

# Toward a Novel Approach to LGBTQ+ Christians

*Prof. Januarius Asongu*

Contact: [asongu2@gmail.com](mailto:asongu2@gmail.com)

Saint Monica University, Buea, Cameroon

## Abstract

This article provides a theological and biblical defense of LGBTQ+ inclusion within Christian ethics and ecclesial life. Drawing upon hermeneutical scholarship, Christocentric theology, and historical-critical interpretation, it challenges traditional readings of biblical texts often used to condemn same-sex relationships and gender diversity. The paper argues that the essence of Christian morality—rooted in agape love, justice, and the imago Dei—compels the church to embrace LGBTQ+ persons as full participants in the body of Christ. Through a re-examination of key scriptural passages (e.g., Genesis 19, Leviticus 18, Romans 1, and 1 Corinthians 6), this study demonstrates that historical context, linguistic nuance, and cultural situatedness have been overlooked in exclusionary interpretations. The article concludes that faithful discipleship requires moving beyond legalistic literalism toward a hermeneutic of grace and inclusion that mirrors the radical hospitality of Jesus.

**Keywords:** LGBTQ+, theology, biblical interpretation, inclusion, Christian ethics, hermeneutics, love, justice

## Introduction

The relationship between Christian faith and LGBTQ+ identity remains one of the most divisive ethical issues in contemporary theology. For centuries, non-affirming interpretations of Scripture have been used to justify exclusion, discrimination, and psychological harm. Yet, many biblical scholars and theologians argue that these interpretations reflect cultural biases rather than divine intent (Brownson, 2013; Gushee, 2017).

This article offers a systematic theological defense of LGBTQ+ inclusion grounded in Christian ethics, scriptural exegesis, and Christ-centered moral reasoning. The argument proceeds from a central claim: **the gospel of Jesus Christ calls the church to unconditional love, justice, and affirmation of all persons created in the image of God.**

The discussion unfolds in four movements: (a) the *imago Dei* and the moral equality of persons; (b) re-examining the “clobber texts” used to condemn same-sex relationships; (c) the ethical authority of Jesus’s ministry of inclusion; and (d) the ecclesial implications of an affirming theology.

## The Imago Dei and the Moral Equality of Persons

### Humanity as Image-Bearers of God

The doctrine of the *imago Dei* (Genesis 1:26–27) affirms that every human being reflects the divine image, irrespective of sexuality, gender, or social status. This ontological dignity is not contingent upon conformity to heteronormative categories but arises from the Creator’s act of endowment.

As theologian James Cone (1984) argues, any theology that denies the full humanity of a marginalized group becomes a theology of oppression. To deny LGBTQ+ people their divine image is to deny the creative freedom of God and the moral universality of grace.

### The Ethical Implication of the Imago Dei

The *imago Dei* grounds Christian ethics in the principle of inherent worth. As McFague (1993) contends, the relational nature of the image implies mutuality and diversity—attributes reflective of divine plurality. Consequently, the diversity of human love and gender identity can be viewed not as deviation but as divine creativity.

When the church excludes LGBTQ+ believers, it contradicts the Creator’s affirmation of creation as “very good.” Inclusion, therefore, is not permissive liberalism but fidelity to the ontological reality of divine love.

## Re-Examining the “Clobber Texts”

Traditional condemnations of homosexuality derive primarily from a handful of biblical passages—Genesis 19, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:26–27, and 1 Corinthians 6:9–10. A contextual and linguistic re-reading reveals that these texts address issues of exploitation, idolatry, and purity codes, not consensual, loving same-sex relationships.

### Genesis 19: The Sin of Sodom

Genesis 19 is frequently cited as divine condemnation of homosexuality. However, the prophetic reinterpretation of this narrative in Ezekiel 16:49 identifies the sin of Sodom as arrogance, inhospitality, and neglect of the poor—social injustices rather than sexual orientation. As Boswell (1980) demonstrated, the Sodom narrative concerns the violent breach of hospitality norms, not mutual same-sex affection. To weaponize this story against LGBTQ+ persons is a hermeneutical distortion.

### Levitical Codes and Cultural Context

The Holiness Code of Leviticus (18:22; 20:13) prohibits male same-sex acts within a ritual-purity framework designed to distinguish Israel from surrounding nations. These laws were never universal moral edicts but symbolic boundary markers. As Wright (2010) notes, Christian ethics does not selectively reapply ancient purity codes—otherwise, prohibitions against mixed fabrics or dietary rules would remain binding. The New Covenant reframes holiness not as ritual separation but as inclusive righteousness rooted in love (Romans 13:10).

### Romans 1: Idolatry and Exploitation

Paul’s argument in Romans 1:26–27 has been widely misinterpreted as a blanket condemnation of same-sex relationships. In context, Paul addresses Gentile idolatry and lustful excess as evidence of humanity’s fall, not as a statement on sexual orientation (Brownson, 2013). His concern is exploitative, passion-driven behavior detached from mutual fidelity. Moreover, the Greek terms *para physin* (“against nature”) refer to actions contrary to one’s own nature, not to universal moral law (Loader, 2013). Thus, same-sex love expressed with integrity is not under Pauline indictment.

## 1 Corinthians 6:9 and Translation Bias

The terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 have been mistranslated as “homosexuals.” Historical linguistics suggests *malakoi* refers to moral weakness or exploitation, while *arsenokoitai* likely denotes economic or sexual coercion (Scroggs, 1983). Modern translations influenced by post-Reformation sexual ethics impose anachronistic meanings alien to the original context.

## The Christocentric Ethic of Inclusion

### Jesus’s Ministry as Ethical Paradigm

Jesus consistently subverted social hierarchies, extending divine fellowship to those deemed “unclean” or sinful (Luke 15; Mark 2:15–17). His interactions with Samaritans, tax collectors, and women signify a hermeneutic of mercy over exclusion. The moral trajectory of the Gospel narrative moves from boundary enforcement to radical inclusion.

As Hays (1996) observes, ethical fidelity in the New Testament is discerned not through legalism but through *the pattern of the cross*—self-giving love that restores human dignity. When applied to sexuality and gender, this ethic mandates affirmation of relationships characterized by covenantal love, faithfulness, and justice.

### The Law of Love as Hermeneutical Key

Jesus summarized the law as love of God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37–40). Paul reiterated this in Galatians 5:14: “The entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: Love your neighbor as yourself.”

If a theological position perpetuates harm, shame, or exclusion, it violates the law of love and fails the test of moral coherence. Thus, any interpretation of Scripture that results in psychological or spiritual damage to LGBTQ+ individuals cannot be deemed Christian in the fullest sense (Gushee, 2017).

## The Early Church and the Evolution of Moral Insight

The book of Acts demonstrates that moral understanding in the early church evolved under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Peter's vision in Acts 10 dismantled purity boundaries to include Gentiles, establishing a precedent for expanding inclusion beyond inherited taboos. Likewise, today's inclusion of LGBTQ+ believers represents the continuation of this Spirit-led moral development.

## Counterarguments and Theological Responses

### The "Complementarity" Argument

Some theologians assert that sexual complementarity (male–female) reflects divine design. Yet, as scholars like Rogers (1999) argue, complementarity is relational, not anatomical. What matters ethically is the mutuality and covenantal fidelity of love, not reproductive potential. Christian marriage, viewed sacramentally, symbolizes Christ's union with the church—a metaphor of covenantal devotion, not biological pairing.

### The "Authority of Scripture" Objection

Affirming theology does not reject biblical authority; it seeks faithful interpretation through historical-critical methods. The infallibility of Scripture lies in its revelation of God's redemptive intent, not in literal adherence to ancient social codes. As Augustine noted<sup>1</sup>, interpretation must aim at the promotion of love; any reading that fosters cruelty contradicts divine will.

### The "Slippery Slope" Concern

Opponents warn that affirming LGBTQ+ inclusion erodes moral boundaries. However, Christian ethics is not boundaryless permissiveness but discerning love. The inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons does not negate moral standards—it redefines them through Christ's ethic of compassion and fidelity rather than fear and exclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 12, Chapter 30, Paragraph 41.

## **The Ecclesial Imperative**

### **Inclusion as a Test of Discipleship**

The authenticity of Christian witness depends on how it treats the marginalized. Jesus declared, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). Exclusion of LGBTQ+ persons from full participation in sacramental and ministerial life contradicts this command.

### **Pastoral Responsibility and Healing**

The church’s historical complicity in LGBTQ+ suffering necessitates repentance and restorative justice. Pastoral care must affirm identity as God-given, offering spaces for spiritual healing rather than conversion or suppression (Yarhouse, 2010).

### **A Vision of the Inclusive Kingdom**

Revelation 7:9 envisions a redeemed multitude of every tribe, tongue, and people before the throne of God—a vision of radical diversity. The inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons within this eschatological picture is not optional but essential to the fullness of God’s kingdom.

## **Conclusion**

The defense of LGBTQ+ inclusion is not a departure from Christian orthodoxy but a return to its Christological center. Scripture, when interpreted through the lens of love and justice, affirms diversity as intrinsic to creation. The moral arc of the gospel bends toward inclusion, not exclusion.

As the church seeks fidelity to Christ’s mission, it must replace condemnation with compassion and doctrinal rigidity with relational grace. To affirm LGBTQ+ believers is to affirm the Creator whose image they bear and the Savior whose love knows no exceptions.

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