

ECO Theology

Gender, Sexuality, and the Kingdom
Preconference

2025





The Standing Theology Committee

Introductions



The Book



Gender, Sex, and the Kingdom Theology Resources

2025





Presenting Issues



The Questions

- How do we love one another as Christ loved us?
- How can we be ambassadors of the kingdom of God?



Outline

1. Who are they?
 - a. Group
 - b. Individual
2. Who are we as Christians?
 - a. Group/Church
 - b. Individual
3. How do we meet?
 - a. Church
 - b. Individual

Who are They?





Who are They? Sociological Factors

Nature v. Nurture?

When nurture becomes nature, natural law changes



Who are They? Sociological Factors

Plausibility Structures

What makes behavior make sense?



Who are They? Sociological Factors

Contributing Factors:

- Biology
- History
- Traditions
- Technology
- Economics



Who are They? Individuals

How do people narrate their own stories of meaning?



Who are They? Individuals

Small Group: Narrative Analysis

Tell a story you have experienced or heard about someone who now identifies as LGBTQ in as close to their own words as possible (i.e. without moral judgment)

What values were expressed? What hopes? What were the key concepts driving the story/plot? Was there relational hurt or trauma? Why might that be?



Who are They? Individuals

Personal Narratives

- Disempowerment
- Minority/Difference from normal experience
- Realization of identity
- Liberation in new community
- Not a choice, but an experience of nature



Who are They? Individuals

Identity Construction

- Found cultural material
- Bricolage
- Mimesis



Logic of Eros

- Consume the lesser
- Unite with the equal
- Be consumed by the greater
- Con-fusion
- Animal, immature

Who are We?

People of God





Who are We? The People of God

1. Image of God is bearing the character of God
2. Be like Christ in love (agape not eros)
3. Be kingdom oriented
4. Ambassadors of reconciliation



Who are We? The Image of God

- Avoiding anachronisms (communicable attributes and intrinsic value/dignity)
- Image is idol... representation/symbol
- Representatives (ambassadors)



Who are We? Agape vs Eros

God is preparing a people who can represent him through agapeic love

- Maturity
- Self-giving (kenosis)
- Discipline
- Imitation of Christ in this



Who are We? Kingdom of God

Kingdom means kingdom. A context, environment, body-politic.

Gender, marriage, sex, singleness have Christian meaning within the kingdom.



Who are We? Ambassadors

- *Presbutes* (ambassador/elders)
- Outcome: Reconciliation, reconciling all things to God
- Method: Love God, Love Neighbor *as a people*



Small Group Discussion

Cultural Analysis of your church

- Material Culture: What do your church artifacts say about meaning, value of the church
- What would an outsider perceive about your church?
- Is your physical plant useful for facilitating all the ministry needed?

Who are We?

Individual Christians





Hamartiology Creates Soteriology

Typically, people talk about Jesus as a *solution*, which means we define him by the *problem*.



Yarhouse's 3 Modes

1. Divergence
2. Disability
3. Diversity

Source: Yarhouse, Mark A. *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015.



3 Gospels

1. Forensic Gospel (**D**ivergence)
2. Therapeutic Gospel (**D**isability)
3. Affirmation or Liberation Gospel (**D**iversity)



Forensic/Law and Order

Problem: Sin is lawbreaking

Solution:

1. Jesus kept the law
2. Jesus paid the legal debt by his sacrifice
3. Acceptance of Jesus transfers legal guilt



Forensic/Law and Order

Practices:

1. “Just stop sinning”
2. Moral responsibility falls on the individual



Forensic Ecclesial Outcomes

Best Case:

- Help establish the right order of society, or at least the church
- United front of morally upright people influencing the world with good



Forensic Ecclesial Outcomes

Worst Case:

- Behave before belonging (exclusion of visible sinners)
- Vilification of sinners. “Us and them”
- Moral policing
- Deviant behavior creates secrecy/hiding
- Revelation of secrets destroys trust and trustworthiness



Forensic Problems

Alignment to right-wing of culture war — failure to be ambassadors.

Soteriological logic rooted in medieval justice concepts no longer valid:

- Capital Punishment
- Transferrable guilt
- Scapegoat mechanism, punishment of innocent for the wicked



Forensic Problems

Partial Truth

- Sin is indeed lawbreaking (but this is a symptom of rebellion)
- God, in Jesus is forgiving debt, not paying it. “Erasing” Col 2:13-14
- There are no biblical death-sacrifices for the removal of sins (Yom Kippur goat is not killed)
- Jesus is the Passover Lamb, which is a festive offering (consumed by the people, not by God) and commemorates liberation from slavery, not forgiveness of sins



Therapeutic Gospel

Problem: Sin is brokenness

Solutions:

1. Jesus fixes a broken system
2. Jesus heals broken people



Therapeutic Gospel

Practices:

1. Spiritual Formation/Disciplines
secular form in Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)
2. Group talk therapy (small groups)
3. Interventions (professional therapists when amateur pastors won't do)



Therapeutic Ecclesial Outcomes

Best Case:

- Welcoming group... “We’re all broken sinners here”
- Desire for moral change through safe and consensual practices/therapeutic interventions



Therapeutic Ecclesial Outcomes

Worst Case:

- Bait and Switch (“Come as you are, but we want you to change to be like us”)
- Gaslighting (“We’re not the problem, you are”)
- Therapy is about normalization, not about truth...
waffling
- Conversion Therapy



Therapeutic Problems

Partial Truth

- Sin is never called a “fall” in the Bible
- Sin is never described as “brokenness”
- Rom 8:20-21 Creation “subjected to futility” by God “in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”
- Sin isn’t brokenness, it’s enslavement, waiting for the church to do its job



Affirmation/Liberation Gospel

Problem: Sin is Bigotry, Ignorance

Solutions:

1. Jesus loves (read affirms) everyone
2. Church must join the moral arc of the universe as it heads toward justice through inclusivity



Affirmation/Liberation Gospel

Practices:

1. Protest and Direct Action
2. Political engagement
3. Celebratory rituals



Affirmation Ecclesial Outcomes

Best Case:

- Inclusive, welcoming community
- Supports social minorities and outcasts
- Are nice people



Affirmation Ecclesial Outcomes

Worst Case:

- Cheap grace
- Cheerleader church
- Political action requires leftist alignment and mission drift
- Pointless institution persisting on endowments



Affirmation Problems

Partially true

- Sin is enslavement... but to the powers
- “Affirmation” is a form of colonialism
- The arc of the moral universe is toward Babylon, not the kingdom. The confusion is mistaking the world for the kingdom (i.e. Christendom)



3 Ways to Culture War and Harm

Forensic: Right wing

Therapy: False middle waffling

Affirmation: Left wing



The 4th Way

Jesus is not a *solution* to a problem. Jesus is the king.
Kingship of Jesus *reveals* sin.



Biblical Gospel: The Kingdom of God

- Kingdom means kingdom, whole body, incarnate (not spiritual only)
- Inclusion is by allegiance/fidelity/*pistis*
- Mission is to reveal the kingdom:
A community that shows what it looks like when and where God is king.
 - “Lord of Time” and *Sabbath Gospel*



Story of the Bible in a Gen 1-11 Nutshell

- Image of God: mature representatives
- Probation: Adam and Eve not yet mature... need to learn by practice/discipline
- Rebellion, Cain
- Formation of a people (Seth)

How do we meet?

Ambassador Individuals





How do we meet

- Love individuals
- Value individuals
- Empower individuals to have community ownership

How do we meet?

The Church as Embassy





History of the Church

- Christendom gender/sexuality
 - Not necessarily a golden age
- End of Christendom
 - Church's domain restricted



Embassy: Sign of the Kingdom

- Plausible
- Tangible
- Holy
- Invasive



Embassy: Sign of the Kingdom

- Become a context, community, a *primary* community



Embassy: Sign of the Kingdom

- Hospitality and Welcome vs. Discipleship



Problems of Meeting: Applications

- Challenge of Worship centrality
- Challenges of institution, branding
- Challenges of physical plant



Group Discussion: Narrative Analysis

What would you describe the gospel?

What does it say about an open LGBT identifying person?

What structures and values are expressed in this?

What plot line would you draw?



Small Group: Practical Outreach

How do we make people known and loved?

How do we tell the gospel in personal contexts?

Where should we meet?

FLOURISH INSTITUTE *of* THEOLOGY

ECO Theology and The Seminary

The best of the church is in the seminary, the best of the seminary is in the church

