and inclusion are emerging. Theological reinterpretation offers a new lens through which religious texts are understood, allowing for inclusive interpretations that emphasize love, mercy, kindness, compassion, and justice. Counseling resources and support groups provide homosexuals with affirming spaces to explore and reconcile faith with identity, while interfaith dialogues promote mutual understanding and respect between religious and homosexuals.

Ultimately, these approaches underscore the potential for faith and homosexuals to coexist in harmony. Through continued dialogue, compassion, and an evolving understanding of sacred texts, religious communities have the opportunity to cultivate inclusive environments where homosexuals can embrace both their faith and identity. The journey toward reconciliation is ongoing, yet it offers a promising vision for the future—one in which religious faith and homosexuals no longer need to be in conflict, but rather can thrive together within supportive, understanding communities.

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