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## The Rhetoric of Gay Christians: Matthew Vines and Reverend Nancy Wilson as Exemplars

Joshua Holman Miller  
*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

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THE RHETORIC OF GAY CHRISTIANS: MATTHEW VINES AND REVEREND  
NANCY WILSON AS EXEMPLARS

by

Joshua Holman Miller

Bachelor of Arts  
Michigan State University  
2012

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts - Communication Studies

Department of Communication Studies  
Greenspun College of Urban Affairs  
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University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
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## THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend the thesis prepared under our supervision by

**Joshua Miller**

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**Department of Communication Studies**

Sara VanderHaagen, Ph.D., Committee Chair

David Henry, Ph.D., Committee Member

Thomas Burkholder, Ph.D., Committee Member

Gregory Borchard, Ph.D., Graduate College Representative

Kathryn Hausbeck Korgan, Ph.D., Interim Dean of the Graduate College

**May 2014**

## **ABSTRACT**

The Rhetoric of Gay Christians: Matthew Vines and Reverend Nancy Wilson as Exemplars

by

Joshua Holman Miller

Dr. Sara C. VanderHaagen, Examination Committee Chair  
Professor of Communication Studies  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

There is a view of gay rights debates that pits Christians against gay rights advocates. According to this perception, Christians oppose gay rights, because the Bible condemns homosexuality as a sin, and those who support gay rights do so using purely secular arguments. However, this perception of the gay rights debate is flawed and overly simplistic because not all Christians oppose gay rights. In fact, there are multiple interpretations of biblical texts that support homosexuality and have caused a gay rights debate within the church that is as complex and intricate as gay rights debate outside of the church. This thesis examines the gay rights debate within the church and, specifically, investigates the biblical arguments used by two individuals, Matthew Vines and Reverend Nancy Wilson, to convince others that homosexuality is not a sin.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I often wonder how I could be so blessed. I have always received support and encouragement from so many wonderful people. Without their presence in my life, I doubt I would have been able to make it this far. It is difficult to put into words how I feel about all of the support I have received. What follows is my best attempt at accomplishing that impossible task.

Two years ago, when I decided that I was going to move to Las Vegas and attend UNLV, I really had no idea why I was doing so. I had a good feeling about it and that is about it. Now, I know why I attended UNLV—to work with Dr. Sara VanderHaagen. I find it to be rather humorous that we arrived here at the same time. She grew up in the same denomination. Even though she went to Calvin College instead of Hope College, I knew that she would be a great choice for an advisor. Her guidance made this project possible. Her knowledge of biblical interpretation, biblical controversies, and religion in general has enabled me to think about my project in new and exciting ways. Ever since I stepped into her office to ask her to be my advisor, she has been encouraging and supportive of my efforts and this project. She has provided me with countless pieces of advice. Her commentary, suggestions, corrections, and feedback have been wonderful, extensive, helpful, and at times even humorous. She read through all of my typo filled drafts. She certainly corrected plenty of typos but correcting “humpy” to “hunky” stands out in my mind. She read and re-read countless drafts of my thesis chapters; there have been roughly thirty. She did more than that. She read drafts of my PhD school writing samples, statements of purpose, drafts for conferences, and my curriculum vita. She was

there to calm me down when I was freaking out about my prospectus defense, about making my PhD decision, and when I was waiting to hear from PhD schools.

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The other faculty members have fostered an incredible department that allowed me to grow as an academic, instructor, and person. They were willing to help me revise and edit numerous papers. When I started this program, I knew very little about communication studies. With their support and guidance, I learned so much. They challenged me to become a better writer, to challenge myself, to set high goals for myself, and to “just see what happens.” Because of this, I submitted papers to

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about what I should do with my research and how to make my research stronger. He always pointed out my typos. He is just a great guy \*stare\*.

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needed have and always reminded me to complete them. Her assistance was necessary for me to travel to the conferences to which I have travelled. She was always enthusiastic when answering my questions and guided me out of the building when it was on fire. Bill Belk, our basic course instructor, taught me how to teach and always told me that I would become a great teacher. He guided me through my decision to go to graduate school. Because of him, I am confident that I will be able to develop and teach my own courses one day. By watching him, I now understand what it means to invest yourself in helping others even if you have just met them.

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My high school friends pushed me to be best I could be. When I was unsure of myself and my abilities, they helped me see what I could achieve. They taught me about determination. They taught me to care for others. They are welcoming and accepting. They are gracious. They are all so strong, brave, caring, and intelligent. Thank you Kathryn, Linda, Lydia, Priscilla, Josh, Claire, Anber, Fish, Elyse, Kim, Kelly, Dan, Jake, Allison, John, C.J., Matt, Quinton, Steve, David, Liz, Nicole, Marie, and all of the others.

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gave me puzzles, science kits, and fishing poles. They taught me about contracts, engineering, and gardening. My Meemo encouraged me to find what made me happy. She brought me to get coffee and was always interested in hearing about what I was researching. She was happy to hear that I was getting accepted to PhD schools. She was happy to hear that I was making progress on my thesis and was excited to get to read it. Even though she will not be able to read it now, I know that she would have been happy to read it now that it is finished. I now move onto PhD school knowing that she would be proud, encouraging, supportive, and excited as I continue to find the definition of true happiness.

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I believe that God has blessed me with a kind heart, a gentle soul, enormous strength, and a wonderful mind. He taught me to love my neighbor. I pray that I will continue to love, be kind and gentle, find strength, and share my gifts with others.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	ii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	iv
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	xiv
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
<b>The Biblical Debate Concerning Same-Sex Relationships</b> .....	2
<b>The Gay “Texts of Terror”</b> .....	3
<i>The Genesis Creation Stories</i> .....	3
<i>Genesis 19 – Sodom and Gomorrah</i> .....	5
<i>Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13</i> .....	6
<i>Romans 1:18-32</i> .....	10
<i>1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:10</i> .....	12
<b>Queer Biblical Interpretation</b> .....	13
<i>Why “Out” the Bible?</i> .....	14
<i>The Eunuchs</i> .....	18
<i>The Bisexuality of Jesus?</i> .....	21
<i>David and Jonathan</i> .....	23
<i>Ruth and Naomi</i> .....	25
<b>The Gay Christian and the Tension between Homosexuality and Christianity</b> .....	29
<b>Process of Examination</b> .....	33
<b>CHAPTER TWO: THE MODERN HISTORY OF GAY CHRISTIANS</b> .....	44
<b>“Sodom by the Sea”</b> .....	46
<b>Council on Religion and the Homosexual</b> .....	51
<b>Anita Bryant and John Briggs</b> .....	55
<b>AIDS and the “Fundamentalists”</b> .....	63
<b>Christianity, Homosexuality, and the 1990s</b> .....	69
<b>The 2004 Election</b> .....	71
<b>Proposition 8</b> .....	73
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	76
<b>CHAPTER THREE: NANCY WILSON’S CONSTRUCTION OF GAY CHRISTIAN PARRHESIASTEIA</b> .....	88
<b>The Fortieth Anniversary of MCC LA</b> .....	94



Constituting <i>Parrhesiastea</i> .....	97
The Truth of God’s Creation of MCC .....	99
Duty and Troy Perry’s Fasting.....	102
Death and MCC—AIDS and Matthew Shepard.....	105
MCC’s Future .....	108
Conclusion .....	113
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: MATTHEW VINES AS A GAY CHRISTIAN PROPHET ...</b>	<b>123</b>
Vines, the Insider .....	127
Vines’ Personification of Traditionalists.....	129
The Seeming Contradiction of Vines’ Gay Christian Identity.....	135
Vines’ Invitation.....	143
Vines, the Prophet.....	148
Vines’ Identities and the Queer Christian Rhetorical Situation.....	155
The Refused Invitation: The Traditionalists’ Backlash .....	160
Conclusion .....	167
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: TOWARDS A QUEER CHRISTIAN RHETORICAL ARCHIVE.....</b>	<b>179</b>
Genre and the Rhetoric of Gay Christians .....	182
Final Remarks .....	187
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>196</b>
<b>CURRICULUM VITA .....</b>	<b>217</b>

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

In the United States, there is a perception that the gay rights debate situates Christian, social conservatives against secular, gay rights advocates. According to this perception, Christians oppose gay rights because the Bible condemns homosexuality as a sin, and those who support gay rights do so using purely secular arguments. However, this perception of the gay rights debate is flawed and overly simplistic because not all Christians oppose gay rights. There are multiple interpretations of biblical texts that support homosexuality and have caused a gay rights debate within the church (i.e., between Christians) that is as complex and intricate as gay rights debate outside of the church (i.e., between Christians and secular groups). This debate has garnered academic attention as biblical scholars have extensively discussed what the Bible says concerning homosexuality.<sup>1</sup> While biblical scholars have produced the arguments that are used this controversy, rhetorical scholarship has yet to address how rhetors deploy these arguments publicly. For instance, current rhetorical scholarship has not evaluated Christian speakers' attempts to challenge traditional readings of the Bible.

This project focuses on the biblical arguments used by two individuals, Matthew Vines and Reverend Nancy Wilson, to convince others that homosexuality is not a sin. I evaluate the efforts of those two individuals as they attempted to mobilize or convince others that the Bible supports homosexuality. In particular, I examine a speech that Wilson delivered in 2008 in front of the congregation of the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) of Los Angeles at the fortieth anniversary of the creation of the MCC. I also explore the Matthew Vines speech, "The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality," that he delivered at a Methodist church in Wichita, Kansas, on March 8,

2012.<sup>2</sup> The arguments Matthew Vines used in his speech are representative of the arguments liberal Christians use to argue the Bible does not condemn homosexuality.

This project aims to understand how and why rhetors argue for gay- and lesbian-affirming interpretations of the biblical texts. To this end, I begin by describing the arguments in the larger debate within the church in order to provide relevant background for Vines' and Wilson's speeches about Christianity and homosexuality. After discussing the biblical arguments for and against homosexuality, I explain how scholars believe the gay Christian identity forms, which is particularly relevant context for the argument that I develop in the third and fourth chapters. At the conclusion of this chapter, I preview the remaining chapters of this thesis.

### **The Biblical Debate Concerning Same-Sex Relationships**

The debate among biblical scholars concerning same-sex relations is a critical background to the texts of this thesis. Both Vines and Wilson respond to traditional interpretations of the Bible and participate in the overall biblical debate about homosexuality. As such, a description of this debate enables a stronger evaluation of Vines' and Wilson's arguments in support of homosexuality and their attempts to mobilize support for homosexuality. To understand how individuals use biblical texts to defend and affirm homosexuality, one first must understand how individuals use biblical texts to condemn homosexuality. For that reason, I begin by describing the critical arguments in the biblical debate concerning homosexuality.

To start, I examine the traditional "texts of terror" for gay individuals, which includes the Genesis creation stories, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:26-27, and 1 Corinthians 6:9.<sup>3</sup> These "texts of terror" are the

biblical passages that have most frequently been used to condemn homosexuality. After this, I will turn my attention to the Biblical texts that have been used to affirm same-sex relations, which include the Book of Ruth and the story of David and Jonathan.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout this discussion, I describe arguments used in three distinct interpretative approaches to biblical text: the traditional Christian approach, the liberal Christian approach, and the queer Christian approach.<sup>5</sup> The traditional approach uses the “texts of terror” to indicate the Bible condemns homosexuality.<sup>6</sup> The liberal approach typically defends homosexuality by reframing the “texts of terror.” While both the liberal Christian approach and queer Christian approach argue that the Bible allows for same-sex relationships, the queer Christian approach goes further than the liberal Christian approach and argues that certain biblical characters are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. The liberal approach is reactive to traditional arguments; the queer approach is proactive in that it actively searches for new interpretations of biblical texts that support homosexuality. While I do not describe all of the arguments that individuals use in the biblical debate over same-sex relationships, I explain the arguments necessary to demonstrate the complexity of the debate and the arguments that will be most relevant for the texts I use in this project.

### **The Gay “Texts of Terror”**

#### *The Genesis Creation Stories*

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number” – Genesis 1:27-28, New International Version

The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. – Genesis 2:23-24, New International Version

On August 13, 2013, a small restaurant in Bancroft, Ontario, catalyzed a debate between itself and the town's gay community. For more than a decade, the restaurant had displayed a newspaper clipping which stated, "God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve."<sup>7</sup> This restaurant was certainly not alone in endorsing this slogan. Now, this statement is so widespread that the Human Rights Campaign refers to it as "cliché."<sup>8</sup>

This example illustrates how traditional readers of the Bible use the Genesis creation stories to argue that homosexuality is sinful and violates natural law. They note that Genesis 2 states that "the man and the woman will be the means and the context in which the family will grow in such a way as to serve God."<sup>9</sup> They also argue that God created man and woman for the purposes of procreation; same-sex relationships violate natural law, because the relationships do not naturally result in procreation. Accordingly, marriage must be between a man and a woman, be "connected to children and fruitfulness," and involve long-term commitment.<sup>10</sup>

However, liberal and queer readers maintain that the creation stories do not mandate that marriage be between a man and a woman. Some liberal and queer readers have argued that other passages in the New Testament should inform our reading of the creation stories in Genesis. In particular, liberal readers point to Galatians 3:28, which states, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."<sup>11</sup> Liberal and queer readers note that Paul is quoting Genesis in Galatians 3:38. However, there are two critical changes to the original Genesis text. First, Paul does not indicate that people have to "be fruitful and multiply."<sup>12</sup> Second, instead of stating that God creates "male and female,"<sup>13</sup> Paul indicates that there is neither male nor female. Because of Paul's alteration of the

language, liberal and queer readers claim that Paul is saying that relationships no longer need to be for the purpose of procreation and that those relationships no longer need to be opposite sex.<sup>14</sup> This argument aligns with the belief that the shift from the Old to New Testament is also a shift from law to grace.

### *Genesis 19 – Sodom and Gomorrah*

In early February, 2014, gay rights groups in Kenya organized pro-gay rights protests. These protests angered many leaders in neighboring Uganda. One Ugandan, George Ukwi, argued that people in Kenya did not understand that marriage was between a man and a woman. He said, ““Kenya, please return to innocence, otherwise these barbaric behavior [sic] you call human rights will lead you astray.””<sup>15</sup> He also indicated that ““Kenyans have lost their fibre morale and I pray that Jehovah God descends heavily upon them like He did to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.””<sup>16</sup>

In other quarrels concerning religion and homosexuality, the act of calling homosexuals “sodomites” results from traditional readings of the Sodom and Gomorrah story. Some traditional readers claim the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was because the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah were homosexual. In this story, two angels came to the house of Lot in Sodom. After hearing of this, the men of Sodom went to the house of Lot and demanded that Lot allow the men to “know” the two angels. General consensus among traditional, liberal, and queer readers is that the word translated as “know” carries sexual implications. Therefore, the men of Sodom were attempting to have sexual relations with two male angels. Later, God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Traditional readers argue that the reason God destroyed the two cities was because the inhabitants were homosexual and attempted to engage in homosexual

intercourse.<sup>17</sup> Liberal and queer readers vehemently disagree with the traditional reading of this story. For liberal and queer readers, the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was attempting to gang rape angels, not having a same-sex long-term relationship. Liberal and queer readers also indicate that the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah are associated with the sin of inhospitality, not homosexuality.<sup>18</sup>

*Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13*

Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination –  
Leviticus 18:22, King James Version (KJV).

If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have  
committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be  
upon them. – Leviticus 20:13, KJV.

In December, 2013, Shreveport, Louisiana, “passed an ordinance banning housing and employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.”<sup>19</sup> One City Councilman, Ron Webb, vehemently disagreed with the ordinance, implicitly cited Leviticus, and argued that “The Bible tells you homosexuals are an abomination.”<sup>20</sup> He then attempted to repeal the ordinance by introducing a proposal that intended to overturn it. During the next city council meeting, there was a lively debate about Webb’s proposal. At the meeting, a trans-woman, Pamela Raintree, approached the podium and stated, “Leviticus 20:13 states, ‘If a man also lie with mankind as he lieth with a woman, they shall surely put him to death.’”<sup>21</sup> Raintree then held up a stone for the whole council to see and stated, “I brought the first stone, Mr. Webb, in case that your Bible talk isn’t just a smoke screen for personal prejudices.”<sup>22</sup> According to Raintree, if Webb was certain that the Bible condemned homosexuality, then he should also be certain that it was his duty to stone her. Webb did not stone Raintree and later withdrew his proposal to repeal the ordinance.

For some biblical scholars, the passages that Webb and Raintree used, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, constitute the heart of the biblical debate concerning homosexuality. For instance, according to the theologian Lesleigh Stahlberg, because the language of Leviticus is direct and “unequivocal, the two passages become the clobber texts in the debate.”<sup>23</sup> Given Leviticus 20:13 indicates that failure to follow the law carries the punishment of death, this passage certainly has the capability of condemning homosexuality. With frequency, traditional readers of the Bible cite these passages as biblical evidence against homosexuality. For example, Rob Schwarzwald, of the Family Research Council, argues that the prohibition on homosexuality in Leviticus is a part of a moral code that applies to modern Christians.<sup>24</sup> Because of this, these passages demand an explanation and interpretation from liberal and queer readers of the Bible if they are going to convince traditional readers of the Bible that the Bible can affirm LBG individuals.<sup>25</sup>

Traditional Christian readers view these two passages as moral laws that explicitly prohibit sexual impurity and immorality. Furthermore, traditional Christian readers argue that Jesus understood the importance of adhering to the moral laws in Leviticus. For instance, they indicate that Jesus told his followers to love thy neighbor, which was originally a Levitical law.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, according to this argument, the prohibitions in Leviticus were not overturned by Jesus’s teachings. However, the argument that Jesus did not overturn Levitical laws is not persuasive to liberal readers, because Jesus broke Levitical laws by eating before washing his hands or working on the Sabbath.<sup>27</sup>



In contrast, liberal Christian readers hold a multitude of interpretations concerning these passages. First, unlike traditional readers, liberal readers of these passages generally believe these passages are ceremonial or ritual laws, not moral laws.<sup>28</sup> The implication of this distinction is that Jewish ritual laws or ceremonial laws would not apply to individuals living today, only to Jewish individuals living prior to the birth of Christ. The argument that Levitical laws do not apply to modern Christians is supported by an interpretation of Leviticus that suggests the Leviticus Holiness Code was established in order to ensure that early Jews remained distinct and separate from the people of regions surrounding early Israel. To augment this argument, some liberal Christian readers examine the traditions of groups of people who lived near the early Israelites. For instance, the Canaanites practiced homosexual cult prostitution. Accordingly, the Holiness Code condemned homosexual practices in order to ensure that the early Israelites did not appear to be similar to the Canaanites.<sup>29</sup> Also, liberal readers have interpreted Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 as condemning the cult prostitution observed in Canaanite tradition.<sup>30</sup> To this end, since the prohibitions in Leviticus were meant to distinguish early Israelites from surrounding peoples, the prohibitions do not apply to modern Christians.

Another similar liberal reading of these passages suggests that these passages are only a historical account, not laws that apply to modern Christians. At the core of this argument rests an assumption that parts of the Bible are meant to be a historical record. As such, Leviticus was meant to describe what was done by early Israelites, not establish a universal law that modern Christians would need to follow.<sup>31</sup>

Liberal interpretations also focus on the meaning(s) of the word abomination. Instead of defining abomination as a sinful act, some liberal readers argue that abomination means being “ritually unclean for Jews” similar to how eating pork might be ritually unclean.<sup>32</sup> Liberal readers use this interpretation of abomination meaning unclean rather than a sin as further evidence that the Leviticus laws were meant to apply to early Israelites. They also interpret abomination to be about people acting counter to how God created them (i.e, a heterosexual acting homosexual). Therefore, some read these passages as saying heterosexual men who sleep with other men are abominations. Likewise, homosexual men who sleep with women would be abominations, but homosexual men who sleep with men would not be abominations.

Finally, there are individuals who focus on the phrase “as with womankind” in order to interpret these passages. These liberal readers argue that the addition of the phrase “as with womankind” means that these prohibitions are concerned with unequal power relationships and sex that lacks love. Steven Greenberg argues that instead of concerning modern notions of same-sex relationships, the Leviticus prohibitions are about, “sex for conquest, for shoring up the ego, for self-aggrandizement, or worse, for the perverse pleasure of demeaning another man.”<sup>33</sup> Greenberg’s interpretation indicates that the Leviticus prohibitions are about exerting power over other through sexual intercourse (e.g., rape<sup>34</sup>), not consensual, egalitarian same-sex relationships.

In order to respond to the traditional interpretations of Leviticus, liberal readers of the Bible have established a variety of interpretations of the two passages in Leviticus. These interpretations appear to fall into two categories. First, some of these arguments indicate that a reader of the Bible needs to examine the historical and social context of the

time when the Bible was written in order to have a fuller understanding of what the biblical text says. Second, some of these arguments focus on the meaning of particular words and indicate that words have a different meaning than what traditional readers typically interpret them to mean.

*Romans 1:18-32*

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. – Romans 1:26-27, New International Version

The website debate.org was created to promote debates about social issues on the internet. In 2013, this website asked its users to deliberate about whether or not it is unnatural to be gay.<sup>35</sup> Those who argued that homosexuality was unnatural either implicitly or explicitly cited Paul's letter to the Romans as their evidence. For instance, one user indicated that "the human race was created with male and female organisms. We reproduce with one man and one women [sic]. A women [sic] cannot reproduce with a women [sic], and a man cannot reproduce with a man. Therefore; it is extremely unnatural to be gay."<sup>36</sup> Another user concurred by stating, "Yes it's UNNATURAL and sickening, if homosexuality was common with no technological advances, HUMANITY would CEASE TO EXIST, naturally, everybody is born HETEROSEXUAL, a penis and vagina (sperm and egg) form the necessary things to have a baby."<sup>37</sup> According to these accounts, homosexuality is unnatural because reproduction is impossible in homosexual relationships; Roman 1:26-27 is the biblical support for this argument.

Traditional readers argue that Romans 1:26-27 provides strong evidence that same-sex relationships are unnatural. This interpretation indicates that Paul, the writer of

Romans, is describing all of the ways in which humanity is sinful and “fallen.”<sup>38</sup> Included in Paul’s list of sinful acts is homosexuality, according to traditional readers. Traditional readers contend that homosexuality could be a punishment for turning away from God. These readers argue Paul is describing how God punished individuals with “shameful lusts” (i.e., homosexuality) after those people engaged in idolatry. Because the passage is broadly written, traditional readers also claim the passage is referring to any homosexual act, not only pederasty or rape.

Liberal readers argue that Romans 1:26-27 is about idolatry, not homosexuality. Before these two verses, Paul notes the following, “Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.”<sup>39</sup> As these are the verses that come before Romans 1:26-27, liberal readers argue that Paul is really discussing the sin of idolatry. Paul says “because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.” Liberal readers indicate the “this” in the previous sentence refers to the sin of idolatry. Paul is saying “because of idolatry, God gave them over to shameful lusts.” Liberal readers believe this passage states idolatry causes unnatural relationships. Furthermore, some liberal readers believe Paul is saying that people who are naturally heterosexual started engaging in homosexual sexual acts as a result of the sin of idolatry; for them, there are also individuals who are naturally homosexual. Therefore, Romans 1:26-27 does not denounce people who are naturally homosexual, but individuals who commit idolatry, which leads to unnatural relationships (this could include unnatural same-sex relations).

Other liberal readers argue that Paul was only referring to a limited number of instances of homosexual activity. These readers claim that Paul’s limited view of

homosexuality only included two examples of homosexual activity: pedophilia and male temple prostitution.<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, liberal interpretations of Romans 1:26-27 argue that the unnatural relationships being described were associated with unequal power relations and relationships without love (e.g., grown men being sexually involved with young boys).

*1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:10*

Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God – 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, New International Version

Don't fool yourselves! No one who is immoral or worships idols or is unfaithful in marriage or is a pervert or behaves like a homosexual will share in God's kingdom. – 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Contemporary English Version.<sup>41</sup>

Translators have interpreted the words in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 in many different ways. Some of those translations have explicitly condemned homosexuality, while other translations have not even mentioned homosexuality. As such, one of the issues involved in the debate between traditional, liberal, and queer readers of 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:10 concerns how translators translate the words in these passages. The words in question are the Greek words *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi*, which some translators interpret as homosexual.<sup>42</sup> Traditional readers maintain that the word *malakoi* is “a common slang term in Hellenistic Greek for the passive partner in a gay sexual relationship.”<sup>43</sup> For these readers, *arsenokoitai* is the active partner. If *arsenokoitai* means the active partner in gay sex, then 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 would read the active partner in gay sex will not share in heaven. As such, traditional readers use these passages to provide evidence that homosexuality is banned for modern Christians.

Conversely, liberal readers argue that these passages do not condemn same-sex relations, because the meanings of *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* are vague and might not refer to modern same-sex relationships. Some liberal readers have claimed these words refer to male temple prostitution.<sup>44</sup> The main justification for this argument is that there is not a Greek or Hebrew word for homosexual as the term is understood today. In addition, liberal readers point to the vast number of ways that the words *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* have been translated to support their argument. The King James Version says “effeminate.” The Revised Standard Version says “sexual perverts.” The New Revised Standard Version says “male prostitutes.”<sup>45</sup> Given all of the ways *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* have been translated, liberal readers certainly feel justified in their argument that these words have a vague meaning and might not refer to modern conceptions of homosexuality.

In response to the “texts of terror,” liberal readers of the Bible have developed and used many arguments about why those “texts of terror” do not actually condemn homosexuality. In many instances, they have argued that the biblical authors were not writing about modern, same-sex relationships. Instead, the biblical authors were discussing male prostitution or pagan idolatry. While liberal readers of the Bible have developed arguments to respond to the “texts of terror,” queer readers of the Bible have argued there are biblical passages that affirm homosexuality and even describe homosexual biblical characters.

### **Queer Biblical Interpretation**

In order to illustrate the queer biblical interpretations, I turn to Nancy Wilson’s book *Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus, and the Bible*.<sup>46</sup> She devotes an entire chapter

to arguing for the potentiality of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) biblical characters. In more than fifty pages, her fourth chapter, “Outing the Bible,” provides evidence that the Bible is filled with LGB individuals. While Wilson indicates that there were numerous other LGB characters, I focus on her descriptions of the Eunuchs, David and Jonathan, Naomi and Ruth, and Lazarus and Jesus, because these are the narratives to which she devotes the most time and attention. To begin, I describe Wilson’s purpose for outing these biblical characters. Then, I detail her arguments.

### *Why “Out” the Bible?*

Wilson’s chapter begins with a warning label that states “I am not willing to meet anyone halfway. So, come along if you dare.”<sup>47</sup> She aims to go too far, because “in terms of boldly and comfortably claiming our presence, as if we [gays and lesbians] *really have a right to be included* [in the biblical story], we haven’t gone far enough.”<sup>48</sup> Wilson states, “It is time boldly to ‘liberate’ some biblical LGB characters and stories from ancient closets.”<sup>49</sup> She intends to queer the biblical record. She ponders the question of what would happen if one reads the Bible with the assumption that the characters are LGB instead of heterosexual:

What if we just *assumed* that lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals were *always* in the Bible? What if we just accepted the fact that our counterparts followed Moses and Miriam in the Exodus, wandered in the wilderness, and walked with Jesus by the sea [sic] of Galilee? We were there! Even when we were silent or closeted about our sexuality. Even if many people in those ancient cultures repressed their sexuality or never expressed it (which is doubtful!), we were there.<sup>50</sup>

Wilson is clear. She will argue that LGB individuals are a part of the biblical narrative. However, because the Bible does not describe their sexuality, Wilson will. Wilson's use of the first person plural in the opening pages of her chapter provides evidence of who her audience is. She is speaking to LGB individuals, not heterosexual Christians. After referencing the gay and lesbian community, she states that "we haven't gone far enough" to be included.<sup>51</sup> She asks us to assume that lesbians, gays, and bisexuals were in the Bible, and she subsequently indicates that "our counterparts" walked with Jesus, Moses, and Miriam. By stating "our counterparts," she includes herself and her audience under the umbrella LGB. As such, her audience members are like the biblical characters that she is going to discuss in the chapter. They are—the characters and her audience—gay, lesbian, and bisexual.

Then, Wilson provides an extended justification for her provocative, queer reading of the Bible. After indicating that she intends to liberate biblical LGB characters, she also states:

It may seem unfair to "out" these defenseless biblical characters, but I'm tired of being fair. Centuries of silence in biblical commentaries and reference books have not been fair. A passionate search for biblical truth about sexuality must be undertaken. It is time for shameless, wild speculation about the Bible and about *human* as well as "*homo*" sexuality. Our speculation will not destroy the Bible. If we are wrong about some of our speculation, no one will die. In fact, some people who thought they deserved to die just for being gay or lesbian may actually begin to believe that there is hope for them—and live.<sup>52</sup>



Wilson's purpose is clear while she argues that characters in the Bible were LGB. She is not attempting to convince Christians, who believe that the "texts of terror" condemn homosexuality, to believe that the Bible affirms homosexuality. Instead, she aims to convince LGB individuals that they populate the biblical text. Wilson intends to convince her audience that they can find hope and life through the biblical narrative, because her queer interpretation "can empower lesbians and gay men to embrace the Bible joyfully."<sup>53</sup>

Wilson further justifies her queer interpretations of biblical characters by referencing the Jewish *Midrash* tradition. She indicates that leaders of Jewish communities "have always claimed the right to *expand* on a given text."<sup>54</sup> In doing so, Wilson claims that those individuals practicing *Midrash* give voice to biblical characters who do not speak for themselves. Instead, the rabbis and other writers imagine what they said, who they were, and what else that they did besides what the biblical text directly stated. Finally, Wilson argues that "allowing the silences to speak is one of the powerful methods of a feminist hermeneutic of the Bible. It is time for us to let the gay and lesbian and bisexual characters and inferences have voice, life, and dimension."<sup>55</sup> The Jewish *Midrash* tradition assumes the biblical text is not complete; there are spaces in the biblical narrative. The *Midrash* tradition provides what Walter Fisher calls narrative *probability* to the biblical narrative, because it imagines what occurred during the Bible's spaces and silences which provides a more coherent biblical story to the practitioner of the *Midrash* tradition.<sup>56</sup> In her reference to the *Midrash* tradition, Wilson indicates that traditionally biblical scholars provide voice to marginalized individuals who did not speak. She does this by providing a voice to biblical LGB individuals.

According to Wilson, LGB people need to hear her queer interpretations in order to proceed with a process of healing, grieving, and forgetting that begins when others use the Bible against them. Passionately, Wilson writes, “Many gay men and lesbians have been rejected, punished, and excluded by their families and churches, as well as by the larger society. In order to live, gay men and lesbians have had to learn how to let go, grieve, and forgive.”<sup>57</sup> She continues that “in order to embrace the Bible joyfully, many people will have to *forgive* the Bible, as well as forgive those who have used it to hurt and punish and ostracize them.”<sup>58</sup> Because LGB individuals are wounded by others’ use of the Bible, they do not trust the Bible. Wilson indicates that her interpretations of the Bible will help those individuals to trust the Bible once again.

However, Wilson also indicates that aiding those LGB people is a difficult task, because they are afraid of the Bible. Their scars run too deep. She writes:

I’ve seen gay and lesbian people open a Bible fearfully, as if it would physically hurt them to read it. They have *Biblephobia*. For gay and lesbian people who grew up thinking that the Bible was a source of spiritual authority, the word of God, and the story of Jesus’ love, the experience of being verbally abused with a Bible was devastating. It was an experience of betrayal. It was no longer safe to open a Bible, to read it, or even, sometimes, to own one. And along with this pain came the loss of all the *good stuff* that the Bible had provided.<sup>59</sup>

After being devastated by the Bible, LGB individuals choose not to associate with the Bible. They fear those who use the Bible, because they fear that those individuals will use the Bible to condemn them. For instance, Wilson recalls a time when she and other members of the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) handed out flyers for their

church. While doing this, “gays and lesbians on the street ripped up flyers and shouted, ‘F— the Bible!’”<sup>60</sup> According to Wilson, these individuals are so hurt by how others used the Bible that they refused to consider the Bible’s liberating potential.

Even though others might reject her at the time, Wilson prays that they will find that the Bible affirms gays and lesbians. After witnessing other LGB individuals curse the Bible, she indicates:

Their angry reaction ensures that they will never forget that they encountered a gay or lesbian person who somehow feels there is still something of value in a relationship with the Bible. Perhaps at some future date, when they are ready or are more needy than angry, they may remember and reach out and be able to claim or reclaim a healthy relationship to whatever religious tradition or text is theirs — or make their peace with it and move on.<sup>61</sup>

Her purpose in “outing” gay and lesbian individuals is to provide others a means to affirm themselves with the Bible. Because there are gays and lesbians in the Bible, the text frees gays and lesbians from feeling condemned. Even if other gays and lesbians do not accept these interpretations initially, they will forever know that other gays and lesbians have found solace from how the Bible has been used against them by turning back to the Bible. In essence, Wilson invites her audience to see themselves in the biblical text which hopefully prevents those individuals from thinking the Bible excludes them from its narrative. She intentionally reclaims the Bible for LGB individuals.

### *The Eunuchs*

Nor let the eunuch say,  
“Here I am, a dry tree.”  
For thus says the Lord:  
“To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths,

And choose what pleases Me,  
And hold fast My covenant,  
Even to them I will give in My house  
And within My walls a place and a name  
Better than that of sons and daughters;  
I will give them an everlasting name  
That shall not be cut off.  
- Isaiah 56:3-6<sup>62</sup>

To allow LGB individuals to see themselves in the Bible, Wilson lists the biblical characters that she believes are a part of a sexual and/or gender minority. The list includes 34 individuals.<sup>63</sup> Her main argument that allows her to conclude that those individuals were gay, lesbian, bisexual, or another sexual and/or gender minority is based on the term “eunuch.” According to Wilson, the “eunuchs and barren women . . . *are our gay, lesbian, and bisexual antecedents.*”<sup>64</sup> Wilson then argues that there are many different mentions of eunuchs in the Bible and that eunuch has multiple meanings throughout the text. Eunuchs are not only castrated men as some traditional definitions of the term indicate. Therefore, if Wilson is correct that eunuchs are gay, lesbian, and bisexuals, then there are numerous mentions of LGB individuals throughout the Bible.

Wilson begins her argument by referencing the prophecy in Isaiah 56 as a direct rebuttal to the Deuteronomic and Levitical laws. Deuteronomy 23:1 reads, “He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the assembly of the Lord.”<sup>65</sup> Yet, Isaiah revises this prohibition by indicating that not only will those eunuchs enter the heaven, but that God will give them an everlasting name.<sup>66</sup> Because Isaiah responds to the previous prohibition against eunuchs, Wilson argues that Isaiah establishes an inclusive covenant with all eunuchs.

After this, Wilson indicates that her understanding of this passage has altered over time. Before she assumed that a eunuch could only be a castrated male. However,

because Isaiah references both “sons and daughters,” Wilson views that the term eunuch could not only exclusively to males.<sup>67</sup> If the Bible did not apply the term to men only, then the traditional understanding of the term as castrated males must be incorrect. Instead, Wilson argues that the term applies to an entire “genre” of people—the LGB community. She references the work of another queer theologian, John McNeill, who indicates that the “term ‘eunuch’ in the New Testament is used not only in its literal sense—i.e., those who have been physically castrated—but also in a symbolic sense for all those who for various reasons do not marry and bear children.”<sup>68</sup>

Then, by referencing Matthew 19:10-12, Wilson further supports her argument by indicating that Jesus stated, “All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother’s womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it.”<sup>69</sup> Wilson interprets “eunuchs who were born thus” to be gays and lesbians. She even states her understanding of this passage as: “‘Let anyone accept this who can’: ‘Yoo-hoo! Homosexuals, listen up! This one’s for you!’”<sup>70</sup> While other nontraditional readers argue that Jesus said nothing about homosexuality, Wilson’s reading of the Bible argues that Jesus did. Jesus told gays and lesbians that they were born as gays and lesbians. Whereas, before the Deuteronomic and Levitical laws separated eunuchs (i.e., gays and lesbians) from the Kingdom of God, Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy by creating an inclusive covenant with eunuchs. However, according to Wilson, not only did Jesus create a covenant with eunuchs, but he was also a eunuch.

### *The Bisexuality of Jesus?*

[Jesus] said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.” Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke. Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke. Then, leaning back[a] on Jesus’ breast, he said to Him, “Lord, who is it?”<sup>71</sup>

Wilson tells her audience truth when she writes that she will not withhold any of her queer beliefs about the Bible. When she turns her attention to Jesus, she writes, “A monolithically heterosexual, or even asexual assumption, has dominated the interpretation of Jesus’ life, ministry, and personhood for too long.”<sup>72</sup> Wilson intends to correct this belief.

Wilson begins her argument about Jesus’ sexuality by disagreeing with the belief that John was the beloved disciple of Jesus. Instead, she argues that Lazarus was the beloved one. In doing so, she references the work of Vernard Eller—a prolific author and minister in the Church of the Brethren. Using Eller’s book *The Name of the Beloved Disciple*,<sup>73</sup> Wilson makes several arguments about why Lazarus was the “Beloved Disciple” as opposed to John. First, Wilson indicates that the term “Beloved Disciple” only appeared after Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave. Second, Wilson explains that Mary of Bethany was paired with Lazarus, and then Mary Magdalene was also paired with the “Beloved Disciple.” She describes how Peter and the beloved disciple rushed to Jesus’ tomb together—“Then she [Mary Magdalene] ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.’”<sup>74</sup> According to Wilson and Eller, “whom Jesus loved” modifies the other disciple; the other disciple was Lazarus.

Wilson believes that Lazarus has been closeted by the biblical authors. His identity was stripped by those authors because he was “the other disciple,” not “Lazarus.” Wilson was not alone in this belief. Other gay men and lesbians have identified with Lazarus. According to her, the West Hollywood Presbyterian Church founded the Lazarus Project, because “they compared the experience of being in the *tomb* to the experience of being closeted. Also, when Jesus raised Lazarus, he used the words ‘*Come out*’ (John 11:43)!”<sup>75</sup> While Wilson concedes that the words “come out” were merely coincidence, she does argue that this “coincidence” still loudly speaks to gays and lesbians.

Not only did Jesus revive Lazarus (i.e., the other disciple), but he loved him. Wilson claims that the Bible’s description of Jesus and Lazarus was unique because of the frequency with which the Bible mentioned the love between the two. Even though Jesus likely loved his other disciples, family, and mother, the Bible does not describe those relationships with as intense of love as it does for Jesus and Lazarus. Then, Wilson rhetorically asks, “How is it possible to read over and over again about this man whom he [Jesus] loved and not imagine that there might have been at least some dimension of passion and eroticism connected to his feelings?”<sup>76</sup>

After stating her question, Wilson answers it. She argues that the passion between Jesus and Lazarus provides evidence to suggest that Christians should view Jesus as bisexual. This is not the only biblical character that she describes as bisexual. King David was also bisexual. He, with Jonathan, was a member of a biblical same-sex, romantic partnership.

*David and Jonathan*

“How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle!  
Jonathan was slain in your high places.  
I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;  
You have been very pleasant to me;  
Your love to me was wonderful,  
Surpassing the love of women.”<sup>77</sup>

Wilson tells her queer narrative of David and Jonathan. She indicates that for David and Jonathan, it was love at first sight. They first met after David vanquished the giant, Goliath. At that time, “the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”<sup>78</sup> Then, because “he loved him as his own soul,” Jonathan made a covenant with David.<sup>79</sup> Moments later, Jonathan “took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt.”<sup>80</sup>

Wilson and other queer theologians argue that this first meeting was homoerotic. First, according to the queer theologian, Yaron Peleg, Jonathan’s covenant with David demonstrates that the two were romantically and/or erotically involved. Peleg indicates that there were two primary forms of covenants in the Bible: between God and individuals, and between husband and wife. For Peleg, the covenant between David and Jonathan was representative of the later. David and Jonathan entered the same covenant that husbands and wives entered.<sup>81</sup>

Not only was this passage erotic or romantic because of the covenant between David and Jonathan, but also because Jonathan stripped in front of David. According to Peleg, the word “to strip” (i.e., took off) implies sexual subjection. Peleg writes, “Jonathan voluntarily takes off the signs of his authority and manhood, and then strips



before David in a heartfelt and submissive manner.”<sup>82</sup> Wilson notes that this part of David and Jonathon’s relationship clearly resembles Greek literature that depicts homoerotic warriors.<sup>83</sup>

Wilson’s queer narrative of David and Jonathan continues when Jonathan discovered that his father, King Saul, wished to murder David. Jonathan then betrayed his father in order to save David’s life. At this time, Jonathan reaffirmed his convenient with David, and then “Jonathan again caused David to vow, because he loved him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul.”<sup>84</sup> In order to save David from Saul, Jonathan and David arranged to meet in a field after Jonathan discovered whether or not Saul intended to murder David.

After Jonathan and David devised their plan to keep David safe, Jonathan attended a dinner with Saul. At this dinner, Saul discovered that Jonathan had betrayed him in order to protect David. Saul yelled at Jonathan, calling him the “son of a perverse, rebellious woman!”<sup>85</sup> After this, Jonathan defended David, and asked Saul “Why should he [David] be killed?”<sup>86</sup> To which, Saul responded by throwing a spear at Jonathan. In that moment, Jonathan knew that his father would kill David. Grieved, Jonathan heatedly left the table. He did not eat for a day, because “he was grieved for David.”<sup>87</sup> Yet, even though he was grieved, Jonathan sought out David to fulfill their agreement.

Jonathan indicated to David that Saul intended to kill him. Afterward, “they kissed one another; and they wept together, but David more so.”<sup>88</sup> Here, Wilson indicated that some interpretations of “but David more so” described David as being overcome with emotion. Others argued that “wept the more” was a euphemism for sexual arousal.<sup>89</sup>

Nevertheless, Wilson highlighted her belief that this passage demonstrated that David and Jonathan were in a same-sex, romantic, potentially erotic, relationship.

Wilson also tells the ending of her narrative about Jonathan and David's relationship. Tragically, Jonathan was slain on the battlefield. Upon hearing about the death of his lover, David lamented for Jonathan, "I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me; Your love to me was wonderful, Surpassing the love of women."<sup>90</sup> In this passage, Wilson recognizes David's love for Jonathan as well as David's bisexuality. David indicated that he had felt the love of women, but that the love of Jonathan surpassed that. She also responded to opposing arguments. Others had indicated that the love that David had for Jonathan was different than the love the David had for women. Yet, Wilson notes that the term "surpassing" is a comparative term. This was the same type of love, but Jonathan gave David more of it than women did.

After discussing the potentiality of David's bisexuality, Wilson jokingly states that "maybe homosexuality *is* genetic—at least in the Bible!"<sup>91</sup> After all, according to her, the great-great-grandmother of King David was also involved in a biblical same-sex relationship. His great-great-grandmother, Ruth, was a lesbian, and so was her partner, Naomi.

### *Ruth and Naomi*

And Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall *cleave* unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.<sup>92</sup> - Genesis 2:23-24

And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth *clave* unto her [Naomi].<sup>93</sup> - Ruth 1:14

Queer biblical interpreters have long argued that Ruth and Naomi loved each other as husband and wife love each other.<sup>94</sup> In fact, Wilson is so convinced that Ruth and Naomi were a romantic couple that she refers to the entire book of Ruth as a romantic novella.<sup>95</sup> The first manner in which these interpreters support this argument was by demonstrating that the verb “to cling” was used in the Ruth 1:14 and Genesis 2:23-24 in a similar manner. When a man left his family for his wife, he clung to her. Similarly, Ruth clung to Naomi.

In the manner that she discusses David and Jonathan, Wilson tells her queer narrative of Ruth and Naomi. In the beginning, a famine forced Ruth, along with her sons, to move to Moab. While in Moab, her sons married. Tragically, her sons and husband died. She was widowed and did not have an heir. She told her daughters-in-law that she was moving back to Palestine and that they should stay in Moab. Her first daughter-in-law, Orpah, returned to her family, but her other daughter-in-law, Ruth, clung to Naomi.<sup>96</sup> To Naomi, Ruth stated, “Entreat me not to leave you / Or to turn back from following after you / For wherever you go, I will go / And wherever you lodge, I will lodge / Your people shall be my people / And your God, my God / Where you die, I will die / And there will I be buried / The Lord do so to me, and more also / If anything but death parts you and me.”<sup>97</sup> Wilson argues that the words that Ruth stated to Naomi were an expression of love—the same type of love that is expressed between husband and wife. Certainly, the words that Ruth spoke to Naomi are currently used in heterosexual marriages—“until death do us part.” According to Wilson, if heterosexual couples can say these words to express their love, why is this passage not read as an expression of love?<sup>98</sup>

Wilson is angry that heterosexual individuals use this passage during their weddings while simultaneously refusing to allow same-sex individuals to say those words in a wedding ceremony. Wilson writes:

The fact that there is not *one* example in the Bible of heterosexuals who express their undying commitment to each other in a way that can be used in heterosexual marriage ceremonies is certainly a major omission! Heterosexuals have ripped off our love stories for too long! I find myself fantasizing about going through every wedding liturgy in every Christian worship book with my eeu-terrorist scissors and cutting out Ruth's words to Naomi. *You can't steal them!*<sup>99</sup>

Wilson argues that those who would use the words of Ruth in their wedding ceremonies and condemned homosexual love were hypocritical. Their hypocrisy angers Wilson.

Wilson's narrative of Ruth and Naomi does not stop at Ruth's expression of love for Naomi. After Ruth and Naomi travel back to Palestine, Ruth found employment on Boaz's farm. Eventually Ruth married Boaz, but never showed any feelings for Boaz. In fact, there was never romance between Ruth and Boaz. Ruth simply married Boaz to afford herself and Naomi the ability to survive.<sup>100</sup> Eventually, Ruth gave birth to a son.

However, when Ruth gave birth to a son, the townspeople also said that Naomi now had a son, not Boaz. After the birth, the women of the town spoke to Naomi, and said:

Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a close relative; and may his name be famous in Israel! And may he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, *who loves you*, who is better to you *than seven sons*, has borne him." Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom, and became a nurse to him. Also the neighbor women gave him a name [Obed], saying, "There is a son born to Naomi."<sup>101</sup>

Wilson notes that the women of the community indicated that Naomi had gained a son, not a grandson. Because she gained a son, the women must have seen Naomi and Ruth as

being equal, as two mothers, in their relationship and not as a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. They were, therefore, a couple.

Even if Ruth and Naomi were not in a romantic relationship, Wilson still used this passage to justify same-sex adoption. According to her, if Naomi gained a son and also nursed him, then Naomi was more present in Obed's life than Boaz. Naomi and Ruth were Obed's primary caregivers. In other words, Obed—the grandfather of King David—was raised by two women, not a man and a woman.<sup>102</sup> If Ruth and Naomi were able to raise the grandfather of a king, then, according to Wilson, two women have been capable of raising a child in a healthy and successful manner. Not only did Wilson use the story of Ruth and Naomi to establish that there were LGB individuals in the Bible, but also to demonstrate that same-sex couples, lesbians in particular, have biblical sanction to raise children.

Wilson's arguments about the eunuchs, David and Jonathan, Jesus and Lazarus, and Ruth and Naomi represent the pillars of queer interpretations of the Bible. These arguments indicate that there were LBG individuals throughout the Bible. According to these interpretations, therefore, the Bible not only does not condemn homosexuality, but affirms homosexuality. While both queer and liberal readers respond to traditional readers, queer interpretations reach further than liberal interpretations because queer interpretations argue that the Bible is filled with homosexual characters. The key difference between liberal and queer interpretations is present in Wilson's description of Jesus. According to liberal readers, Jesus did not discuss homosexuality and therefore did not condemn homosexuals. According to Wilson and queer readers, Jesus did discuss homosexuality and in doing so affirmed homosexuals; he may even have loved a man.

## **The Gay Christian and the Tension between Homosexuality and Christianity**

As liberal and queer readers develop their arguments in different ways, the identities of gay Christians develop in diverse manners. In particular, research has shown that gay Christians perceive their Christian identity as being incompatible with their gay identity. For instance, sociologist Krista McQueeney interviewed 25 members of lesbian- and gay-affirming churches. In her study, McQueeney writes about one of the participants in her study, “For Emily and others, being a Christian was a ‘moral identity’ . . . it signaled her worth as a person. Identifying as ‘gay’ violated a biblical interpretation that, in no uncertain terms, marked her as not ‘a good person.’ This conflict was not easy to resolve.”<sup>103</sup> Many of the individuals in McQueeney’s study were Christian for most of their lives. As such, many of these individuals were unwilling to reject their Christian identity. However, when these individuals discovered they were homosexual, they also recognized that they would be unable to reject their homosexual desires. Their unwillingness to reject their Christian identity and their inability to reject their homosexual desires created tension in these individuals, because they perceived their Christian beliefs as condemning their homosexual desires and acts.

The development of lesbian- and gay-affirming churches allowed homosexual individuals to identify as both Christian and homosexual. McQueeney argues that lesbian- and gay-affirming churches gave individuals struggling with their perceived contradictions between homosexuality and Christianity “a space to redefine their stigmatized sexuality by constructing and performing identities as lesbian/gay *and* Christian,” which gave these lesbian and gay Christians a “reclaimed . . . sense of dignity and worth.”<sup>104</sup> Even though an individual’s intra-personal struggle between a homosexual

and Christian identity is difficult to resolve, lesbian- and gay-affirming churches are able to help lesbian and gay Christians resolve their perception that their identities contradict.

According to McQueeney, there are three ways lesbians and gays display their Christian identities: minimizing, normalizing, and moralizing sexuality. Because they believe the Bible condemns homosexual acts, there is also a group of gay Christians who resolve this tension by living a life of celibacy.<sup>105</sup> However, McQueeney's study does not mention gay Christians who choose to live a life of celibacy. As such, it is possible that gay Christians do not resolve the tension between Christianity and homosexuality in the same manner that the 25 interviewees of McQueeney's study did. Even if this is so, McQueeney's study provides significant insight into how some gay Christians resolve the tension between homosexuality and Christianity.

First, McQueeney describes minimizing sexuality, which refers to treating homosexuality "as secondary to the Christian identity."<sup>106</sup> Individuals who minimized their sexuality would remain silent around issues of sexuality. McQueeney describes these individuals by stating, "It seemed that these members wanted to participate in a lesbian- and gay-affirming church, but rejected explicit talk about sex and sexuality, given the immoral meanings that homosexuality carried."<sup>107</sup> These individuals would privilege their religious identity over their sexual identity; outside of church and in public, these individuals might even hide their sexual identity in order to preserve their identity as a good Christian.

The majority of gay and lesbian Christian individuals in McQueeney's study attempted to normalize their sexuality. These gay and lesbian individuals would engage in typical, normal Christian behavior such as monogamy. McQueeney writes, "lesbian

and gay members used this strategy to claim that they were ‘normal’ in spite of their sexuality.” McQueeney also indicates that these lesbian and gay members “claimed ‘normal’ gender identities to resist the common stigma that lesbians and gay men are abnormally gendered.”<sup>108</sup> Two of the lesbian- and gay-affirming churches in McQueeney’s study also aided this normalization by performing same-sex unions, which uphold the value of monogamy. Therefore, lesbian and gay Christians attempted to establish themselves as good Christians by engaging in typical Christian behavior.

Lastly, a minority of gay and lesbian Christian individuals in McQueeney’s study attempted to moralize their sexuality. McQueeney writes that these individuals “claimed that their sexuality . . . gave them a special calling as Christians. Much like some gay men living with HIV/AIDS redefine their disease from a ‘curse’ to a ‘blessing’ by becoming HIV/AIDS educators and activists.”<sup>109</sup> Individuals who attempted to moralize their sexuality, including Wilson, argued there were moral reasons that lesbian and gay individuals needed to be included in congregations. Moralizing is distinct from normalizing sexuality, because when an individual moralizes sexuality, they are arguing lesbian and gay Christians have special callings such as a calling to teach other lesbian and gay individuals about God or a calling to become HIV/AIDS activists.

In addition to being HIV/AIDS activists, some gay Christians believed their special calling was political activism. Some gay and lesbian Christians started to actively support gay rights initiatives and oppose anti-gay initiatives. For instance, in 1992, Mel White wrote a letter in opposition to an anti-gay ballot measure in Oregon. In this letter, White discussed the biblical arguments used to condemn homosexuality. He argued the Bible condemned temple prostitution and pagan idolatry, not homosexuality as we



understand it in modern times. White also indicated there was no scientific evidence to suggest ex-gay conversion was able to change an individual's sexual orientation. During this time, the gay community was still almost exclusively associated with AIDS; AIDS was still the "gay disease." Therefore, in his letter, White claimed innocent children were also being infected with the disease.<sup>110</sup> White argued that people's ignorance was allowing the disease to spread.

In his letter, White also responded to an argument that homosexuals did not need protection. White argues the following:

Hate crimes against us are increasing dramatically. We are cursed, clubbed with baseball bats, and murdered simply because we are gay. We are losing our jobs and our apartments, not because we are bad employees or irresponsible tenants, but because of our sexual orientations. We are not allowed to serve in the military when Pentagon studies prove irrefutably that gays and lesbians serve their country with skill and honor.<sup>111</sup>

White's demonstration of the discrimination that lesbians and gays face will be useful for this project. Understanding the discrimination that lesbians and gays faced will help this project's evaluation of how gay- and lesbian-affirming churches (e.g., MCC's) attempt to mobilize gay Christians. In her speech, Wilson argues that one of the purposes of MCC is to provide a safe space for gay Christians.<sup>112</sup> Describing the discrimination lesbians and gays face enables me to explore how Wilson and queer biblical arguments attempt to overcome that discrimination in order to aid MCC and MCC's mission to provide safe space for gay Christians.

The tension between homosexuality and Christianity is relevant context to Vines' speech as well. In an article he wrote for the *Huffington Post*, Vines describes how he felt tension between his new gay identity and his Christian upbringing.<sup>113</sup> However, unlike Wilson, Vines appears to have normalized his sexuality by describing in his speech how he plans to be monogamous and get married. On the other hand, Wilson appears to have moralized her sexuality by indicating gay and lesbian Christians have special duties, such as creating safe spaces for other gays and lesbians.

### **Process of Examination**

This project first describes the historical development of the tension between homosexuality and Christianity. The project then evaluates two speeches. One was given by Wilson in October of 2008 at the MCC of Los Angeles. The other was delivered by Vines in March of 2012 at a Methodist church in Wichita, Kansas. Vines and Wilson are similar in that they both identify as gay Christians. Both of these individuals believe God has called them to argue in favor of gay-friendly interpretations of the Bible. As such, both the speeches of Vines and Wilson promote affirming homosexuality in the church. However, these speeches also have differences. First, Vines only uses liberal interpretations of the Bible during his speech, whereas Wilson also refers to queer interpretations of the Bible. Second, Vines' speech is focused on convincing people the Bible does not condemn homosexuality. However, Wilson's speech is more focused on mobilizing people who already believe the Bible does not condemn homosexuality. Because these speeches are different, my evaluation of both speeches allows for comparison of the tactics and arguments used by liberal and queer readers of the biblical text.

In chapter two, I argue that the gay Christian identity constitutes a rhetorical exigence for gay Christian rhetors. In order to warrant this argument, I trace the history of the conflict between homosexuality and Christianity. I begin where this debate first flourished—San Francisco. I examine the early history of San Francisco and discuss why the city became a metropolis for gay individuals. The number of homosexuals who made their home in San Francisco created the conditions for the city to become the first battlefield concerning the advancement of gay rights. In its early history, ministers flooded it and condemned it as being a “Sodom by the Sea.” Yet, here, the first organization that argued that homosexuality and Christianity were compatible developed. As a result of the theological work that developed in that organization, gay Christians found arguments that justified their homosexuality and Christianity. Then, I describe historical tensions between Christians and homosexuals, including Anita Bryant crusade, the Christian anti-gay movement, the Briggs initiative, “Gay-Related Immune Deficiency,” Matthew Shepard, the 2004 election, and Proposition 8.

The argument that I advance in chapter three is that Wilson’s rhetorical efforts constituted her audience members as *parrhesiastea*—frank speakers. I use Foucault’s understanding of the term to describe how Wilson creates members of MCC as critics who frankly speak the truth even when they are in danger, because they have the duty to do so. Wilson’s speech also specifically allows an examination of how an individual can mobilize Christians to preach to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals as well as mobilize Christians to advocate for gay and lesbian rights.

Wilson, both in her book and in her speech, refuses to alter her arguments for gay and lesbian inclusion in the church in light of her audiences. For instance, she is frank in

her discussion and reference to potential gay and lesbian individuals in the Bible. Wilson also uses MCC's past as a justification for continued expansion of the church and for continued efforts to provide safe spaces for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals across the globe. In her speech, Wilson assumes that her audience agrees with her about her interpretation of the Bible and she is not speaking in front of a hostile audience. Instead, Wilson is attempting to convince her audience to argue for gay- and lesbian-affirming interpretations of the Bible in places that would be hostile to those interpretations.

In chapter four, I evaluate Vines' speech. From 2008 to 2010, Vines was a student at Harvard University. In 2010, Vines admitted to himself that he was gay. He was raised in a traditional church in Wichita, Kansas. Because of his traditional religious upbringing, he was familiar with all of the traditional, biblical arguments used against homosexuality. He also believed that the people at his church thought those arguments were "the final word on this issue."<sup>114</sup> Because of the traditional, biblical arguments about homosexuality, his Christian identity, and his newfound gay identity, Vines was left feeling like he was living a contradiction. To resolve this contradiction, he decided to take a two-year leave of absence from Harvard in order to study the Bible and what it says about homosexuality. During those two years, he developed a presentation which used the liberal, biblical arguments about homosexuality to convince people the Bible did not condemn homosexuality. After those two years, Vines started his quest to change the minds of people in Wichita, Kansas.

Throughout this chapter, I advance several arguments. First, I argue that the organization of his speech mirrors the development of his identity as a gay Christian.

This organization invites his audience to develop from traditional readers to liberal readers. Second, I argue that Vines embodied a prophetic *persona* in this speech. In order to make this argument, I develop rhetorical scholarship's understanding of the prophet. I agree with Michael Leff and Ebony Utley and indicate that some prophets must argue themselves into that position.<sup>115</sup> Vines does this. He starts his speech in a manner that creates himself as a prophet which enables him to function as a prophet at the end of his speech. Using Vines' speech as evidence, I also test James Darsey's suggestion that gay rights rhetoric cannot be prophetic.<sup>116</sup>

In chapter five, I conclude by summarizing the main arguments that I advance throughout the thesis. I then offer concluding remarks that compare and contrast Vines' and Wilson's speeches. Using my comparisons, I argue that further rhetorical scholarship should examine the potentiality of a genre of gay Christian rhetoric.

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of an academic debate amongst biblical scholars about homosexuality, see the ninety-third volume of the *Anglican Theological Review*.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Vines, "Op-ed: Don't Give Up on Christian Gays," *The Advocate*, published on May 1, 2013, accessed on August 14, 2013, <<http://www.advocate.com/op-ed/2012/05/01/opinion-do-not-give-christian-gays>>.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Wilson, *Our Tribe: Queer folks, God, Jesus and the Bible*. (New York: HarpersCollins Publishers, Inc., 1995), 94. Wilson indicates that this term was first used by Robert Goss in its application to biblical texts that are used to condemn gay and lesbian individuals. However, the term was originally created by Phyllis Trible to refer to biblical passages that involve gender violence. See Robert Goss, *Jesus Acted Up* (San Francisco: HaperSanFrancisco, 1993), and Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> I agree with Dana Cloud in her discomfort in some of the terms that I use. However, I have selected the terms that best encapsulate the positions that members of churches have in debates about gay rights. For instance, the term traditionalist is a less partisan term than alternative terms that I could use such as fundamentalist. Cloud writes in her 5<sup>th</sup> footnote that "I will admit to a certain discomfort with using the word 'queer,' because it has so many pejorative connotations and uses historically and today; however, I cannot think of a more inclusive shorthand for the identities and experiences of gay, bisexual, lesbian, trans-gendered, gender-ambiguous, and transsexual persons, so I use it advisedly." See Cloud, Dana L. "The First Lady's Privates: Queering Eleanor Roosevelt for Public Address Studies," in *Queering Public Address: Sexualities in American Historical Discourse*, ed. Charles E. Morris III (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 41.

<sup>6</sup> John E. Goodingay, Grant R. LeMarquand, George R. Sumner, and Daniel A. Westberg, "Same-Sex Marriage and Anglican Theology: A View from the Traditionalists," *Anglican Theological Review* 93.1, 1-50.

<sup>7</sup> Nate Smelle, "Anti-gay clipping upsets Bancroft restaurant-goers," *Toronto Sun*, published on August 28, 2013, accessed on March 8, 2014, <<http://www.torontosun.com/2013/08/28/adam-and-steve-clipping-upsets-bancroft-restaurant-goers>>.

<sup>8</sup> Sharon Groves, "Debunking the Myth: 'Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve,'" *Human Rights Campaign*, published on December 17, 2013, accessed on March 8, 2014, <<https://www.hrc.org/blog/entry/debunking-the-myth-adam-and-eve-not-adam-and-steve>>.

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<sup>9</sup> Goodingay et al., “Same-Sex Marriage and Anglican Theology: A View from the Traditionalists,” 20.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>11</sup> New International Version

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 1:28, New International Version.

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 1:27, New International Version.

<sup>14</sup> Jeirdre J. Good, Willis J. Jenkins, Cynthia B. Kittredge, and Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., “A Theology of Marriage including Same-Sex Couples: A View from the Liberals,” *Anglican Theological Review* 93.1 (2011), 68.

<sup>15</sup> Everest Bukenya, “Uganda Outrage At Kenyan Gay, Lesbian Protest,” *AllAfrica*, published on February 11, 2014, accessed on March 8, 2014, <<http://allafrica.com/stories/201402131172.html>>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Jacob M. Caldwell, “The Viability of Christian Same-Sex Unions: Why Scripturally Normed Faith Communities Must Support Homosexual Relationships,” *Theology & Sexuality* 16.1 (2010), 62. doi: 10.1558/tse.v16i1.59

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Shrayber, “Transgender Woman Invites Councilman to Stone Her, Even Brings Stone,” *Jezebel*, published on January 18, 2014, accessed on March 7, 2014, <<http://jezebel.com/transgender-woman-invites-councilman-to-stone-her-even-1504104555>>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg, “Modern Day Moabites: The Bible and the Debate About Same-Sex Marriage,” *Biblical Interpretation* 16 (2008), 442-472.

<sup>24</sup> Rob Schwarzwald, “Leviticus, Jesus, and Homosexuality: Some Thoughts on Honest Interpretation,” accessed on September 7, 2013, <<http://www.frc.org/issueanalysis/leviticus-jesus-and-homosexuality-some-thoughts-on-honest-interpretation>>.

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<sup>25</sup> Although, it should be noted that there could be other purposes for the liberal and queer readings of the Biblical text besides convincing traditional Biblical readers to support gay rights. For instance, gay and lesbian Christians might use liberal and queer readings of the Biblical texts to affirm their identity and resolve tensions between being homosexual and Christian.

<sup>26</sup> Stahlberg, 462.

<sup>27</sup> D. Russell Scott, "The Teachings of Jesus on Sin," *The Expository Times* 36, (1925): 223-225.

<sup>28</sup> Stahlberg, 461.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 459.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 459.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 460.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 457.

<sup>33</sup> Steven Greensburg, *Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 204.

<sup>34</sup> Good et al., 80.

<sup>35</sup> "Is it unnatural to be gay?" published in 2013, accessed on March 8, 2014, <<http://www.debate.org/opinions/is-it-unnatural-to-be-gay>>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Goodingay et al., 27.

<sup>39</sup> Romans 1:22-23, New International Version.

<sup>40</sup> Kristy Maddux, "Christianity, Homosexuality and the 'Plain Sense' of Scripture: A Critical History of Interpretation." *Journal of the Northwest Communication Association* 30 (2001), 112.

<sup>41</sup> I use both the Contemporary English Version and New International Version to highlight the differences in the way that translators have translated this particular passage.



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<sup>42</sup> The New International Version uses “men who have sex with men” for *arsenokoitai* and the Contemporary English Version uses “behaves like a homosexual.”

<sup>43</sup> Goodingay et al., 27.

<sup>44</sup> Wilson, 107.

<sup>45</sup> Maddux, 114.

<sup>46</sup> Wilson, *Our Tribe: Queer folks, God, Jesus and the Bible*.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 112-113.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>56</sup> According to Deborah Kahn-Harris, the Midrash tradition arises from the exogeneses of the biblical text. The interpretations of the Midrash respond to those exogeneses. Kahn-Harris indicates that the Midrash tradition allows for multiple, competing interpretations of the Bible. See Deborah Kahn-Harris, “Midrash for the Masses: The Uses (and Abuses) of the Term 'Midrash' in Contemporary Feminist Discourse,” *Feminist Theology* 21 (2013), 299. My reference to narrative *probability* comes from the work of Walter Fisher. According to Fisher, *probability* refers to “what constitutes a coherent story.” See Walter Fisher, “Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument,” *Communication Monographs* 51 (1984), 8.

<sup>57</sup> Wilson, 113.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 113-114.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 115.

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- <sup>62</sup> Isaiah 56:3-5, New King James Version.
- <sup>63</sup> This list appears in her appendix—"The Roll Call of Eunuchs." See, Wilson, 281-285.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid, 124.
- <sup>65</sup> Deuteronomy 23:1, New King James Version.
- <sup>66</sup> Isaiah 56:3-5, New King James Version.
- <sup>67</sup> Wilson, 125.
- <sup>68</sup> John J. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993), 64-65.
- <sup>69</sup> Matthew 19:10-12, New King James Version.
- <sup>70</sup> Wilson, 129. Here, Wilson also references the work of John McNeil. See, McNeill, 65.
- <sup>71</sup> John 13:21-25, New King James Version.
- <sup>72</sup> Wilson, 139.
- <sup>73</sup> Vernard Eller, *The Name of the Beloved Disciple*, (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1987).
- <sup>74</sup> John 20:2, New King James Version.
- <sup>75</sup> Wilson, 143.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid, 146.
- <sup>77</sup> 2 Samuel 1:25-26, New King James Version.
- <sup>78</sup> 1 Samuel 18:1, New King James Version.
- <sup>79</sup> 1 Samuel 18:2, New King James Version.
- <sup>80</sup> 1 Samuel 18:4, New King James Version.
- <sup>81</sup> Yaron Peleg, "Love at First Sight? David, Jonathan, and the Biblical Politics of Gender," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30 (2005), 179.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid, 181.
- <sup>83</sup> Wilson, 150.
- <sup>84</sup> 1 Samuel 20:17, New King James Version.
- <sup>85</sup> 1 Samuel 20:30, New King James Version.

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<sup>86</sup> 1 Samuel 20:32, New King James Version.

<sup>87</sup> 1 Samuel 20:34, New King James Version.

<sup>88</sup> 1 Samuel 20:41, New King James Version.

<sup>89</sup> Wilson, 152. Wilson refers to the work of Tom Horner, who argued that Jonathan loved David and that they were sexually involved. See, Tom Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, (Lexington, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1978).

<sup>90</sup> 2 Samuel 1:25-26, New King James Version.

<sup>91</sup> Wilson, 154.

<sup>92</sup> Genesis 2:23-24, King James Version, emphasis added.

<sup>93</sup> Ruth 1:14, King James Version, emphasis added.

<sup>94</sup> See, for example, Jesus Metropolitan Community Church, “Ruth loved Naomi as Adam loved Eve,” accessed on February 5, 2014, <[http://www.wouldjesusdiscriminate.org/biblical\\_evidence/ruth\\_naomi.html](http://www.wouldjesusdiscriminate.org/biblical_evidence/ruth_naomi.html)>.

<sup>95</sup> Wilson, 154.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>97</sup> Ruth 1:16-17.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>99</sup> Wilson, 156.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 154-155.

<sup>101</sup> Ruth 4:14-17. Wilson also added this emphasis.

<sup>102</sup> Wilson, 155.

<sup>103</sup> Krista McQueeney, “‘We are God’s Children, Y’All:’ Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Lesbian- and Gay-Affirming Congregations,” *Social Problems* 56.1, (2009): 156.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>105</sup> Tanya Erzen, *Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-Gay Movement*, (Berkley, California: University of California Press, 2006), 46-47. For a more recent example, see Merrill Nosler, “Being Christian and Gay,” *The Banner*, published on July 12, 2013, accessed on August 15, 2013, <<http://www.thebanner.org/features/2013/07/being-christian-and-gay>>.

<sup>106</sup> McQueeney, 157.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 158.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>110</sup> Mel White, *Stranger at the Gate: To be Gay and Christian in America*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 299.

<sup>111</sup> White, 300.

<sup>112</sup> “Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (1 of 3) MCC 40<sup>th</sup> Ann. Moderator’s A,” October 15, 2008, accessed August 14, 2013, YouTube, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHIgNT34ROg>>.

<sup>113</sup> Vines, “The Bible and Homosexuality: Why I Left College and Spent Two Years Finding Out What the Scriptures *Really* Say”

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> See Michael Leff, and Ebony A. Utley, “Instrumental and Constitutive Rhetoric in Martin Luther King Jr.’s ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail,’” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 7.1 (2004), 47.

<sup>116</sup> See James Darsey, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*, (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 177, 184, and 206.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE MODERN HISTORY OF GAY CHRISTIANS

In the introduction of his book, *Congregations in Conflict*, Keith Hartman writes, “A Methodist church puts its minister on trial for marching in a gay rights parade. A Quaker meeting struggles with a marriage request from two lesbians. A Baptist church debates the ordination of a gay divinity student, and is thrown out of the Southern Baptist Convention for deciding to go ahead with it. In churches across the country, a fascinating and bitter conflict is being played out.”<sup>1</sup>

This enormous and bitter conflict has created a perception that homosexuality and Christianity are incompatible—perception of discord that represents a significant rhetorical problem for all gay Christian rhetors, including Matthew Vines and Reverend Nancy Wilson. To convince Christians that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality, Vines and Wilson would have to overcome this perception. Their task would not prove to be an easy one, because, throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, many Christian denominations established policies and rhetorics in opposition to homosexuality. The goal of this chapter is, therefore, to describe the unique rhetorical problems that gay Christians face. I aim to accomplish this task through an historical analysis of the discrimination and obstacles that homosexuals have faced, which includes the growth of the Christian anti-gay movement and development of the public perception that homosexuality and Christianity are incompatible.

Through this historical analysis, I argue that gay Christian rhetors are constrained by the need to justify their identities. In “The Rhetorical Situation,” Lloyd Bitzer indicated that “any *exigence* is an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be.”<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, Bitzer argued that “in any rhetorical situation there will be at least one controlling exigence which functions as the organizing principle: it specifies the audience to be addressed and the change to be effected.”<sup>3</sup> Karen Foss augments Bitzer’s theory and argues that a rhetor’s identity can constitute a rhetorical exigence.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, I argue that the gay Christian identity and the historical development of the perception that there is discord between homosexuality and Christianity constitute controlling exigences for gay Christian orators.

In particular, when gay Christians speak, they must justify their identities as gay Christians because of the public perception that homosexuals cannot be Christians. Furthermore, the combative, relentless dispute between gay rights groups and Christian anti-gay groups in the 1970s and 1980s still haunts the memories of gays and lesbians. Because of this memory, when gay Christians speak, they must convince other gays and lesbians that the Bible does not condemn them. Gay Christian rhetors must justify their Christianity to their gay audience and also justify their homosexuality to their Christian audience; the burden of proof is always on gay Christian rhetors to justify their identity regardless of who their audience is.

I will begin my historical analysis where the religious dialogues about religion and homosexuality began—in San Francisco. I track the early influence that homosexuals had on the city and the development of the city as a gay metropolis. Then, I turn my attention to the discrimination that gay individuals faced throughout the city and throughout the United States during the 1940s and 1950s. After this, I discuss the formation of the Council on Religion and the Homosexual, which was the first organization that brought homosexuals and Christians together as one. Afterwards, I

describe the development of the Christian anti-gay movement and the activities of several of its early leaders, including Anita Bryant and California State Senator John Briggs. I explain the ramifications of the AIDS epidemic throughout the 1980s and the formation of the public perception that homosexuality and Christianity were incompatible during that time. I also discuss Christian support for antigay initiatives during the early 1990s and the 2004 and 2008 elections.

### **“Sodom by the Sea”**

In May of 1879, Laura De Force Gordon wrote the following in a time capsule that would be sealed for one hundred years: “If this little book should see the light after its 100 years entombment, I would like its readers to know that the author was a lover of her own sex and devoted the best years of her life in striving for the political equal and social and moral elevation of women.”<sup>5</sup> In 1979, Gordon’s words would be re-discovered in San Francisco’s Washington Square Park. While her words are rather ambiguous, for one of Harvey Milk’s biographers, Randy Shilts, her words demonstrated that San Francisco was a haven for gays and lesbians even when the town was initially founded. Milk may be remembered as the most prominent figure in San Francisco’s gay history, but the town had a thriving homosexual underground long before Milk moved there. Shilts wrote that “generations before people like Harvey Milk went west to build a political movement . . . ministers throughout the West quickly gave the town another nickname, ‘Sodom by the Sea.’”<sup>6</sup>

This nickname was given to San Francisco because during the late 1800s, men in the city developed a code for “denoting sexual inclinations by colored handkerchiefs.”<sup>7</sup> In those times, men had all-male dances and used their handkerchiefs in order to separate

who was the “male” and who was the “female” in their partnership. In 1898, the start of the Spanish-American War “infused new excitement into the city’s gay scene.”<sup>8</sup>

According to Shilts, during the war, “helpful young soldiers learned they could make extra money if they escorted admiring older men around the Presidio military base—and earn more if they proved serviceable.”<sup>9</sup>

At that time, church leaders began to notice what was happening in San Francisco. After San Francisco’s great earthquake in 1906, those church leaders descended upon the town arguing that the earthquake was “God’s wrath on Sodom”—the “Sodom by the Sea.”<sup>10</sup> In particular, according to the historian George Chauncey, the Catholic Church actively curtailed discussion about homosexuality. For instance, in the early 1930s, the Catholic Church threatened to boycott Hollywood movies if Hollywood did not ban gay and lesbian characters from all movies. Chauncey argued that because of these efforts Hollywood censored movies with gay characters, themes, and references for over thirty years.<sup>11</sup> During this period of time, the dangers of being gay increased dramatically as soldiers began to blackmail any gay individual they saw cruising. Police also entrapped unsuspecting gays.

Even so, during the Second World War, San Francisco became an “international gay Mecca.”<sup>12</sup> Because of the draft, many “men were uprooted from generations-old family centers, pulled outside of the ken of their peers’ values, shunted anonymously through big cities in almost exclusively same-sex environments.”<sup>13</sup> During that time, the word “homosexual” first entered their vocabulary. Previously, those individuals may have been unable to describe their same-sex inclinations, but now they had the language necessary to do so. Yet, at the same time, the army started to find and to purge



homosexuals from the military. Chauncey indicated that those who supported the purge started to depict homosexuals “as a part of a formidable and invisible conspiracy that threatened American culture.”<sup>14</sup> Charles Morris has echoed Chauncey’s perspective, arguing that “this tumultuous period . . . was marked by a ‘homosexual panic’ that transformed the homosexual from pansy into ‘menace.’”<sup>15</sup> However, the military’s purge ironically created the impetus for a homosexual community, because it

created an entire class of social outcasts who were public homosexuals. Some committed suicide, but most tried to start quiet new lives. Returning home was an improbable option, with all the messy questions it would raise. Most of the men discharged from the Pacific theater were processed out in San Francisco, and that’s where they stayed. By the end of World War II, the military establishment had given San Francisco a disproportionately large number of identified gays.<sup>16</sup>

Later, the McCarthy trials also created gay refugees who fled to the Bay Area. For instance, “a full contingent of former State Department employees moved en masse to nearby Sausalito . . . after anti-gay hysteria swept the foreign service.”<sup>17</sup> Specifically, Chauncey indicated that throughout the 1950s and 1960s thousands of individuals were discharged or forced to resign from federal government positions because they were assumed to be homosexual.<sup>18</sup>

Because the military or government had already publicly outed these individuals, they saw themselves as being free to create public establishments, including gay bars. One such bar was The Black Cat. In 1948, the Alcohol Beverage Control Commission (ABC) charged that The Black Cat was serving alcohol to homosexuals, which was a crime, and attempted to close the bar. ABC’s charge against The Black Cat went to court,

and, in a major court victory, The Black Cat won the right for homosexuals to assemble peacefully. That court decision only infuriated ABC.

Filled with anger, members of ABC decided to commence a battle that would become its “fifteen-year war on The Black Cat.”<sup>19</sup> Entrapment of homosexuals became a common tactic of ABC’s investigators. Out of necessity, the gay bars of San Francisco created a network where each bar would warn the other bars if they suspected police officers were pretending to be gay. Early in this conflict, drag queens were arrested when “the police took to enforcing an archaic ordinance that forbade anyone from posing as a member of the opposite sex.”<sup>20</sup> Police would frequently break into gay bars and leave with paddy wagons full of gay individuals. When they arrested individuals, it was common practice for the police officers to call “the victim’s employer and family, even if charges were dropped within hours.”<sup>21</sup> Bars instituted no touching or hand holding policies, because “gays dancing was itself an offense that could warrant the bar’s closure.”<sup>22</sup> In San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles, businesses posted signs that stated, “*If You Are Gay, Please Stay Away*, or more directly, *We Do Not Serve Homosexuals*.”<sup>23</sup>

Homosexuals also faced discrimination and tremendous obstacles to being included in society. Chauncey summarized the discrimination that homosexuals faced during the 1950s by stating that, “homosexuals were not just ridiculed and scorned. They were systematically denied their civil rights: their right to free assembly, to patronize public accommodations, to free speech, to a free press, to a form of intimacy of their own choosing. And they confronted a degree of policing and harassment that is almost unimaginable to us today.”<sup>24</sup> Even though it may be difficult to imagine this

discrimination, it was real for the gays and lesbians living in the 1950s. At that time, those individuals had no choice but to survive.

To respond to their discrimination, gays and lesbians in San Francisco established the city's first gay rights groups—the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis. In 1959, these organizations became a topic of public controversy and object of public rebuke. Political flyers argued that “organized homosexuality in San Francisco is a menace that must be faced today. TOMORROW MAY BE TOO LATE.”<sup>25</sup> Those who opposed the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis won their argument. Shilts also indicated that the “police came down even harder on gay bars” and harassment increased after the police discovered the two groups.<sup>26</sup>

In 1963, The Black Cat lost its war with ABC. Out of money for legal defense and tired from a long battle, The Black Cat “closed its doors for good.”<sup>27</sup> The fall of The Black Cat was the first domino in a series of set-backs for gays and lesbians living in San Francisco. Less than a week after its closure, another five gay bars were forced to shut their doors. In less than a year, half of the gay bars in San Francisco no longer existed. Of all of the raids and force closings, the raid of the Tenderloin Bar was the most severe. That night 103 gay individuals were arrested and shoved into seven paddy wagons.<sup>28</sup>

That raid prompted those in gay organizations to ask for help from an unlikely ally. After forming the Society for Individual Rights, gay rights activists “took a chapter from the black civil rights movement and decided to mobilize liberal San Francisco church leaders for their cause. A new organization resulted from the alliance, the Council on Religion and the Homosexual.”<sup>29</sup> This council was a necessary precondition to the development of gay- and lesbian-friendly biblical interpretations.

## **Council on Religion and the Homosexual**

Formed in 1964, the Council on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH) was established in order to connect homosexuals with clergy members. In an interview about the development of CRH, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin—a lesbian couple who founded the first lesbian rights group—would later indicate that, “the catalyst for the Council on Religion and the Homosexual was a Methodist minister, Ted McIlvenna, who decided something needed to be done about getting the church and homosexuals to understand each other better.”<sup>30</sup> McIlvenna wanted to promote dialogue between clergy members and homosexuals. On May 31, 1964, McIlvenna accomplished his initial goal of creating conversation between the unlikely factions. That day marked the beginning of a three-day retreat that involved 15 clergy members and 15 gays and lesbians.<sup>31</sup> At the retreat were leaders of the first gay rights groups, including Call of the Mattachine Society and Martin and Lyon of the Daughters of Bilitis.<sup>32</sup>

McIlvenna had arrived in San Francisco two years before this initial retreat. At that time, Reverend A. Cecil Williams was a minister at the Glide Memorial Methodist Church of San Francisco. Williams was committed to racial and radical justice.<sup>33</sup> Because of his commitment to justice, Williams created a church program to assist teenage individuals who had run away from home. Williams needed someone to run this program, and to fulfil this need he called upon McIlvenna. McIlvenna answered that call by moving to San Francisco.<sup>34</sup>

McIlvenna quickly learned that, in order to fulfill his duties in Glide’s program for teenagers, he would need to understand the issue of homosexuality. According to John D’Emilio, McIlvenna discovered that “many of the male runaways . . . were

homosexuals driven to street hustling by the hostility and ostracism of their parents and their peers.”<sup>35</sup> Knowing that he lacked knowledge about homosexuality, McIlvenna contacted the Mattachine Society for advice on how to help gay teenagers. He learned that the Society did not interact with those individuals. According to D’Emilio, the Society “firmly closed its doors to anyone under the age of twenty-one,” because the Society feared it would be charged with corrupting children and teenagers if it did not.<sup>36</sup> Although McIlvenna could not acquire assistance from the Society in terms of aiding runaways, he did acquire connections with Mattachine as well as other gay and lesbian organizations. Through those connections, he also came to understand the discrimination that homosexuals faced. After realizing the extent of that discrimination, he attempted to create a dialogue between the leaders of gay rights movements and ministers in the city. As D’Emilio indicated, after McIlvenna found “a group of ministers . . . prepared to work for social justice toward homosexuals and lesbians,” he planned the 1964 retreat.<sup>37</sup>

The retreat was labelled a success. At the time, Martin praised the gathering for its “re-birth of Christian fellowship” and for fostering “communication and cooperation between” homosexuals and ministers.<sup>38</sup> Later, D’Emilio would write that during the retreat “ministers acknowledged the role that religion played in the persecution of homosexuals and promised to initiate dialogue in their denominations on the church’s stance toward same-gender sexuality.”<sup>39</sup> Because of their positive experience with the May 31 retreat, those gays, lesbians, and clergy members formed CRH. According to the LGBT Religious Archives Network, “CRH quickly attained a high level of visibility—locally and nationally—because of its unique design as a coalition of religious and homosexual leaders.”<sup>40</sup> In the six months that followed McIlvenna’s initial meetings,

CRH grew. One prominent, nationally-recognized Christian magazine, the *Christian Century*, noted that clergy from “Methodist, Lutheran and Episcopal churches and the United Church of Christ” joined the organization.<sup>41</sup> Those clergy members provided necessary support for gay and lesbian political groups. Lyon and Martin indicated that before CRH was formed politicians generally told gay and lesbian leaders that they could not endorse sinful behavior. Stated differently, politicians told gays and lesbians that in order for the politicians to be able to support them that the gays and lesbians would have to gain the support of churches. The establishment of CRH provided evidence to politicians that gays and lesbians had the support of clergy members which ensured that gay and lesbians groups could attain political force.

On New Year’s Eve in 1964, CRH, along with Mattachine, the Daughters of Bilitis, and the Society of Individual Rights, held a benefit party. Even though they were advised not to tell the police, several ministers, including McIlvenna, informed the police about the party. Initially, the police attempted to force CRH to cancel the dance. When this occurred, Williams and McIlvenna protested and met with the police once again. Even though they were told to “leave morals and law enforcement to [the police], the CRH representatives stayed until they had extracted a promise from vice squad officers not to interfere with the dance.”<sup>42</sup>

Even after this promise, at the party, Martin and Lyon noticed that when guests arrived they appeared unnerved and dazed. They quickly discovered why:

The police had bathed the hall’s entrance with floodlights and were busy taking both still photos and films of everyone who entered. Paddy wagons waited ominously nearby while nearly fifty uniformed and plainclothes officers filtered

through the crowd. Over five hundred gays walked this gauntlet, upset at its propositions but not particularly surprised, given the years of similar police harassment.<sup>43</sup>

The heterosexual ministers were startled. Even though they had heard of police intimidation against gays and lesbians, they had never experienced it firsthand. When the police attempted to enter the party, they promptly arrested three lawyers who argued they could not enter the party. Because there were more than one hundred individuals at the party, the police indicated that they had the right to enter, because the police department considered “any gathering of more than one hundred homosexuals as an armed insurrection.”<sup>44</sup>

The police intimidation at the New Year’s Eve ball meant that heterosexual ministers had experienced the discrimination that homosexuals had faced. D’Emilio indicated that the next day “the ministers held a press conference at Glide, in which they ripped into the police.” Those ministers also “charged officers with ‘intimidation, broken promises and obvious hostility.’”<sup>45</sup> The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that the ministers too “had been harassed by police officials and questioned at length about their ‘theological concepts.’”<sup>46</sup> Martin also described that during this event the police had overstepped their bonds. When the police only harassed and intimidated homosexuals, they avoided backlash because homosexuals were not viewed as credible witnesses. However, after the intimidation at the New Year’s Eve ball, the backlash against the police was more credible, because the ministers were credible witnesses. As D’Emilio indicated, “the ministers provided legitimacy to the charges of police harassment that the word of a homosexual lacked.”<sup>47</sup>

The public outrage over police intimidation against gays demanded a response by the mayor. In January, CRH sent a letter to the mayor demanding action against discrimination against homosexuals. By the end of the month, CRH did not have a response.<sup>48</sup> According to Shilts, eventually the pressure from gay organizations was too great and “two officers from the police community relations unit . . . were assigned to smooth relations with the city’s gays.”<sup>49</sup> Shilts further claimed that “by the end of the year Jack Morrison, the first incumbent supervisor ever to seek the gay vote, was at a [Society for Individual Rights] meeting flanked by ambitious aspirants.”<sup>50</sup> Other politicians promised to repeal laws that provided felony punishments to gay behavior. In other words, homosexuals and their Christian supporters had rapidly developed into a voting block with sizable political clout.

### **Anita Bryant and John Briggs**

A fierce debate between the gay rights voting block and religious right organizations emerged after a series of gay rights victories during the 1970s. For instance, in 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. There were also successful challenges to state sodomy laws and successful passages of gay rights ordinances.<sup>51</sup> However, these early successes of the gay rights movement also drove the development of the anti-gay movement and religious denominations’ condemnation of homosexuality. The expansion of the Christian anti-gay movement in turn threatened to roll back the successes of the gay rights movement. The perception of the incompatibility between Christianity and homosexuality likely resulted from this combative debate between the religious right and gay rights organizations.



The efforts of early anti-gay Christian activists led to a widespread belief that Christians oppose gay rights. The sole purpose of the Christian anti-gay movement was to prevent the lesbian and gay movement “from gaining any more political ground.”<sup>52</sup> The Christian anti-gay movement worked to prevent and repeal gay rights ordinances. For instance, in Dade County, Florida, Anita Bryant led an effort to repeal a non-discrimination ordinance via a ballot initiative. In 1977, Bryant formed her “Save Our Children” group and began campaigning on the theory that homosexuals recruited children. According to Shilts, merely five weeks after the non-discrimination ordinance passed, Bryant’s group “collected 65,000 signatures on petitions calling for the law’s repeal.”<sup>53</sup> Then, on June 7, 1977, the votes of Dade County repealed the ordinance, to which Bryant responded, “tonight, the laws of God and the cultural values of man have been vindicated.”<sup>54</sup> James Darsey summarizes this transition from early gay rights successes to the early successful challenges to the gay rights movements:

By 1977 . . . gay liberationists began to talk with pride of their achievements and of the increasing social and legal acceptance of homosexuality. Everything seemed positive for the movement, but then Dade County, Florida, passed an ordinance prohibiting discrimination against homosexuals in housing, employment, and public accommodations. In this environment of sunny tolerance, the surprise was the vocal, religiously fueled popular reaction against the ordinance lead by singer Anita Bryant, a reaction that resulted in a referendum battle that reached far beyond Dade County.<sup>55</sup>

Throughout her campaign against the gay rights ordinance, Bryant deployed the Bible as evidence. It would not have been difficult for her to develop these arguments,

because around this time the Catholic Church released its *Persona Humana*, which condemned homosexual practices.<sup>56</sup> According to Ronald Fischli, Bryant's rhetoric understood the world in terms of absolutes. There were activities that were right, and there were activities that were wrong; for Bryant, homosexuality was clearly in the latter category. She frequently would cite Leviticus and the letters of Paul to make her argument that homosexuality was a sin—"a sinful abomination."<sup>57</sup> Fischli stated that she quickly concluded that "any differing points of view concerning homosexuality are either ill-intentioned or misguided, thus are either consciously or unwittingly part of a larger conspiracy."<sup>58</sup>

The rhetoric of Bryant and the Christian anti-gay movement sparked anger and rage within the gay community. After Bryant defeated the gay rights ordinance in Florida, outrage surged through the gay neighborhood of Castro in San Francisco. Of this incident, Shilts wrote that "they were taking to the streets. A crowd of 200 grew to 500, then 1,000 and then 3,000 on Castro Street, shouting, 'We are your children.'"<sup>59</sup> They also chanted: "two, four, six, eight, separate the church and state."<sup>60</sup> Harvey Milk led angry gays on marches. There were more protests, and there were more marches. On the Sunday after Bryant's victory, five hundred individuals lined the entrance to St. Mary's Cathedral "to protest the Dade County archbishop's support of Anita Bryant's campaign."<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, according to Fischli, "The Gay Liberation Alliance encouraged consumer boycotts of products of the Florida Citrus Commission, for which Bryant . . . advertised orange juice."<sup>62</sup>

Yet, as protests were erupting from the gay community, another challenge emerged. After watching the success of Bryant in Dade County, another individual,

California State Senator John Briggs, decided to act. Briggs could not act in the same manner as Bryant because California did not have a non-discrimination ordinance, so Briggs decided that “he would get right to the heart of the matter: He would introduce a measure in the state senate to ban homosexuals from teaching in public schools.”<sup>63</sup> When Briggs announced his proposal, gays in San Francisco were already angry about Dade County. Briggs’ proposal brought the fight home. Shilts claimed that in this environment, “gays who had come to San Francisco just to disco amid the hot pectorals of hunky men became politicized and fell into new organizations with names like Save Our Human Rights and Coalition for Human Rights.”<sup>64</sup> During this time, the gay community was furious, and its rage showed in its rhetoric.

There was backlash to this aggressive, gay rhetoric. Gays were increasingly beaten on the street. George Moscone, who would become the mayor of San Francisco and be murdered with Harvey Milk, called the gay communities’ rhetoric “counterproductive.”<sup>65</sup> Dan White, who would become the murderer of Milk and Moscone, “was making waves as an unorthodox supervisory candidate out to restore traditional values to San Francisco government.”<sup>66</sup> Robert Hillsborough, who was a gardener for the city, was violently murdered. Shilts described the gruesome murder in detail:

Then came the screams: “Faggot, faggot, faggot.” A Latino youth, later identified as John Cordova, was kneeling over the prostrate body of Robert Hillsborough, stabbing him passionately, thrusting the fishing knife again and again into the gardener’s chest, then into his face. Blood stained his hands, spurted into the

streets and still he sank his blade into the fallen man; fifteen times he lashed out, sinking the steel into flesh, shouting “Faggot, faggot, faggot.”<sup>67</sup>

After the murder, Hillsborough’s mother blamed Bryant for her son’s death, saying, ““anyone who wants to carry on this kind of thing must be sick. My son’s blood is on her hands.””<sup>68</sup>

In 1978, Briggs still moved forward with his initiative despite the combative political environment. Many predicted that Briggs would be successful. Up until that point, the Christian anti-gay movement had won in Dade County, St. Paul, and Wichita; the gay rights movement was without a single victory.<sup>69</sup> In San Francisco, gay demonstrators created a new chant: ““John Briggs, you can’t hide, we charge you with genocide.””<sup>70</sup> Clive Jones, another gay rights advocate, compared anti-gay initiatives to Hitler’s actions by stating: ““Forty years ago tonight, the gay citizens of Germany found out they no longer had civil rights . . . Tomorrow morning, gay citizens of Wichita will also awaken to find that they too have lost their civil rights.””<sup>71</sup> Even in their vocal opposition to the initiative, many in the gay rights movement were convinced that they would lose. Milk, in fact, turned to San Francisco and worked to prevent San Francisco from voting for the initiative. For him, the state was already lost, but it was symbolically important that San Francisco stand against the measure.

Briggs began appearing nightly on television spouting anti-gay remarks. The gay community knew that it had to organize in the face of this threat, so they arranged the 1978 Gay Freedom Day Parade. Afterwards, Milk received death threats. One postcard read, ““you get the first bullet the minute you stand at the microphone.””<sup>72</sup> The parade continued as planned. 375,000 individuals marched that day in “the largest assemblage of

people that would meet in one place in San Francisco during the entire 1970s.”<sup>73</sup> Despite the threat against his life, Milk took the microphone, and he spoke: ““my name is Harvey Milk—and I want to recruit you. I want to recruit you for the fight to preserve democracy from the John Briggs and Anita Bryants who are trying to constitutionalize bigotry.””<sup>74</sup> After the parade, television sets across the nation filled with stories about San Francisco, gay discrimination, religion, and gay rights. On one hand, mothers described how their sons and daughters committed suicide when they feared they would be fired for being homosexual. On the other hand, Bryant prayed for San Francisco’s sins and asked other Christians to do the same.<sup>75</sup>

The debate in San Francisco continued to rage as Briggs started arguing about children’s safety. According to Shilts, Briggs borrowed his argument from Bryant. Briggs claimed that homosexuals ““don’t have any children of their own. If they don’t recruit children or very young people, they’d all die away. They have no means of replenishing. That’s why they want to be teachers and be equal status and have those people serve as role models and encourage people to join them.””<sup>76</sup> Milk agreed that children were in danger, but instead argued that ““Children . . . do need protection—protection from the incest and child beatings pandemic in the heterosexual family.””<sup>77</sup> During this time, Milk also started arguing that the greatest political act a homosexual could do was to come out. Foss indicated that ““for Milk, coming out became the ultimate enactment of an authentic personal and political response to this repressive measure.””<sup>78</sup>

In Los Angeles, the debate over the Briggs Initiative raged as well. There, the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) worked relentlessly to stop Briggs’s initiative. According to Fejes, Troy Perry, the founder of the MCC, stated that, “If the initiative is

approved in California, the momentum may carry to other states. We feel that would throw homosexuals back 25 years.”<sup>79</sup> In his opposition to Briggs, Perry utilized one of MCC’s unique protest tactics; in September, 1979, he began to fast on the steps of the Capital Building. In doing so, he raised \$100,000, because community members began to donate to his cause.<sup>80</sup>

The gay movement’s arguments and tactics appeared to be succeeding. In September, the popular governor, Ronald Reagan, stated his opposition to the initiative.<sup>81</sup> Then, only a few days before Election Day, according to Shilts, “pollsters call the race too close to call, although gays had clearly seized the momentum.”<sup>82</sup> The split in the electorate shocked both sides as polls had previously shown the initiative was supported by more than 60% of California’s voters.<sup>83</sup> That week, on Halloween, Briggs attempted to visit the gay Polk Street neighborhood. However, his efforts were stymied by Mayor Moscone and Milk. Briggs had wanted to confront drag queens on the streets, but Moscone and the police chief directed Briggs to leave. Shilts would later write that “just fifteen years ago that night, the police and city authorities had forced The Black Cat to close. The confrontation between Briggs and city authorities on Halloween 1978 was but another indication of how fully the tables had turned since that Halloween in 1963.”<sup>84</sup>

The Briggs initiative was soundly defeated. The pollsters were wrong. The election was not close. During election night, news agencies reported that 75% of San Franciscans voted in opposition to the initiative. Other agencies announced that Briggs’ measure would lose by over one million votes. The final results “showed a 2-1 victory for gays statewide.”<sup>85</sup> In Seattle, the gay rights movement had another victory that night. There, gays ensured that the city’s protections for gays and lesbians were not repealed.

As Shilts indicated, “after so many defeats, gays were finally winning.”<sup>86</sup> Even though the gay movement was victorious that day, its victory would not last long. According to Chauncey, “Three weeks later, Harvey Milk, the first openly gay San Francisco city supervisor and one of the victory’s chief architects, was assassinated.”<sup>87</sup> His death signaled that the fight was not complete.

The emergence of the Christian anti-gay movement also provided new opportunities to the lesbian and gay rights movement, because it offered new rhetorical tactics and strategies to gay and lesbians. For instance, the Christian anti-gay movement was successful at bringing the gay rights debate into the public sphere, which unintentionally assisted the lesbian and gay rights movement. Sociologist Tina Fetner argued that the “lesbian and gay movement activists who had been fighting against invisibility saw this public debate as a new opportunity for pro-gay publicity and an occasion to encourage increased mobilization.”<sup>88</sup> For example, after Bryant’s success in Dade County, Milk even wrote that “the word homosexual has now appeared in every household in the country. More good and bad was probably written about it in the last few months than during the entire history of the world.”<sup>89</sup> In addition, Fetner described how the lesbian and gay rights movement used the rhetoric of the Christian anti-gay movement as evidence that lesbian and gay individuals faced discrimination in their communities. However, as Chauncey noted, the fight for gay rights was far from over. Even though there were early victories for gay rights in the 1970s, the 1980s saw extreme backlash and retrenchment against gay rights. This backlash threatened to rollback and curtail all of the gay rights movements’ successes. At that time, the gay rights movements also faced a new challenge—the challenge of HIV/AIDS.

## **AIDS and the “Fundamentalists”**

During the late 1970s and 1980s, the conflict between religious groups and lesbians and gays intensified. At this time, Bryant’s prominence was fading. However, Darsey indicated that she “was the forward-running crest of a wave of conservatism that, as it declined in intensity, also became more pernicious in its apparent ubiquity.”<sup>90</sup> Clergyman Mel White concurs with Darsey and, in his book *Stranger at the Gate: To be Gay and Christian in America*, explained that “A fundamentalist Christian revolution was stirring to life in America”<sup>91</sup> “Fundamentalist” Christians, including Pat Robertson, “preached against homosexuality and promised that gays and lesbians could be healed.”<sup>92</sup> White, in particular, had significant insight about Pat Robertson and other “fundamentalist” Christians and their view of homosexuality because he worked with these individuals when he was a part of the evangelical movement. However, in 1994, White came out as gay and broke ties with the “fundamentalists.”<sup>93</sup> In White’s view, traditionalist Christians wanted to cleanse the nation of homosexuality. People believed homosexuals recruited heterosexuals into homosexuality; they believed “homosexuals abused children;” they believed “homosexuals were more promiscuous than heterosexuals.”<sup>94</sup> Finally, they believed that homosexuals could be cured of their homosexuality and become heterosexuals.

At this time, the belief that Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) was solely a gay disease was widespread. In fact, many referred to AIDS as the Gay-Related Immune Deficiency (GRID). AIDS reaffirmed that gays were a threat to society among a majority of the public. Chauncey claimed that the public panicked and that the “fear of contagion prompted a new wave of discrimination against gay people in medical care,



housing, and employment.”<sup>95</sup> Schools began to expel any student who had AIDS. Chauncey also contended that individuals, such as “the conservative writer William Buckley even proposed tattooing people with AIDS to make it impossible for them to circulate among the public unrecognized.”<sup>96</sup> In a study titled “AIDS and Stigma,” Gregory Herek argued that “early surveys of public opinion revealed widespread fear of the disease, lack of accurate information about its transmission, and willingness to support draconian public policies that would restrict civil liberties in the name of fighting AIDS.”<sup>97</sup> Herek also concurred with Chauncey and indicated that the public supported “authoritarian and punitive measures against” people with AIDS, “including quarantine, universal mandatory testing,” and tattooing those infected with AIDS.<sup>98</sup>

While AIDS created anxiety towards homosexuals, gay individuals were also deeply shaped by the AIDS epidemic. When describing the effects of AIDS on the gay community, Dana Rosenfeld, Bernadette Bartlam, and Ruth Smith stated that for gay individuals “the high number of AIDS deaths at the epidemic’s peak (1987-1996) created a cohort effect, shaping their personal, social, psychological, and community lives, at the time of the epidemic, throughout their life course, and into later years.”<sup>99</sup> The effect of AIDS was enormous. Between 1987 and 1998, “324,029 persons died of either AIDS or a case of death attributable to HIV, with AIDS accounting for 162,667 deaths.”<sup>100</sup> In 1991, one survey indicated that one out of every five gay men with AIDS had been physically assaulted because others believed that they were spreading the disease.<sup>101</sup>

Political and religious leaders either ignored the AIDS epidemic or condemned individuals with AIDS. The then-President, Ronald Reagan, did not speak about the issue until more than 20,000 Americans died. While the government ignored the AIDS

epidemic, it simultaneously criminalized the gay community. In 1986, the Supreme Court ruled in *Bowers v. Hardwick* that anti-sodomy laws were constitutional. Chauncey argued that in the aftermath of that decision “many lower courts interpreted the ruling to mean that discrimination against homosexuals was constitutionally permissible.”<sup>102</sup> For all intents and purposes, gays and lesbians were criminals. Not only was AIDS ignored by the government, but gays and lesbians were punished for it via anti-sodomy laws. Furthermore, in 1996, the military discharged an individual that was known to be HIV-positive. The next year, the Girl Scouts refused to give an 8-year-old girl membership in a troop because of her HIV status.<sup>103</sup>

As mainstream politics ignored AIDS, the gay community vigorously responded to it. Because the survival of the community was threatened, there was “an unprecedented mobilization of gay men and an equally unprecedented degree of cooperation between them and the large number of lesbians who played leading roles in the response to AIDS.”<sup>104</sup> The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) formed and, according to Chauncey, “orchestrated highly theatrical and media-savvy attacks on the institutions and individuals they held responsible for the status quo.”<sup>105</sup> During a period of militant activism, “ACT UP shut down Wall Street, unfurled huge AIDS banners at Yankee Stadium, invaded the campus of the National Institutes of Health, and plastered the streets with posters warning that *Silence=Death*.”<sup>106</sup> ACT UP’s activities jolted other gay rights groups to act. In 1985, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) formed. At that time, GLAAD worked to ensure gay individuals were not demonized as being the sole vectors of AIDS. As a result, pressrooms across the nation

debated about their coverage of the AIDS crisis, which led to “a more complex portrait of the AIDS crisis.”<sup>107</sup>

The AIDS epidemic made it difficult for gays and lesbians to sustain political support. After the *Bowers* decision, polls showed that the support of gay rights was at an all-time low. According to Chauncey, “the number of people who declared that homosexual relations were always wrong climbed from 73 percent in 1980 to 78 percent in 1987.”<sup>108</sup> In locations where the gay rights movement had succeeded at passing non-discrimination ordinances, the threat of rollback grew. As Chauncey described, “groups that had already managed to pass gay rights laws found them under attack from an increasingly well-organized and well-funded right wing.”<sup>109</sup> Chauncey also stated that “beginning in 1988 and reaching a crescendo in 1992-1994, right-wing groups in Colorado, Oregon, Maine, and half a dozen other states used antigay referendum initiatives to build local organizations based on networks of conservative churches, which were quick to coordinate efforts with right-wing groups in other states.”<sup>110</sup> In contrast to these religious groups, gay rights organizations were disorganized, underfunded, or non-existent in many parts of the country. Gay rights organizations faced organized opposition and over sixty antigay initiatives throughout the country in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

While the gay community faced the threat of AIDS and local initiatives, the belief that homosexuality could be cured caused the development of conversion therapy.<sup>111</sup> According to Craig Stewart, successful conversation therapy accounts circulated throughout Christian communities and in public. He indicates that the 1998 “Truth in Love” campaign brought the issue of conversion therapy to the public’s attention after it

bought an advertisement in the *New York Times* that had a photograph of “‘Anne Paulk – wife, mother, and former lesbian.’”<sup>112</sup> According to Stewart, before the release of this advertisement, “discourses of and about ‘ex-gays’ and ‘reparative therapy’ for homosexuality circulated almost exclusively within conservative Christian discourse communities.”<sup>113</sup> Stewart also indicates that after the release of the first several “Truth in Love” campaign advertisements “the arguments of the ‘ex-gay/reparative therapy’ movement began to play a prominent role in the public communication of ‘pro-family’ anti-gay conservative Christian organizations, such as the Christian Coalition, who co-sponsored the advertisements.”<sup>114</sup>

Others, such as White, argued that ex-gay conversation therapy could never be successful. He writes about his experience with ex-gay conversion therapy, “After thirty years of ‘ex-gay’ therapy, including electric shock to ‘overcome’ my homosexuality, and decades of needless guilt and growing despair, I have learned to accept my sexual orientation.”<sup>115</sup> In response to the members of the Christian anti-gay movement who believed that ex-gay conversion therapy successfully changed homosexuals into heterosexuals, White argues, “We don’t need another scientific study or another pathetic story of long-term failure and loss from the ‘ex-gay’ movement to prove that homosexuality, like heterosexuality, is a permanent condition.”<sup>116</sup> However, given that they attempted to cleanse the nation of homosexuality, it is not surprising that many people today view Christianity as being strongly opposed to homosexuality.

Not all Christian communities supported ex-gay therapy; many churches responded to the issue of homosexuality through other policies and actions. For example, according to John Anderson, in 1984, “the United Methodist Church (UMC) passed a

resolution prohibiting ‘self-avowed practicing homosexuals’ from serving as ordained ministers.”<sup>117</sup> In its decision, the UMC indicated that being homosexual was not itself a sin, but acting upon homosexual desires was sinful. Anderson, however, argued that this was a distinction without a difference, because “being a homosexual is enough to implicate one in the category of the prohibited. Thus, the claim that the prohibition of homosexual practice does not discriminate against gays and lesbians as a group is, at best, disingenuous.”<sup>118</sup> Nonetheless, in various denominations, guiding documents “codified the position that *being* homosexual was protected as a status, but that *acting* homosexual was sinful.”<sup>119</sup>

Given the tactics used by traditionalists, it is also not surprising that there are gays and lesbians who refuse to identify as Christians. Mel White wrote the following about the tensions between Christianity and homosexuality:

Religious personalities are using fear and distortion to paint us as the enemy.

Their misinformation leads to prejudice, hatred, violence . . . As a result, all across the country our gay Christian brothers and sisters are suffering in silence, leaving the church in anger and disappointment, and even taking their own lives because too few Christian leaders have the courage to tell that truth: “We can be gay and Christian.”<sup>120</sup>

The rhetoric of the Christian anti-gay movement caused lesbians and gays to leave the church. It was not just traditionalist Christians who refused to associate with homosexuality, but homosexuals also refused to associate with Christianity. For most traditionalist Christians and most homosexuals, homosexuality and Christianity are incompatible because of the traditional interpretations of biblical texts.

## Christianity, Homosexuality, and the 1990s

In the early 1990s, religious antigay rhetoric began to become a liability rather than an asset in public deliberations. In the 1994 election, Republicans regained control of Congress, but they did so without the help of the Christian Right. Chauncey explains:

The organizers of [the 1994] Republican convention kept the Christian Right out of the spotlight because they were determined to avoid the disastrous mistake of the 1992 convention, which sabotaged George W.H. Bush's reelection by giving center stage to cultural conservatives promising a "culture war" for the "soul of America." They knew full well that in the twelve years since Patrick Buchanan's harsh antigay rhetoric had frightened voters away from the Republican Party, the public's acceptance of gay people had only grown.<sup>121</sup>

Throughout the 1990s, public acceptance of homosexuality continued to grow. During this time, vast numbers of homosexuals came out to their friends and families. Chauncey reports that "the number of Americans who reported having a gay friend or close acquaintance doubled from 1985 to 1994."<sup>122</sup> At this time and because of the increase political clout of gay rights groups, "Democratic politicians from big cities or liberal college towns began showing up at gay pride marches as they realized that lesbians, gay men, and their supporters were an important constituency."<sup>123</sup> The number of openly gay politicians was also growing throughout the 1990s,<sup>124</sup> and, in 1993, the first Hollywood film to address the issue of AIDS—*Philadelphia*—was released. Two successful movies with gay characters—*Longtime Companion* and *The Birdcage*—were also produced at this time.<sup>125</sup>

Yet, even though public acceptance of homosexuality was growing, supporters of gay rights suffered serious setbacks as the Republican Party was attempting to distance itself from the Christian Right. For example, Charles Morris and John Sloop indicated that in 1990 "the Illinois State Legislature debated a bill that sought to prohibit all

billboards that depicted same-sex kissing.”<sup>126</sup> Chauncey provided additional illustrations: “Beginning in 1998 and reaching a crescendo in 1992-1994, right-wing groups in Colorado, Oregon, Maine, and half a dozen other states used antigay referendum initiatives to build local organization based on networks of conservative churches, which were quick to coordinate efforts with right-wing groups in other states.”<sup>127</sup> In the vast majority of these referendum debates, the religious right emerged victorious, because “the thin networks of gay newspapers, bookstores, and social and political organizations existing in most areas were little match for the Christian Right’s juggernaut of radio stations, cable and television programs, extensive church networks, and national coordination organization.”<sup>128</sup>

Christian antigay initiatives were successful, damaging, and widespread. Chauncey notes that gay rights supporters lost nearly seventy-five percent of the antigay referendums that raged throughout the early 1990s. He also indicates that there were “more than sixty antigay rights referenda around the country. In Oregon alone, there were sixteen local antigay initiatives in 1993 and another eleven in 1994; gay activists lost all but one.”<sup>129</sup> During these referendums, churches aired antigay videos. Antigay pamphlets “fostered a climate of hostility and fear” and were distributed “door-to-door and pew-to-pew.”<sup>130</sup> Finally, according to Chauncey, “Right-wing groups flooded states and cities with antigay hate literature that depicted homosexuals as sex-crazed perverts who threatened the nation’s children and moral character.”<sup>131</sup> While these antigay initiatives were being debated, Christians marshalled the Bible as evidence against gay rights supporters. Concerning the debacle in Oregon, White writes that “once again the ancient story of Sodom was told incorrectly in pulpits across the state. Once again the words of Leviticus were misused and misquoted in Sunday school classrooms, Bible studies, and prayer meetings.”<sup>132</sup> Like previous disputes over gay rights, the fights over gay rights in Oregon turned violent. White writes, “Ugly graffiti, both pro and con, appeared across the state. Rocks were thrown. Fires were set. Several conservative churches . . . were

damaged. Pro-gay organization had their leaders threatened, their mailing lists stolen, their offices trashed and firebombed. A gay man and his lesbian friend were burned to death in their home by an unidentified arsonist.”<sup>133</sup>

After witnessing the rancor in Oregon, White decided that he had to act and wrote a letter to five thousand pastors and church leaders throughout the state. In that letter, White explained that he believed that the traditional interpretations of scripture were incorrect and described how he came to know himself as a gay Christian. He received eighty replies. Two of them were positive, but the vast majority cited the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and the prohibitions in Leviticus as evidence that White was incorrect. One pastor wrote, ““Your [White’s] letter is written by the devil and comes straight out of hell.””<sup>134</sup> Other pastors warned White that if he continued acting the way he was that he would be ““put to death.””<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, White’s decision to send these letters eventually led to severe personal turmoil for him. After they were sent, his letters were photocopied and circulated among his clients, friends, and religious leaders leading to his excommunication. He writes, “In spite of my graduate degrees in ministry and twenty-five years of Christian service as a pastor, a seminary professor, a writer of best-selling religious books, and a producer of prize winning religious films, admitting I was gay ended all chances of continued service.”<sup>136</sup>

### **The 2004 Election**

Ten years after White published *Stranger at the Gate* and during the 2004 election season, the perception that “a gay Christian” was an oxymoron still persisted. Before the 2004 election, several events propelled gay rights issues to the forefront of the political deliberations that occurred that year. First, the Catholic Church deepened the alleged divide between homosexuals and Christians. John Lynch indicated that “in 2003, the Vatican and the conference of American bishops both produced statements condemning same-sex unions as being in opposition to natural and moral law and as a danger to social



order.”<sup>137</sup> He also noted that the institutional rhetoric of the church emphasized “the hatred of the sin” over loving the sinner.<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, according to the political scientists David Campbell and Quin Monson, “On the east coast, the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts issued a ruling mandating same-sex marriages in that state, while on the west coast, the city of San Francisco began issuing marriage licenses to homosexual couples.”<sup>139</sup>

As Election Day approached, Christian denominations voiced opposition to legal protections for homosexuals and gay rights groups argued that they needed them. According to the legal scholar Brady Brammer, the evidence for legal protections was that “in 2004, sexual orientation bias motivated 15.6 percent of the 9021 reported offenses within single-bias hate crime incidents in the United States.”<sup>140</sup> Yet, he also writes that “many religious groups remain unwilling to back away from their stance against homosexuality. Several major religions in America teach that homosexuality is wrong by divine mandate and conclude that they cannot support social and legal trends favorable to homosexuals without ignoring the commands of the God they worship.”<sup>141</sup> Brammer concludes that “one of the strongest barriers against the gay rights movement is the influence of religion in America, and the general discouragement of homosexuality in a religious context provides the strongest attitudinal barrier to the gay rights movement.”<sup>142</sup> For instance, “Of Americans that claim a high level of religious commitment, 76% believe homosexuality is wrong. Additionally, 39% of the clergy discourages homosexuality in church services.”<sup>143</sup>

President Bush joined the gay rights debate when he announced that he supported amending the United States constitution to define marriage as being between a man and a woman. The political scientists, Daniel Smith, Matthew DeSantis, and Jason Kassel, write that Bush cited Massachusetts’ court decision and San Francisco’s marriage licenses to claim “that the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) . . . could be undermined by the courts and did not protect marriage in the states.”<sup>144</sup> Greg Lewis, another political

scientist, indicates that half of the electorate supported Bush's constitutional amendment proposal.<sup>145</sup>

With President Bush's support and on Election Day, thirteen individual states' gay marriage ban proposals passed.<sup>146</sup> According to Campbell and Monson, self-identified evangelical voters were more mobilized in states with gay marriage bans on the ticket than in states without those proposals.<sup>147</sup> According to Robert Denton Jr., "in Michigan, the Roman Catholic Church spent US\$1 million in support of [a gay marriage ban]."<sup>148</sup> He also argues that the supporters of the gay marriage ban initiatives "launched petition drives to put the issue to public vote, and those drives resulted in grassroots organizations and voter lists that later were very useful to the Bush campaign."<sup>149</sup> Smith, DeSantis, and Kassel report that "there is evidence that counties with dense levels of evangelical Protestants in both [Michigan and Ohio] and counties with sizable numbers of Catholics in Michigan voted strongly in favor of the anti-gay ballot measures" and that "Protestants were significantly more likely than non-Protestants to support the bans."<sup>150</sup>

According to several pundits, gay marriage ban proposals tipped the election in Bush's favor.<sup>151</sup> For instance, Smith, DeSantis, and Kassel indicate that Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council, Robert Knight of the Culture and Family Institute, and Karl Rove all believed that the anti-gay referendum were the necessary factor that caused the widespread conservative turnout that propelled Bush to victory.<sup>152</sup> Knight even indicated that the gay marriage measures "galvanized millions of Christians to turnout and vote, and George Bush and the GOP got the lion's share of that vote."<sup>153</sup> Given that religious groups opposition to gay marriage probably resulted in thirteen gay marriage bans and the re-election of Bush, it is easy to imagine that the public also perceived Christianity as being incompatible with homosexuality.

## **Proposition 8**

Four years later, religious voters would hand the gay rights movement another devastating loss which further cemented the perception of discord between the two groups. On November 4, 2008, the result of California's referendum on the legality of same-sex marriage, Proposition 8, devastated the gay rights movement. Same-sex marriage had been legal in California before the passage of Proposition 8, but the proposition intended to define marriage as being between a man and a woman. On Election Day, the proposition passed with 52 percent of California's population voting to make same-sex marriage illegal. The gay rights movement suffered similar setbacks in Arizona, Florida, and Arkansas on that day as well.<sup>154</sup>

California's debate over Proposition 8 was expansive and expensive. Excluding the Presidential campaign, the raging dispute over Proposition 8 was the costliest campaign during that election cycle. Supporters and opponents of the proposition spent over \$74 million which made it the most expensive campaign concerning a social issue in United States' history.<sup>155</sup> In churches on both sides of the issue, pastors sermonized. Advertisements filled the airwaves. Billboards lined the highways. Phone bank workers relentlessly called. Picketers picketed. People flooded the streets to rally in support or opposition.<sup>156</sup> One advertisement charged that if same-sex marriage was allowed in the state, then schools would be forced to teach inappropriate material about homosexuality.<sup>157</sup> In a quick retort, sons and daughters of gays and lesbians crafted a video in opposition to the proposition arguing that their parents' sexuality did not damage or scar them. Commercials also featured impassioned pleas from the parents of gays and lesbians asking their sons and daughters be allowed to marry.<sup>158</sup>

Then, as Election Day drew closer, reports of violence rose. Jose Nunez, who supported defining marriage as being between a man and a woman, "was brutally assaulted while waiting to distribute yard signs to other supporters of the initiative after church services."<sup>159</sup> Supporters of the proposition accused opponents of promoting violent intimidation, stating that "Californians from around the state have reported being harassed

by people who are against Prop. 8.”<sup>160</sup> Individuals reported “theft and vandalism of Proposition 8 signs . . . in Santa Ana, Yorba Linda, Huntington Beach, Fountain Valley, Irvine and Laguna Hills.”<sup>161</sup> Opponents of the proposition also described being “screamed at, physically intimidated and eventually attacked by” proposition supporters.<sup>162</sup> Not only was this battle combative, but it was also violent.

During the month before voting day, the election was closely and hotly contested. One *New York Times* reporter, Laurie Goodstein, stated the battle was “raging like a wind-whipped wildfire.”<sup>163</sup> Because both sides believed that California would set the trend for the rest of the country, neither side wanted to lose. Tony Perkins, the President of the Family Research Council, argued that the Proposition 8 was more important than the presidential election and stated that ““we [the nation] will not survive if we lose the institution of marriage.””<sup>164</sup> With both sides refusing to cede ground, the conflict intensified; California was a “do or die state” for gay rights proponents.<sup>165</sup>

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints entered the fray to promote the proposition. “Two members of the church's second-highest governing body, the Quorum of Twelve Apostles” established a political strategy that would mobilize Mormons in California.<sup>166</sup> These members quoted scripture to argue that marriage was between man and woman and to indicate that Mormons had a duty to protect the sanctity of marriage. After Proposition 8 successfully passed, Jesse McKinley and Kirk Johnson, political pundits at the *New York Times*, argued that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints provided the “money, institutional support and dedicated volunteers” that insured that the proposition passed.<sup>167</sup> After Proposition 8 passed, an analysis of the polling data indicated that individuals were more likely to support it if they frequently attended religious services than if they did not. The religiosity of an individual was one of the best predictors concerning how an individual would vote on Proposition 8.<sup>168</sup> Broadly speaking, support for the proposition came from conservative, religious individuals, and those individuals ensured its passage.<sup>169</sup>

## Conclusion

Although Christians had not always been in conflict with homosexuals, by the end of the 1980s, the public was convinced that it was not possible to be a gay Christian. By that time, there was a history of animosity between the two groups. Christian groups had opposed many gay rights ordinances and submitted homosexuals to conversion therapy. Gay rights activists were scarred by the words of Christians who told them that they were abominations. Homosexuals' memories of murders and beatings caused them to distrust Christians. The animosity between the groups grew after each and every incident. The deadly, combative, rancorous clash between the groups cemented in public opinion that the two sides were unable to coexist. Now, social scientific research concludes that religious individuals tend to hold negative views of homosexuality. For instance, researchers have argued, "People who belong to conservative religious denominations . . . report more negative attitudes toward homosexual individuals."<sup>170</sup> Social psychologist Lisa J. Schulte and sociologist Juan Battle also argue religion is a more important factor in determining an individual's belief about homosexuality than race or ethnicity.<sup>171</sup>

Certainly, society has been more accepting of homosexuals over time. This does not mean that gay Christians no longer face the need to justify their identities. Take, for example, the story of Bernadette Barton, who identifies as a lesbian. In a 2011 article, she writes, "I am daily assaulted by bumper stickers that claim 'One man + one woman = marriage,' church billboards that command me to 'Get right with Jesus,' letters to the editor comparing gay marriage to marrying one's dog, and nightly news about the latest homophobic attack from the Family Foundation."<sup>172</sup> She recalls of a time when a man, after discovering her homosexuality, told her that "It's an abomination in the eyes of the

Lord.”<sup>173</sup> She then generalizes this experience and argues that “fundamentalist Christians . . . ascribe to a religious ideology that constructs the behavior of an entire group of people as an ‘abomination.’”<sup>174</sup>

In fact, because society is becoming more accepting, the perception that homosexuality and Christianity are incompatible has intensified. Hartman explains:

The religious backlash against homosexuals has come about precisely because of the vast sea change that is taking place within American society. Thirty years ago, no one would have bothered going on television to say that homosexuality was sinful. After all, who would have argued with that? Nor would the Vatican have wasted ink writing its bishops to say that homosexuality was immoral. Nor would the Southern Baptist Convention have passed a resolution requiring its member churches to condemn homosexuality. All of these actions have occurred because churches know that the world has changed.<sup>175</sup>

When gay Christians speak, therefore, they must respond the public opinion that says their very existence is not possible. They must have an answer to the Christians who believe that homosexuality is a sin, but they must also have a response to homosexuals who, traumatized after years of abuse, believe that Christianity brings nothing but pain. When they speak, therefore, gay Christian rhetors must contend with this rhetorical constraint. If they wish to speak to homosexuals, they must justify their Christianity. If they wish to speak to Christians, they must justify their homosexuality. If they wish to speak to both homosexuals and Christians, they must justify their homosexuality while simultaneously justifying their Christianity—an exigence indeed.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Hartman, *Congregation in Conflict: The Battle over Homosexuality*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), ix.

<sup>2</sup> Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," In Ed. Carly R. Burgchardt, *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, (State College, PA: Strata Publishing, 2010), 50.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>4</sup> Karen A. Foss, "Harvey Milk and The Queer Rhetorical Situation," in *Queering Public Address: Sexualities in American Historical Discourse*, ed. Charles E. Morris III (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 89.

<sup>5</sup> Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life & Times of Harvey Milk*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 47. Randy Shilts interpretation of the quotation is that Gordon was a lesbian. However, that is not necessarily the case as there are other plausible interpretations of that event. For instance, Gordon's statement could reflect her strong political commitments or her strong friendships with other women.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>11</sup> George Chauncey, *Why Marriage? The History Shaping Today's Debate Over Gay Equality*, (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books Group, 2004), 5-6.

<sup>12</sup> Shilts, 50.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>14</sup> Chauncey, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Charles E. Morris III, "Pink Herring & The Fourth Persona: J. Edgar Hoover's Sex Crime Panic," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88.2 (2002), 228.

<sup>16</sup> Shilts, 51.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 51.

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- <sup>18</sup> Chauncey, 6.
- <sup>19</sup> Shilts, 53.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid, 53.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid, 54.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid, 54.
- <sup>23</sup> Chauncey, 8.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid, 11.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid, 56.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid, 56.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid, 57.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid, 57.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid, 58.
- <sup>30</sup> Phyllis Lyon, "Phyllis Lyon & Del Martin Recollect Why CRH Was Formed," *LGBT Religious Archives Network*, Exhibit: The Council on Religion and the Homosexual, Coalition Proves Mutually Beneficial, accessed on February 20, 2014, <<http://www.lgbtran.org/Exhibits/CRH/Room.aspx?RID=2&CID=8>>.
- <sup>31</sup> LGBT Religious Archives Network, "Dr. Ted McIlvenna," accessed on February 20, 2014, last modified on July 8, 2005, <<http://www.lgbtran.org/Profile.aspx?ID=125>>.
- <sup>32</sup> LGBT Religious Archives Network, "List of Participants in Consultation," In Exhibit: The Council on Religion and the Homosexual, Dialogue Between Clergy and Homosexuals, accessed on February 20, 2014, <<http://www.lgbtran.org/Exhibits/CRH/Room.aspx?RID=1&CID=5&AID=13>>.
- <sup>33</sup> John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: the Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 192.
- <sup>34</sup> LGBT Religious Archives Network, "Dr. Ted McIlvenna"
- <sup>35</sup> D'Emilio, 192.



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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 193.

<sup>38</sup> Del Martin, "The Church and the Homosexual: A New Rapport," *The Ladder* 8.12 (September 1964), 9-13.

<sup>39</sup> D'Emilio, 193.

<sup>40</sup> LGBT Religious Archives Network, "Dr. Ted McIlvenna."

<sup>41</sup> Christian Century, "Clergy Shatter Another Taboo," originally published on December 23, 1964, accessed on the *LGBT Religious Archives Network*, accessed on February 20, 2014, <<http://www.lgbtran.org/Exhibits/CRH/Room.aspx?RID=2&CID=9&AID=26>>.

<sup>42</sup> D'Emilio, 193.

<sup>43</sup> Shilts, 58.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>45</sup> D'Emilio, 194.

<sup>46</sup> "Angry Ministers Rip Police," *San Francisco Chronicle*, first published on January 3, 1965, accessed via the LGBT Religious Archives Network, accessed on March 1, 2014, <<http://www.lgbtran.org/Exhibits/CRH/Room.aspx?RID=4&CID=17&AID=50>>.

<sup>47</sup> D'Emilio, 194.

<sup>48</sup> "Minutes of CRH Membership Meeting on January 26, 1965," accessed via the LGBT Religious Archives Network, accessed on March 1, 2014, <<http://www.lgbtran.org/Exhibits/CRH/Room.aspx?RID=4&CID=17&AID=50>>.

<sup>49</sup> Shilts, 59.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>51</sup> Tina Fetner, "Working Anita Bryant: The Impact of Christian Anti-Gay Activism on Lesbian and Gay Movement Claims," *Social Problems* 48.3 (2001), 411-428.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 415.

<sup>53</sup> Shilts, 156.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 157.

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<sup>55</sup> James Darsey, "From 'Gay is Good' to the Scourge of AIDS: The Evolution of Gay Liberation Rhetoric, 1977-1990," *Communication Studies* 42.1 (1991), 48.

<sup>56</sup> John Lynch, "Institution and Imprimatur: Institutional Rhetoric and the Failure of the Catholic Church's Pastoral Letter of Homosexuality," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8.3 (2005), 388.

<sup>57</sup> Shilts, 266.

<sup>58</sup> Ronald Fischli, "Anita Bryant's Stand against 'Militant Homosexuality': Religious Fundamentalism and the Democratic Process," *Central States Speech Journal* 30.3 (1979), 267.

<sup>59</sup> Shilts, 159.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>62</sup> Fischli, 265-266.

<sup>63</sup> Shilts, 157.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 161.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 161-162.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 163.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 221.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 219.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 220.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 223.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 223.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 224.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 225-226.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 230.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 230.

<sup>78</sup> Foss, 84.

<sup>79</sup> Fejes, 203.

<sup>80</sup> “Four Historical Readings from 44 Years of MCC Ministry,” accessed on March 3, 2014,  
<[http://mcccchurch.org/download/3%20Four%20Historical%20Readings%20from%2044%20Years%20of%20MCC%20Ministry%20\(FINAL\).doc](http://mcccchurch.org/download/3%20Four%20Historical%20Readings%20from%2044%20Years%20of%20MCC%20Ministry%20(FINAL).doc)>.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 206.

<sup>82</sup> Shilts, 248.

<sup>83</sup> Fejes, 207.

<sup>84</sup> Shilts, 249.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 250.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 250.

<sup>87</sup> Chauncey, 39.

<sup>88</sup> Fetner, 425.

<sup>89</sup> Shilts, 167.

<sup>90</sup> Darsey, 50.

<sup>91</sup> Mel White, *Stranger at the Gate: To be Gay and Christian in America*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 141.

<sup>92</sup> White, 142. The term “fundamentalist” appears in quotations because White refers to those individuals as “fundamentalists.”

<sup>93</sup> Mike Dorning, “Born Again Mel White Leaves the Christian Right’s Inner Circle by Coming Out of the Closet,” *Chicago Tribune*, (May 9, 1994): 1.

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<sup>94</sup> White, 147.

<sup>95</sup> Chauncey, 41.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 41. For a more in-depth discussion of the protestors who argued that students with HIV/AIDS should not be allowed to attend school, see Brier, Jennifer, “‘Save Our Kids, Keep AIDS out:’ Anti-AIDS Activism and the Legacy of Community Control in Queens, New York,” *Journal of Social History* 39.4 (2006), 965-987.

<sup>97</sup> Gregory M. Herek, “AIDS and Stigma,” *The American Behavioral Scientist* 42.7 (1999), 1106.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 1107.

<sup>99</sup> Dana Rosenfeld, Bernadette Bartlam, and Ruth D. Smith, “Out of the Closet and Into the Trenches: Gay Male Baby Boomers, Aging, and HIV/AIDS,” *The Gerontologist* 52.2 (2013), 256.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 257.

<sup>101</sup> Herek, 1108.

<sup>102</sup> Chauncey, 42.

<sup>103</sup> Herek, 1106-1107.

<sup>104</sup> Chauncey, 41.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>111</sup> Ex-gay conversion therapy refers to counseling services that attempt to change a homosexual into a heterosexual.

<sup>112</sup> Craig O. Steward, “Social Cognition and Discourse Processing Goals in the Analysis of ‘Ex-gay’ Rhetoric,” *Discourse Society* 19 (2008), 63.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>115</sup> White, 298.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 271.

<sup>117</sup> John J. Anderson, "The Rhetoric of Homosexual Practice: A Critique of the Identity/Act Distinction in Protestant Ordination Policies," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 41.4 (2013), 601.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 603.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 610.

<sup>120</sup> White, 300-301.

<sup>121</sup> Chauncey, xvi.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 49

<sup>124</sup> Chauncey, 53. Also, see James W. Button, Kenneth D. Wald, and Barbara A. Rienzo, "The Election of Openly Gay Public Officials in American Communities," *Urban Affairs Review* 35 (1999), 188-209.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>126</sup> Charles E. Morris, and John M. Sloop, "'What Lips These Lips Have Kissed': Refiguring the Politics of Queer Public Kissing," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3:1 (2006), 14.

<sup>127</sup> Chauncey, 45.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 45-46.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 47.

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- <sup>132</sup> White, 252.
- <sup>133</sup> Ibid, 252.
- <sup>134</sup> Ibid, 254.
- <sup>135</sup> Ibid, 254.
- <sup>136</sup> Ibid, 255-256.
- <sup>137</sup> Lynch, 383.
- <sup>138</sup> Ibid, 383.
- <sup>139</sup> David E. Campbell, and J. Quin Monson, "The Religion Card: Gay Marriage and the 2008 Presidential Election," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 72.3 (2008), 400.
- <sup>140</sup> J. Brady Brammer, "Religious Groups and the Gay Rights Movement: Recognizing Common Ground," *Brigham Young University Law Review* 4 (2006), 1002.
- <sup>141</sup> Ibid, 1002.
- <sup>142</sup> Ibid, 1020.
- <sup>143</sup> Ibid, 1021.
- <sup>144</sup> Daniel A. Smith, Matthew DeSantis, and Jason Kassel, "Same-Sex Marriage Ballot Measures and the 2004 Presidential Election," *State and Local Government Review* 38.2 (2006), 80.
- <sup>145</sup> Greg Lewis, "Same-Sex Marriage and the 2004 Presidential Election," *Political Science & Politics* (2005), 195.
- <sup>146</sup> Campbell and Monson, 400. Also, see *ibid*, 78.
- <sup>147</sup> Ibid, 413.
- <sup>148</sup> Robert E. Jr. Denton, "Religion and the 2004 Presidential Campaign," *The American Behavioral Scientist* 49.1 (2005), 24.
- <sup>149</sup> Ibid, 24.
- <sup>150</sup> Smith, DeSantis, and Kassel, 87-88.
- <sup>151</sup> Denton, 24.

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<sup>152</sup> Smith, DeSantis, and Kassel, 78.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 78. Also, see Carolyn Lockhead, “GAY MARRIAGE: Did issue help re-elect Bush?,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, published on November 4, 2004, accessed on April 5, 2014, <<http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/GAY-MARRIAGE-Did-issue-help-re-elect-Bush-2677003.php>>.

<sup>154</sup> “California Gay Marriage Banned As Proposition 8 Passes,” *Huffington Post*, last updated on December 6, 2008, accessed on February 6, 2014, <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/11/05/california-gay-marriage-b\\_n\\_141429.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/11/05/california-gay-marriage-b_n_141429.html)>.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Laurie Goodstein, “A Line in the Sand for Same-Sex Marriage Foes,” *New York Times*, posted on October 26, 2008, accessed on February 7, 2014, <[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/27/us/27right.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/27/us/27right.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)>.

<sup>157</sup> Joe Garofoli, “Report: anti-gay TV ads swaged Prop. 8 voters,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, published on August 4, 2010, accessed on February 7, 2014, <<http://www.sfgate.com/politics/joegarofoli/article/Report-anti-gay-TV-ads-swayed-Prop-8-voters-3179434.php>>. To view this particular advertisement, see VoteYesonProp8, “Yes on 8 TV Ad: It’s Already Happened,” YouTube, posted on October 8, 2008, accessed on February 7, 2014, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PgjcqFYP4>>.

<sup>158</sup> Jonathan Rauch, “Prop. 8 ads’ invisible gays,” *Los Angeles Times*, published on October 26, 2008, accessed on February 7, 2014, <<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-oe-rauch26-2008oct26,0,3675742.story#axzz2sfk808Jx>>.

<sup>159</sup> “Prop. 8 Supporter Violently Attacked for Distributing Lawn Signs,” *Christian News Wire*, Published on October 8, 2008, accessed on February 9, 2014, <<http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/916008237.html>>.

<sup>160</sup> “Attack outside of Catholic church part of 'wave of intimidation,' says Yes on 8,” *Catholic News Agency*, published on October 15, 2008, accessed on February 9, 2009, <[http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/attack\\_outside\\_of\\_catholic\\_church\\_part\\_of\\_wave\\_of\\_intimidation\\_says\\_yes\\_on\\_8/](http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/attack_outside_of_catholic_church_part_of_wave_of_intimidation_says_yes_on_8/)>.

<sup>161</sup> Salvador Hernandez, “Prop. 8 sign-stealing ignited free speech debate,” *The Orange County Register*, first published on October 20, 2008, last updated on August 21, 2013, accessed on February 9, 2014, <<http://www.ocregister.com/articles/signs-9536-stolen-people.html>>.

<sup>162</sup> “The Face of Proposition 8,” posted by Theremina, Vimeo video, posted in 2009, accessed February 9, 2014, <<http://vimeo.com/2053489>>.

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<sup>163</sup> Goodstein, “A Line in the Sand for Same-Sex Marriage Foes”

<sup>164</sup> Goodstein, “A Line in the Sand for Same-Sex Marriage Foes”

<sup>165</sup> Nancy Wilson, mcclatv, “Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (1 of 3) MCC 40<sup>th</sup> Ann. Moderator’s A,” MCC 40<sup>th</sup> Ann. Moderator’s A,” YouTube, uploaded on October 15, 2008, accessed on February 7, 2014, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHIgNT34ROg>>.

<sup>166</sup> “Mormon Church steps into the Prop. 8 battle,” *Los Angeles Times*, posted on October 9, 2008, accessed on February 6, 2014, <<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2008/10/now-the-mormon.html>>.

<sup>167</sup> Jesse McKinley, and Kirk Johnson, “Mormons Tipped Scale in Ban on Gay Marriage,” *New York Times*, published on November 14, 2008, accessed on February 6, 2014, <[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/15/us/politics/15marriage.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/15/us/politics/15marriage.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)>.

<sup>168</sup> See Patrick J. Egan, and Kenneth Sherrill, “California’s Proposition 8: What Happened, and What Does the Future Hold?,” *National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute*, published in January 2009, accessed on February 6, 2014, <[http://www.www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/pi\\_prop8\\_1\\_6\\_09.pdf](http://www.www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/pi_prop8_1_6_09.pdf)>.

<sup>169</sup> Goodstein, “A Line in the Sand for Same-Sex Marriage Foes”

<sup>170</sup> Wade C. Rowatt, Jo-Ann Tsang, Jessica Kelly, Brooke LaMartina, Michelle McCullers, and April McKinley, “Associations Between Religious Personality Dimensions and Implicit Homosexual Prejudice,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45.3, (2006): 398.

<sup>171</sup> Lisa J. Schulte and Juan Battle, “The Relative Importance of Ethnicity and Religion in Predicating Attitudes Towards Gays and Lesbians,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 47.2, (2004): 127-142.

<sup>172</sup> Bernadette Barton, “1CROSS + 3NAILS = 4GVN: Compulsory Christianity and Homosexuality in the Bible Belt Panopticon,” *Feminist Formations* 23.1 (2011), 70-71.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>175</sup> Hartman, 170.



### **CHAPTER THREE: NANCY WILSON'S CONSTRUCTION OF GAY CHRISTIAN *PARRHESIA* STEA**

During the early 1970s, after the creation of CRH, a leaflet started making its way around the gay community in San Francisco. This leaflet stated:

Today there is a church where the gays and straights worship God side by side.

Some churches give lip service approval to the gay Christian. Yet their members snub the gays. Some churches ban the gay person completely. Today there is a church which accepts homosexuals as normal persons. That church is

Metropolitan Community Church. This is a church where gay lovers can come to the altar rail together.<sup>1</sup>

In 1968, Reverend Troy Perry created the first gay Christian denomination—MCC. Perry had previously been a Pentecostal minister. However, because of his homosexuality, he was excommunicated from the denomination after he was outed by an individual with whom he had slept. To ensure that other homosexuals had a church community, Perry founded MCC, as Fred Fejes noted, to serve “the religious needs of the lesbian and gay community” and to show “that religion and homosexuality were not antithetical.”<sup>2</sup>

Perry did not found MCC without his own struggles. After being excommunicated from his denomination, Perry “spent the next several years struggling to reconcile his sexuality and his Christian spirituality.”<sup>3</sup> He had spent the majority of his life praying that God would forgive him for his homosexuality. To make matters worse for Perry, when his church discovered his homosexuality, he had to tell his wife why he was being forced to leave the church. He had to admit to his wife that he was a homosexual.<sup>4</sup> After this ordeal, he started thinking that God no longer loved him. In a documentary about his life,

*Call Me Troy*, Perry indicated that he told himself that “‘I have nothing to live for—nothing.’ And, I walked over and turned the water on in the tub, took a razorblade, cut both my wrists, just laid back in the tub, and waited.”<sup>5</sup> Later, Perry wrote that, “The veins popped and yielded up their dark fluid. It was thicker than I expected, and darker. I had physical sensations of numbness growing upon me. I drifted off to sleep, even though I was not at all aware of it.”<sup>6</sup>

In that tub, Perry thought that no one cared about him. As he was drifting into a deeper sleep, he was found and rushed to the hospital. On his way to the hospital, he prayed to God, but did not think God would listen because he was gay. Yet, God responded. Perry later claimed that God spoke to him that night. According to Perry, God said to him, “Troy, I love you. And, you are my son.” Perry stated in his documentary, “God talked to me. I didn’t believe that God would ever talk to me again.” In an epiphany, he told himself, “I can be gay and Christian and I know without a shadow of a doubt, I was a Christian and I was an openly gay man, and it was going to be okay.”<sup>7</sup>

In his knowledge that God loved him, Perry also knew that God wanted him to preach and serve gays and lesbians. He knew that he had to start a new church. As Melissa Wilcox wrote, Perry “placed an advertisement in the September 1968 issue of Los Angeles’ fledgling gay magazine, the *Advocate*” announcing the first service of the new denomination.<sup>8</sup> Then, on October 6, 1968, twelve individuals arrived at Perry’s house to hear the first MCC sermon. The next Sunday, the congregation grew by one individual. The third sermon had fourteen members. On the fourth Sunday, “Perry was discouraged by a drop to only nine” members.<sup>9</sup> However, by the tenth service, the

congregation had grown so much that Perry's house was not large enough to hold all of its members.

After that, Perry's church grew rapidly. In two years, MCC services started in San Francisco, San Diego, Chicago, and Honolulu.<sup>10</sup> In those locales, MCC spread leaflets announcing the formation of those congregations. Those four congregations and the original Los Angeles congregation came together in 1970 to hold the first General Conference of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. After MCC's initial conference, Wilcox indicated that its growth continued at a swift pace:

By February of 1972, there were twelve churches and twelve missions, for a total of twenty-four congregations; by April there were twenty-six congregations, and by June there were thirty-one. The December 1972 issue of *In Unity*, published just more than four years after the first MCC service, listed thirty-five congregations in nineteen states, and by the time MCC celebrated its tenth anniversary, there were one hundred eleven congregations, including groups in Canada, Great Britain, Nigeria, and Australia.<sup>11</sup>

MCC continued to flourish under the direction of Perry, guided by his belief that he was directed by God to evangelize gays and lesbians. By 1974, more the one-thousand individuals attended Perry's sermons at MCC Los Angeles every Sunday.<sup>12</sup> In 1974, two sociologists, Ronald Enroth and Gerald Jamison, described those sermons as "simple, brief, often meandering, and sometimes punctuated by humorous anecdotes and illustrations."<sup>13</sup> Wilcox argued that Perry's success was in part because "The UFMCC's message . . . provided a powerful affirmation of LGBT identity, while the uniqueness of a gay and lesbian Christian organization . . . drew those where were struggling to find a

home where both identities would be accepted and nurtured.”<sup>14</sup> Many individuals found a home at MCC. According to Enroth and Jamison, at MCC services, there were frequently “large numbers of Roman Catholics and Baptists and a scattering of Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Pentecostals, Mormons, and even Jews.”<sup>15</sup> The church grew so rapidly that in 1972 MCC Los Angeles (MCC LA) was the third largest congregation in all of Los Angeles. During that year, MCC LA established a crisis intervention center for gay individuals that operated 24 hours a day.<sup>16</sup>

The growth of MCC did not occur without challenges. The church faced and continues to face arsons and violence. The church contended with Anita Bryant, the development of the anti-gay movement, and the use of ex-gay therapy. Later, members of MCC watched as their friends, loved ones, and fellow MCC members died of AIDS. MCC fought for non-discrimination ordinances and contended with anti-sodomy laws. Its members prayed for Matthew Shepard after his brutal murder.

In 1997, Perry and Reverend Nancy Wilson wrote a letter to President Clinton that detailed the major hate crimes that MCC had faced since its inception. They argued that MCC was targeted by arsons and fire-bombings more than any other institution in the United States.<sup>17</sup> According to their report, in 1973, MCC Los Angeles burned to the ground after it was targeted by arson. After the fire, on February 28, 1973, a quote from Perry appeared in the *Advocate*. He stated, “We believe we CAN change the world! We will NOT be stopped! To those people who would rejoice because of our loss: WE SERVE YOU NOTICE — that we, in the Gay Community, will never permit the hands of the clock to be turned back on us ever again! We WILL rebuild and go forward.”<sup>18</sup> However, that year MCC Nashville’s worship facility was also set ablaze. MCC San

Francisco also turned to ashes in 1973, and the location where MCC New Orleans met, The UpStairs Lounge, was fire-bombed.

According to Robert Goss, the UpStairs Lounge fire was “the worst arson hate crime and mass murder of gay men and friends in U.S. history.”<sup>19</sup> On June 24, 1973, around 65 persons were gathered in The UpStairs Lounge later in the day after MCC New Orleans’ church services were complete. Without their knowledge, an arsonist started a fire in the stairwell. When the door to the stairway was opened, “a burst of flames blew into the room,” and the fire “spread quickly into an intensely hot inferno.”<sup>20</sup> As Goss described it, “bodies burst into flames. Rev. Bill Larson screamed, ‘Oh God!’ and moved to the barred window where he was struck by a falling object, screaming in pain as he burned to death.”<sup>21</sup> After the fire was extinguished and “as firemen cleared away the debris, Rev. Bill Larson’s body stood visible for hours upright in the window, a macabre reminder of martyrdom for his sexual orientation. His body faced the hundreds of curious spectators who looked at the fire-damaged building.”<sup>22</sup> Even though there were survivors, “the intensely hot blaze tragically overwhelmed many persons, leading to a total of 32 fatalities.”<sup>23</sup> Twenty-nine individuals died instantly, while several other individuals died later in the hospital. For instance, Ed Tunstall, a writer for the Associated Press, wrote that “that fire which claimed 29 lives at the Up Stairs Lounge lasted less than 20 minutes.”<sup>24</sup> A later report by Bill Rushton of *The Advocate* indicated that the death toll rose to 32 individuals and that “four bodies remained unidentified.”<sup>25</sup> In this blaze, one-third of the members of MCC New Orleans lost their lives.

New Orleanians responded to the fire in a manner that demonstrated that they, like the arsonist, had deep seated hatred against homosexuals. One of the individuals who

died in the hospital was Luther Boggs. Boggs was a teacher. When he was in the hospital fighting for his life “with burns all over his body,” “he was fired from his teaching job because he was a homosexual.”<sup>26</sup> In addition, according to Goss, after the fire, “Rev. Larson’s mother read in the press that her son was a homosexual, and she refused to participate in her son’s funeral because of what the neighbors would think and refused to accept her son’s cremated remains.”<sup>27</sup> Even mothers did not want to associate with their homosexual children.

Then, Perry heard about the devastation of MCC New Orleans. After the bombing, Eric Newhouse, an *Associated Press* writer, indicated that Perry “declared next Sunday a day of mourning for ‘our dead brothers and sisters.’”<sup>28</sup> Later, Perry was infuriated when he heard about homophobic comments and police descriptions of the bombing. Goss noted that the “media responses to the arson produced a range of homophobic comments: ‘I hope that the fire burned their dresses off,’ and ‘The Lord had something to do with this and punished them.’”<sup>29</sup> Perry demanded an apology from the Police Department, which he finally received after MCC and the gay community had mobilized across the nation. The fire had also exposed “the moral bankruptcy of the Christian churches” as “the only churches to respond were St. George’s Episcopal Church and the MCC denomination led by its founder, Rev. Troy Perry.”<sup>30</sup>

Even though the fire ravaged MCC New Orleans, the surviving members of the congregation ensured that it continued. On February, 16, 1974, an article appearing in *The Times-Picayune* reported that MCC New Orleans, “which reportedly lost one-third of its total membership in the tragic Upstairs Lounge fire last year, has entered in to a new phase of growth and spiritual renewal.”<sup>31</sup>

In 1973, MCC had experienced so many arsons and fire-bombs that its annual State of the Church Report referred to that year as the year of “Refiner’s Fire.” The report stated, “We were sorely tried by the torch—as fire destroyed the church in Los Angeles (not once, but twice), the meeting place which housed our Nashville Mission, our San Francisco Church . . . and the tragic fire which wiped out over 1/3 of our New Orleans congregation, including the pastor.”<sup>32</sup> After 1973, MCC was certainly familiar with being persecuted by fire.

The fires continued. Between 1974 and 1997, a dozen MCC building burned to the ground.<sup>33</sup> During this time, rocks broke stain glass windows, MCC buildings were spray painted with homophobic slurs, crosses burned in front of MCC buildings, parishioners were violently assaulted, pastors received death threats, and pastors were murdered. Throughout its history, MCC constantly experienced terror and violence. Even as MCC fought to ensure its safety against arson, the denomination joined with other gay rights organizations to fight in the political arena against figures such as Anita Bryant, California State Senator John Briggs, and against the supporters of Proposition 8.

### **The Fortieth Anniversary of MCC LA**

Nancy Wilson rose to speak to the Metropolitan Community Church of Los Angeles congregation (MCC LA) on October 5, 2008. On that day, she spoke in celebration of MCC LA’s 40th anniversary—an anniversary that simultaneously marked the 40th anniversary of the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) denomination. Even though she spoke in front of MCC LA’s congregation, she did not speak in its sanctuary. That congregation had planned a full weekend of events to celebrate its anniversary. On Friday night, October 4, MCC LA showed the documentary *Call Me Troy*—a documentary that detailed the life of Troy Perry who founded MCC. Then, the next night,

MCC LA gathered in the banquet hall at the Renaissance Montura Hotel.<sup>34</sup> There was where Wilson gave her speech.

Gathered for this event was an audience of MCC's most prominent leaders. The current pastor of MCC LA, Reverend Doctor Neil Thomas, was there. The founder of MCC, Reverend Doctor Perry, attended. Also present was John Duran, who was the Mayor of West Hollywood at the time. Numerous other members and friends of MCC LA gathered to hear MCC's moderator speak.<sup>35</sup> Those members of her audience were the prominent leaders of MCC and of Los Angeles—the shepherds who watched God's flock. Together, this audience represented numerous individuals who had the power and ability to alter the direction of MCC for years to come. Later, her speech would be uploaded to YouTube for all MCC members and others to see.<sup>36</sup>

In front of these leaders, Wilson stood as a shepherd in her own right. As the moderator of MCC, Wilson oversaw more than 250 congregations across 23 countries. Virginia Mollenkott, a queer and feminist theologian, once indicated that Wilson was a powerful member of MCC. Mollenkott compared MCC to other churches, such as the Catholic Church. According to her, MCC's structure was not hierarchical like the Catholic Church (i.e., with the Pope at the top, then the cardinals, then the bishops, and with the priests down below). Even so, Mollenkott indicated that MCC's moderator was “the equivalent in more hierarchical organizations of President, CEO, Archbishop, or even Pope.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, Wilson was a prominent leader in MCC. Mollenkott also argued that whenever Wilson spoke “greatness emanates from her heart, her attitudes, her life, her work, who she *is*.”<sup>38</sup>

Her audience already knew of this greatness. Before becoming the moderator of MCC, Wilson had been the senior pastor of MCC LA for 15 years. In that time, she had experienced what her audience had experienced. She had seen what her audience had seen. She still knew what her audience knew. She knew, like her audience, of the queer interpretations of the Bible that indicated that David and Johnathon were lovers. She



knew, like her audience, of the interpretations of the Bible that challenged traditional interpretations that claimed the Bible condemned homosexuality. She knew that her audience knew that they could be gay and Christian. Simply, she was speaking to individuals that she knew—her friends and family in Christ. Because of her experience as the senior pastor of MCC LA and her experience as the moderator of MCC, she also had unique insight into the dilemmas, challenges, and opportunities that MCC faced.

Appropriately, she had the ability to express and reformulate MCC's shared heritage. In her discussion of epideictic occasions, Celeste Condit referenced the work of Michael McGee when she argued that "communities of any size—nation to family—need to have explicit definitions of major shared experiences, because 'to be a part of a community' means in large part to identify oneself with the symbols, values, myths, or 'heritage' of that community."<sup>39</sup> Therefore, according to Condit, during epideictic situations, the speaker shapes the values of her community, because the speaker creates those occasions "in order to have opportunities for expressing and reformulating our shared heritage."<sup>40</sup> By inviting Wilson to speak at its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, MCC LA created a rhetorical situation in which she could express and reformulate the heritage and values of MCC. When it created this occasion, MCC became an audience that gave Wilson what Condit called "the right to select certain values, stories, and persons from the shared heritage and to promote them over others."<sup>41</sup> During her speech, Wilson selected particular stories and values of MCC and promoted those values. In doing so, she reaffirmed MCC.

If Condit is correct that epideictic occasions create and recreate the shared heritage of a community, then it is important to examine how rhetors in those occasions deploy the memory of the past to shape the present and future. Using Condit thusly, I argue that, in this epideictic occasion, Wilson uses the memory of MCC's past in order to create her audience as parrhesiastes in the present and for the future. In other words, she creates and recreates the shared heritage of MCC as *parrhesiastic*, which, according to

David Novak, means that MCC functions “as a truth-teller.”<sup>42</sup> To demonstrate this claim, I first describe Michel Foucault’s concept of “*parrhesia*,”<sup>43</sup> and Maurice Charland’s concept “constitutive rhetoric,”<sup>44</sup> and then I explain how those concepts function together. After this, I attend to Wilson’s speech to articulate how her narrative of MCC’s past creates her audience members as *parrhesiastea*.

### **Constituting *Parrhesiastea***

In late April, 2013, Pope Francis spoke a short sermon at the Feast of St. George. In this sermon, Francis stated that early Christians faced immense persecution when they evangelized the Greeks after Christ’s death. Francis proclaimed that those early Christians had “courage to proclaim Jesus to the Greeks, an almost scandalous thing at that time.”<sup>45</sup> He then stated, “Let us ask the Lord for this ‘*parresia*,’ this apostolic fervor that impels us to move forward, as brothers, all of us forward! Forward, bringing the name of Jesus . . .”<sup>46</sup> According to Francis’ understanding, *parresia* (or *parrhesia*)<sup>47</sup> meant boldly and courageously proclaiming the name of Jesus even when one faced persecution. Oddly, this view of the term *parrhesia* functions similarly to Foucault’s discussion of the term.

In *Fearless Speech*, Foucault indicates that *parrhesia* is akin to speaking boldly and freely. He interprets Demosthenes, a Greek statesman and orator, as saying that he “will use *parrhesia* because he must boldly speak the truth about the city’s bad politics. And he claims that in so doing, he runs a risk. For it is dangerous for him to speak freely, given that the Athenians in the Assembly are so reluctant to accept any criticism.”<sup>48</sup> The *parrhesiastes* is also courageous. When Raymie McKerrow discusses Foucault’s *parrhesia*, he highlights courage as a critical and distinguishing element of *parrhesia*: “Sophists could not be *parrhesiasts* [*parrhesiastes*]—they can speak on the subject of courage, but could not be courageous.”<sup>49</sup> Unlike the Sophistic orator who embellishes arguments and appeases audiences, the *parrhesiastes* purely speaks the truth with courage and boldness even when the audience may disapprove.

As in Foucault's writing, in Christian tradition, theological understandings of *parrhesia* describe it as speaking boldly and courageously. For instance, the theologian David Tiede argues that boldness "is integral to Luke's depiction of Christian preaching and witness in the Jewish and Greco-Roman public forums."<sup>50</sup> He explicitly links the notion of boldness with the concept of *parrhesia* by citing the eleven instances that the term appears in the Book of Acts. He also uses Paul's boldness as an example of *parrhesia* by stating, "Paul is still delivered to Rome in chains. But it is when dragged before kings and princes and handed over to the religious leaders and to prisons that this boldness of the witness is most evident."<sup>51</sup> Although Foucault does not attend to the Bible in his genealogy of the term *parrhesia*, the term itself appears in the Bible as speaking boldly and courageously.

Foucault argues that there are five characteristics of *parrhesia*: frankness, danger, criticism, duty, and truth.<sup>52</sup> The *parrhesiastes* is an individual who speaks freely and frankly; he or she says everything that is on his or her mind. Furthermore, when the *parrhesiastes* acts he or she assumes that he or she is in danger. *Parrhesiatea* are in danger, because they frankly critique those in power. They critique, because they know that they are correct, and, because they are correct, they have an obligation and duty to speak.<sup>53</sup>

Unlike theologians, Foucault understands the act of *parrhesia* as an act of an individual. He views *parrhesia* as "a 'game' between the *one* who speaks the truth and the interlocutor."<sup>54</sup> According to Arthur Walzer, Foucault views the *parrhesiastes* as either "an orator criticizing the *demos* in a democratic political context," or "a counselor offering frank criticism of a prince in a monarchical context."<sup>55</sup> Either the *parrhesiastes* is an individual who speaks to the many or an individual who speaks to another individual. Importantly, Foucault does not offer a view on *parrhesiatea*—a group of *parrhesiastes*. Employing biblical uses of *parrhesia*, it is possible to understand the *parrhesiatea*. For example, in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes that "we have boldness (*parrhesia*) and

access with confidence through faith in Him.”<sup>56</sup> In addition, in his prayer at the Feast of St. George, Francis asks that God grant *us* this “*parresia*.”<sup>57</sup> The use of “we” and “us” signals that in the Christian tradition the act of *parresia* is not necessarily an act of the individual. Instead, it is an act of a group—an act of the *parrhesiastea*.

In her speech, Wilson constitutes her audience members as a group of *parrhesiastea*. According to Charland, constitutive rhetoric creates a particular audience; the rhetor speaks that audience into existence. He writes that this form of rhetoric “must constitute the identity” of a group of people “as it simultaneously presumes” that identity “to be pregiven and natural, existing outside of rhetoric.”<sup>58</sup> This rhetoric also “positions the reader towards political, social, and economic action in the material world.”<sup>59</sup> I argue that Wilson’s constitutive rhetoric creates her audience as *parrhesiastea*, because she positions her audience in a manner that predisposes them to act as *parrhesiastea* in the future.

The five characteristics of *parrhesia* are evident in Wilson’s descriptions of MCC and her audience members throughout her speech. Wilson argues that even though members of MCC had been in danger in the past, they still spoke the truth, because God had been at their side. In their knowledge that God has been on their side, they have known of their duty to speak the truth, even if that meant critiquing those with more power. MCC members have been critics who frankly spoke the truth even when they had been in danger, because they had the duty to do so. By constituting her audience thusly, Wilson also speaks into existence audience members that would frankly and boldly tell the truth in the future.

### **The Truth of God’s Creation of MCC**

Wilson begins her twenty minute speech by addressing her audience as being individuals who know the truth. According to Foucault, a *parrhesiastes* is an individual who does not have any doubt in what he or she is saying.<sup>60</sup> *Parrhesiastea* are certain that

they know the truth, and they are certain that when they speak they are expressing the truth. In creating her audience members as *parrhesiastea*, therefore, Wilson creates an audience that is certain that it knows the truth about God and God's word. For her and her audience, the truth is that God loves and affirms queer individuals, that churches need to minister to queer individuals, and that being queer is not a sin.

To demonstrate that MCC knows the truth, Wilson starts her speech by reminding her audience that the Book of Genesis states that "God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good."<sup>61</sup> She then indicates that in 1968 God created MCC by speaking "let there be light" once more. By paralleling the first Genesis creation story, she implies that the creation of MCC has been good. Immediately afterwards, she reminds her audience that when Jesus preached his Sermon on the Mount he told his followers that they were "the light of the world."<sup>62</sup> She asks, "Who knew, before 1968, that he meant us—that we would be called to shine a light in so many places that needed illumination including the church that bears his name and many places that the church would never dare to go?"<sup>63</sup> By describing MCC as having the light, Wilson is also stating that MCC has had the truth. Throughout Christian tradition, light has illuminated the truth. For instance, in *The City of God*, Saint Augustine writes that light "is the holy company of the angels spiritually radiant with the illumination of the truth."<sup>64</sup>

In her extended reference to light, Wilson initiates her construction of her audience. When speaking of light during his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus states, "A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."<sup>65</sup> By referencing this passage, Wilson creates her audience as both knowing the truth and having the duty to share that truth. Here, light represents the truth of God's word and the Christian model. According to Wilson, since MCC members have been the light, they have been the truth and have known the truth. By knowing the

truth, they also have had the duty to share that light, because Jesus has instructed his followers to put the lamp on the stand instead of underneath the bowl. In the future, in order to fulfill their duty, members of MCC would have to ensure that they would spread the light (i.e., truth) about God.

After referring to the Sermon on the Mount, Wilson turns and speaks directly to the founder of MCC, Perry, about the danger MCC has faced. She thanks him for founding MCC forty years earlier and tells of the time when she first met him. His “amazing blend of gospel preaching and justice—radical justice—speak” had caught and had held her attention.<sup>66</sup> Since she first heard him preaching, she has known “that this movement—this path of illumination—was worth living and dying for. It was worth risking everything for.”<sup>67</sup> Supporting MCC has been synonymous with risking one’s life. As evidence for this claim, Wilson reminds her audience that, when she met Perry, the first arson had already been committed against MCC. In late January, 1973, MCC LA had burned to the ground; this had been the first, but not only, time an MCC had ignited.<sup>68</sup>

By reminding her audience about this first arson, Wilson creates her audience as a community that lives in danger. When he writes of danger, Foucault claims that “someone is said to use *parrhesia* and merits consideration as a *parrhesiastes* only if there is a risk or danger for him in telling the truth.”<sup>69</sup> More specifically, McKerrow indicates that the *parrhesiastes* accepts “the risk of death as the ultimate penalty for speaking what one believes.”<sup>70</sup> MCC LA has been violently attacked, which meant it has been risky, even deadly, to be associated with the church. By indicating that others attack MCC, Wilson creates her audience and community members as individuals who have lived in danger. While it is true that Wilson is not in immediate danger when she speaks at MCC’s anniversary, the narrative she crafts indicates that her community historically has been in danger.

While describing her audience as being in danger, Wilson also creates her audience as a community with duty. She tells her audience that even though his church

burned to the ground, Perry had flown to Boston to welcome MCC Boston into the MCC family. In other words, even though Perry experienced violence and danger, he nevertheless had had a duty to spread the truth of MCC. Wilson supports this argument by indicating that, “Little did you [Troy] know that you left MCC Los Angeles to take into membership the next moderator of MCC. But, God knew. We needed to be connected to the light.”<sup>71</sup> Through her description of how God had known that Wilson and Perry needed to come together in the light (i.e., truth), Wilson is indicating that God has sanctioned the actions of MCC. In claiming that God has approved of MCC, Wilson creates her audience members as individuals who are certain they know the truth.

After this opening, Wilson continues her speech in the past tense. She discusses the overwhelming challenges that MCC has faced, but also describes how MCC has overcome those challenges. She begins with one of the first political battles MCC had entered—the fight against the Briggs Initiative. In doing so, she creates her audience as individuals who have had the duty to sacrifice themselves to advance the cause of MCC.

### **Duty and Troy Perry’s Fasting**

In 1978, the Briggs Initiative appeared on California’s state ballot. This proposition would have banned gays, lesbians, and their supporters from becoming school teachers.<sup>72</sup> At this time, Wilson had only recently begun her duties as an elder at MCC LA. When she had arrived for one of her first meetings, Perry was not there. Instead, “he was fasting on the steps of the federal building to raise the initial funding to fight the Briggs Initiative.”<sup>73</sup> Gay rights movement leaders had not wanted to engage in a state by state strategy, but Perry “broke rank with them. He saw California as a do or die state.”<sup>74</sup> While he was fasting, supporters of the initiative had started spreading rumors about him not fasting. Despite these hurdles, MCC “kept at it.”<sup>75</sup> MCC had created phone banks, and had begun making calls. After spending days on the phone, they had succeeded in raising \$100,000. During her speech, Wilson explains that this money “funded the first poll ever

taken that helped set the strategy that won that day.”<sup>76</sup> According to her, the Briggs Initiative had failed because of the efforts of members of MCC.

Wilson retells the story of Perry’s fasting to remind her audience about MCC’s duty to prevent discrimination against gays and lesbians. When describing the *parrhesiastes*’ duty, Foucault indicates that, “The orator who speaks the truth to those who cannot accept his truth [. . .] is free to keep silent. No one forces [the speaker] to speak, but [the speaker] feels that it is his [or her] duty to do so.”<sup>77</sup> In other words, the speaker must voluntarily choose to speak because he or she feels obligated to do so. Duty is why the speaker speaks even if there is danger. Similarly, Perry had not been forced to fast on the steps of the federal building. He had chosen to do so in order to speak the truth about the Bible’s affirmation of homosexuality. Similarly, MCC’s phone operators had not been forced to make calls. They had done so in order to spread the truth about the Briggs Initiative as doing so had been their duty.

By describing Perry’s and MCC’s efforts to stop the Briggs Initiative, Wilson uses her audience members’ memory to invite them to believe that they have a duty to act in the present and the future. Wilson explicitly compares the conflict over the Briggs Initiative to the ongoing debate over Proposition 8. Before, during the debate over the Briggs Initiative, Perry had thought that California was “a do or die state” when he chose to fast. Now, both supporters and opponents of Proposition 8 see California as “a do or die state.” Wilson uses her and her audience’s memory of the Briggs Initiative to argue the MCC has a duty to oppose Proposition 8.<sup>78</sup> Because MCC had been a deciding factor in stopping the Briggs Initiative, it is possible that it will be the deciding factor in halting Proposition 8. As MCC had told the truth about the Briggs Initiative, it has to tell the truth about Proposition 8. In indicating this, Wilson creates her audience as an audience that is positioned to act against the proposition.

Wilson continues her theme about duty by describing MCC as a community that fulfills its obligations. According to her, MCC has successfully fulfilled its duty to



minister to and to aid the queer community. She repeats that “God said, ‘let there be light,’ and you [MCC LA] gave birth to a movement, to a denomination, to a Latin ministry that thrives and saves lives today.”<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, she credits MCC members with helping to establish the Human Rights Campaign which is “the largest civil rights organization working to achieve equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans.”<sup>80</sup> MCC has also helped create the “largest LGBT center in the world,” states Wilson.<sup>81</sup> Her rapid list of MCC’s successes addresses MCC as a light that has shined. In stating this, she creates MCC as a community that has performed its duties and obligations for God.

Wilson also praises MCC as having been frank because of its involvement in queer theology. She states, “You know we’ve done queer theology. You, MCC, have done queer theology for every Sunday for forty years.”<sup>82</sup> In this brief statement, Wilson references numerous works by members of MCC. In 1996, when she published her own book, *Our Tribe: Queer folks, God, Jesus and the Bible*, she described it as a book on queer theology.<sup>83</sup> In 2000, MCC’s Reverend Doctor Mona West published her book about queer theology—*Take Back the Word: a Queer Reading of the Bible*.<sup>84</sup> MCC LA’s current pastor, Thomas, wrote his dissertation on queer theology.<sup>85</sup> Finally, MCC LA’s statement on homosexuality has discussed the love of David and Jonathan as well as Ruth and Naomi.<sup>86</sup> By referencing these works in her speech, Wilson reminds her audience that MCC has developed and has nurtured queer theology in both writing and practice.

By supporting queer theology, MCC has been frank. Members have not held their tongues when they have described the love between David and Jonathan. They have not been silent about Ruth and Naomi. They boldly have argued that Jesus was bisexual.<sup>87</sup> In short, they have been frank. Frankness, according to Foucault, is when a speaker says all that needs to be said and does not hide anything that is on his or her mind.<sup>88</sup> In Wilson’s reference to queer theology, she creates her audience as a community that has not silenced

their thoughts. Instead, they have boldly proclaimed all that they have believed about the Bible, its stories, and its characters.

### **Death and MCC—AIDS and Matthew Shepard**

Once she finishes praising the development of queer theology, Wilson remembers one of MCC's greatest challenges—the AIDS epidemic, which has devastated gays and lesbians, the gay rights movements, and MCC. Her discussion of AIDS further crafts her audience as individuals who have duty and who are in danger. According to Wilson, in the past, MCC not only had had an obligation to speak the truth about homosexuality and the Bible, but they had been obliged to speak the truth about AIDS. They had had a duty to sacrifice themselves and put themselves in harm's way to minister to those with AIDS. In essence, by caring for those with AIDS, members of MCC had enacted their duty to speak the truth that God cared for queer individuals as well as for those living with AIDS.

During her speech, Wilson begins this discussion of AIDS with the story of Johnny Matthews, who died of AIDS. Quickly, succinctly, and frankly, she describes Matthews: "Was she queer, lesbian, trans? I have no idea. She wore a yarmulke. She was hard of hearing. She had a bad speech impediment. She was noisy. She came late to church. She was argumentative. She talked at the top of her lungs. She always needed a ride, usually from me, and always monopolized new-comers, especially good looking women."<sup>89</sup> Then, the pace of Wilson's speech slows. She continues, "But, she was generous and she had her bags with her. And one day she had a bunch of fortune cookies with Bible verses inside of them. She gave me one and I stuck it in my desk."<sup>90</sup> At that moment, the pace of her speech quickens and intensifies as she states: "A year later, after she had died, we were in Culver City, the roof was leaking, all hell was breaking loose, I felt overwhelmed. I was desperate . . . And, so, yes, I opened the drawer, and I opened the fortune cookie. I admit it."<sup>91</sup>

Suddenly, Wilson's tempo slows again. Grief yet also hope appear in her voice. Somberly, she utters, "And, it said, 'Cast all your cares upon God, because God cares for you.' Grace and mercy. Angels in strange forms."<sup>92</sup> Wilson speaks with certainty. Matthews had been an angel who had visited MCC LA. Even though Wilson had been overwhelmed with challenges, the fortune cookie reminded her of the truth that God cared for her—a lesbian. In articulating this story, therefore, Wilson reminds her audience of the truth that God has loved and cared for their queer community and of the truth that God has watched over their community. Said differently, the story of Matthews reminds MCC that it has known the truth about the Bible and homosexuality.

Then, with barely a pause, Wilson transitions away from Matthews' story and tells her audience of MCC's first AIDS vigil. In late 1986, MCC had held it in downtown Los Angeles. She kept the church open all night, but she had been "a little worried about security," so she said a prayer to keep the church safe. After she had said her prayer, guardian angels stood "guard all night at our church at that AIDS vigil."<sup>93</sup> During her speech, Wilson counts this as a success in MCC's fight against AIDS. According to her, MCC LA had also been victorious when it "fought for the very first AIDS hospices ever built, and then welcomed, rent free on our property, the first pediatric AIDS residence ever in the world."<sup>94</sup>

MCC has taken to the streets to find and help those with AIDS. Wilson recalls a time when she "went with one team to one of the worst places where drug addicts and old drag queens went to die" with Christmas gifts.<sup>95</sup> After Wilson had handed one of the Christmas gifts, a bear, to one woman, Wilson noticed that woman was crying. When the other woman had regained her composure, she said that "she was crying because the next day, Christmas, her mother was bringing her six year old daughter to visit, and she had been fretting all day about having no gift to give her on this last Christmas, and now she had this beautiful bear."<sup>96</sup> After telling the story, Wilson states, "That's a quintessential MCC LA story. It is what you do and have done over, and over, and over again."<sup>97</sup>

Then, Wilson relates her experiences with AIDS to her audience's experiences with the disease. She states, "MCC LA, you loved, touched, prayed for, and buried hundreds."<sup>98</sup> In fact, current estimates show that MCC has "lost some 6000 of its members to AIDS" throughout the 1980s.<sup>99</sup> AIDS has devastated the church, and it has devastated her. To demonstrate her personal devastation with AIDS, Wilson names the clergy members who had served with her at MCC LA who had died from AIDS: "Reverend Bob Jones. Reverend Jim Harris. Reverend Tom Walker. Reverend Danny Mahoney. Reverend Carlos Jones."<sup>100</sup>

The members of MCC have sacrificed themselves in the face of AIDS. They have gone into the streets to find and love those who have had less than a year to live. They have emotionally invested themselves into relationships that cannot last in this life. However, they have had a duty to sacrifice themselves as they continue to serve their brothers and sisters in need. When they have been able, they have brought joy to those who had been suffering, even if that joy is in the form of a bear on Christmas Eve. In doing so, they have brought both light and truth to those in darkness.

The AIDS epidemic is not the only reason the members of MCC LA have known death. On its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, exactly ten years before Wilson gives her 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary speech, MCC learned of Matthew Shepard's murder. In her remembering of Shepard, Wilson speaks of when MCC LA's Youth Group had "made a huge sign that hung out in front of the church that said 'pray for Matthew,'" and she speaks of the time the Reverend Jesse Jackson had spoken in MCC LA's sanctuary.<sup>101</sup> Five thousand people had gathered in the streets near MCC LA to hear the sermon about Shepard's death. When referring to that MCC's action after Shepard's death, Wilson concludes, "MCC LA, you helped our people grieve, and challenged the anger. We stood up against the violence."<sup>102</sup>

When reading Wilson's statements about Shepard, it is important to remember that members of the queer community do not remember Shepard's murder as an individual act of violence. Instead, queers argue that Shepard's murder demonstrated

society's homophobia—homophobia that encourages violence against queer individuals. Thomas Dunn claims that, “the queer counterpublic memory” of Shepard’s murder “reflected and publicized not the solitary, private experiences of violence but rather an ongoing violence that stifled everyday LGBT life.”<sup>103</sup> This memory does not view Shepard’s death as an isolated incident, but rather as an example of society’s propensity to encourage violence against queer individuals. As such, Wilson not only uses this memory to remind her audience of the tragedy of Shepard’s death, but to create her audience as individuals in danger. According to Wilson, therefore, MCC is still in danger as Shepard had been throughout his life.

### **MCC’s Future**

After remarking on Shepard’s death, Wilson gives voice to other challenges and successes that MCC has faced during its 40 years. She begins by swiftly listing the barriers MCC has faced: “We’ve known wilderness in forty years, have we not? Briggs Initiative, Anita Bryant, AIDS, fires, murders, vandalism, persecution, earthquake, Pete Wilson’s vetoes, and Proposition 8.” In that short sentence, Wilson articulates nearly forty years of pain and suffering that MCC has endured. In the beginning, the MCC fought against the Briggs Initiative. They have contended with Bryant’s statements such as, ““homosexuals cannot reproduce—so they must recruit. And to freshen their ranks, they must recruit the youth of America.””<sup>104</sup> They have battled AIDS. They have watched or have died as arsonists burned their sanctuaries to the ground over and over again. They have mourned the fire-bombing of the UpStairs Lounge, they have mourned the 32 individuals who died that day.<sup>105</sup> They have remembered that on that night a third of MCC New Orleans’ members were engulfed in flames.<sup>106</sup> They have been infuriated by Pete Wilson, a former Governor of California, and his vetoes of gay rights legislation. They have survived knowing that he had refused to protect them from being fired.<sup>107</sup>

Nancy Wilson's reference to Proposition 8 brings her audience back to the present. After concluding her list of challenges with "Proposition 8," she continues, "And, we have seen the Promised Land of equal rights, marriage equality, strong, thriving institutions."<sup>108</sup> By referencing the Promised Land, she indicates that MCC has seen its destination. Implicitly, she is stating that the members of MCC are similar to the Israelites. In the Bible, after Moses, with God's assistance, frees the Israelites from Egyptian rule, the Israelites wander through the wilderness for forty years before they find their Promised Land.<sup>109</sup> For the Israelites, their Promised Land is the land that became Israel, and, on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their fleeing Egypt, the Israelites arrive there. On its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, MCC has arrived in its Promised Land as well. As He did for the Israelites, God has guided them through the wilderness. Like with the Israelites, the members of MCC have been God's chosen people because God has guided them to their Promised Land.

Even though they have found the Promised Land, Wilson argues that MCC has more to do. The tense of her speech switches to present tense. For that reason, at this moment, she starts creating her audience as individuals who would act in the future. She claims, "There are places crying out for safety, safe space, and human dignity right here in North America. There are places that have no safe space, no sanctuary, no place where a young person can find community, hope, and friends, no welcoming churches, no PFLAG."<sup>110</sup> Wilson then offers her first specific policy proposal. She argues that MCC needs to plant one hundred new MCCs throughout North America. After constituting her audience as *parrhesiastea*, she instructs her audience to act accordingly. Because MCC has always had the duty to spread the truth, MCC now has the duty to create and support new queer congregations.

According to Wilson, MCC LA needs to support MCCs across the globe. She starts depicting MCC's international efforts by describing its efforts in Pakistan. There, queer people fear for their lives. They live in poverty and in the closet. They are in

danger. And, according to Wilson, MCC is obliged to act. Wilson articulates that MCC is already beginning to meet its obligations, because it has already visited Pakistan earlier in the year. Those MCC members have found and have supported lesbians. They have raised money to help them go to school and find jobs. Wilson tells her audience the queers in Pakistan “are our people. Queer people in Pakistan know we are here whether they are Christian, or Muslim, or whatever their religious background. They know we will care. Our presence has already begun to make a difference. A light is being lit in Pakistan.”<sup>111</sup>

Wilson then turns her attention to Nigeria. She declares that “the Rainbow House of Prayer MCC is under attack.”<sup>112</sup> There has not been a safe space in Nigeria. Wilson tells her audience that two weeks prior to her speech MCC smuggled its own pastor out of Nigeria. Now, according to Wilson, other members are being assaulted and facing death threats. As she continues to speak about MCC in Nigeria, the momentum in her voice builds until she proclaims that “We need to create safe space for our community in Nigeria and not abandon them in their time of need.”<sup>113</sup> Without pause, she speaks of another African country. In Uganda, AIDS activists are being attacked and arrested. However, MCC has worked with the United Nations to ensure they had been released. She subsequently announces that, “A light has become a firestorm of demand for human rights for sexual minorities in Africa and MCC is fanning the flames.”<sup>114</sup>

Afterwards, Wilson discusses a country closer to home. In doing so, she articulates one of MCC’s international successes. She states that in Jamaica the queer community had lived in fear in 2005. At that time, the leaders of the gay rights movements were murdered. She then tells her audience that there is now a thriving MCC in Jamaica with 150 members. Human rights for gays and lesbians are now topics of public conversation there. She exclaims, “A light has been lit and can never go out in the hearts of brave young men and women of Jamaica who embody the best of the future of MCC.”<sup>115</sup> When the light of MCC spreads, success follows.

In praising MCC Jamaica, Wilson selects a particular value that the rest of MCC should follow. The members of MCC Jamaica bravely challenge violence against sexual and gender minorities. That bravery represents the best of MCC, Wilson argues. The best of MCC boldly defend God's love for queers even if they have to face violence and death to do so. Said differently, MCC is at its best when it is *parrhesiastic*. Wilson tells her audience that even when MCC Jamaica had been in danger in the past that it frankly critiqued those in power because it had had the duty to do so. She further indicates that all MCC congregations should do the same in the future. If MCC did so, then it would be the best that it could be. Furthermore, by arguing that MCC LA needs to support its brothers and sisters in Jamaica, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Uganda, Wilson pushes her audience to act. However, she only does so after she has constituted her audience as individuals who would sacrifice themselves to spread truth.

After discussing the success of MCC in Jamaica, Wilson focuses on one of MCC's greatest challenges—the United States. While indicating that MCC has had success, she also argues that “this was no time to be complacent” as there is still work to do.<sup>116</sup> She claims that in America the younger generation represent “the most unchurched generation” that this nation has ever seen and that only MCC can minister to the members of the younger generation. She states, “They [young people] are looking for people to change the world with, for a movement that cares about the things they care about—that is queer enough and radical enough to honor those who in 1968 risked lives and reputations to challenge the church, laws, nations so that those on the margins could have hope and community—people who knew then, as we know now, that Jesus does not discriminate.”<sup>117</sup> In order to be successful, MCC needs to stay radical and queer; they still need to criticize. About the criticism characteristic of *parrhesia*, Foucault indicates that, “the function of *parrhesia* is not to demonstrate the truth to someone else, but has the function of criticism: criticism of the interlocutor.”<sup>118</sup> According to Foucault, a *parrhesiastes* does not prove the truth to another individual, but critiques that individual



for not understanding the truth. When discussing this characteristic of *parrhesia*, Novak indicates that even though “opposition of a majority is not necessary for *parrhesia*,” majority opposition indicates that a speaker is *parrhesiastic*.<sup>119</sup> Because Wilson characterizes MCC as a radical minority, she positions herself and her audience against an opposing majority. Simultaneously, she argues that MCC still needs to risk life and reputation to confront traditionalist churches, challenge laws, and reach other nations. The younger generation wants MCC, only if MCC remains committed to its founding principles. Therefore, to reach that generation, MCC members must continue to be critics in the future.

Wilson ends her speech with one final call to action. She tells MCC LA that: “We in MCC around the globe need you. We need your spirit, your energy, your creativity, your holy boldness, your resources, your people as never before. We still need you to be the gay church where the gay church is needed, to be the trans-church, or the AIDS church, or the mother church, or the human rights church . . . We believe in you and the future you represent.”<sup>120</sup> She tells one final story about a phone call she had received previously. She claims that the caller wanted to know what, if any, preparations MCC was making as the economy was beginning to fail. After describing the call, Wilson instructs her audience not to worry, because, “Economy woes or challenges will not stop us. The religious right or fundamentalists in any culture will not stop us. AIDS will not stop us. Failure or success will not stop us. Death threats or bigots will not stop us. The light is on and it’s not going out.”<sup>121</sup> She pauses and inhales. Soberly, she continues, “We have a cloud of witnesses don’t we, watching tonight. Think of them right now. They are waiting for us to have the kind of courage it took to found MCC and to find it all over again, to fall in love with the impossible dream of a rainbow people of God. They held up the light for many of us, and now it is our turn to hold it up for a new generation.”<sup>122</sup> Then, her voice becomes energized as she concludes, “MCC Los Angeles, at forty years young, you

are about something powerful being illuminated in the human spirit, you are about something God still wants to do, something that is not finished yet. Amen.”<sup>123</sup>

In this final paragraph, Wilson beckons her *parrhesiastea* to act. She reminds her audience that God has sanctioned their church, because He has seen that it is good. God now wants MCC to spread that goodness and that truth. This would not be easy. MCC would have to face “fundamentalists,” encounter death threats and bigots, cope with death, and confront failure. In other words, they would be acting even though they would be in danger when they do. Yet, they still have a duty to act, because God has given them the light and has told them to illuminate the darkness of the world. Because God has given them the light, they can know that they also have the truth. When they speak, they can know that they are saying truth. Therefore, boldly, they would tell others of “the rainbow people of God,” including the first rainbow people of God—Ruth, Naomi, David, and Jonathan. When they speak of Ruth, Naomi, David, Jonathan, and the eunuchs, they would not hold anything back. Instead, they would be frank with others about those stories and characters. They would also act. They would fight against Proposition 8, they would challenge violence in Pakistan and Jamaica, they would spread the word to younger generations, and they would criticize anyone who condemned queers. In short, they would be *parrhesiastea*, because they have always been *parrhesiastea*. Because they have always been *parrhesiastea*, she addresses them as *parrhesiastea*.

## Conclusion

On October 6, 2008, MCC LA gathered to celebrate its fortieth anniversary. By gathering at this time, MCC LA created a rhetorical situation that gave permission to Wilson to shape and reshape the heritage of MCC. With that permission, Wilson created a vision of MCC’s past and used that vision to construct an audience that would act in the present and future. In particular, MCC’s past was *parrhesiastic*. In the past, MCC had

frankly spoken the truth and criticized others in the face of danger, because they had the duty to do so. Because that was the collective heritage of her audience, she positioned her audience to act accordingly in the future. She used this occasion to create a church of *parrhesiastea*.

By constructing her audience as *parrhesiastea*, Wilson's speech also spoke about the current condition of MCC and gay Christians more broadly. Because MCC still need to be *parrhesiastic*, its members still faced constant danger. Society was still homophobic, and it still created homophobic violence. MCC still had the duty to criticize, because the majority of Christians still believed that the Bible condemned homosexuality. This was particularly true for her audience, given that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and other Christians were primarily supporting Proposition 8. Even though MCC had spent forty years challenging other denominations' teachings, it still had do to so. Finally, since MCC still had the duty to spread the light (i.e., truth) concerning homosexuality and the Bible, there were still places in darkness—that believed a “rainbow people of God” was still an impossible dream. In those places, the possibility of a queer church was unfathomable, and there was no potential for an individual to be queer, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender as well as a Christian. MCC needed to continue to be *parrhesiastic*, because others assumed that one could not be a gay Christian.

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald M. Enroth, and Gerald E. Jamison, *The Gay Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Fred Fejes, *Gay Rights and Moral Panic: The Origins of America's Debate on Homosexuality*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 72.

<sup>3</sup> "History of MCC," accessed on Metropolitan Community Churches website, accessed on March 1, 2014, <<http://mccchurch.org/overview/history-of-mcc/>>.

<sup>4</sup> Troy Perry, *Call Me Troy*, Documentary, Directed by Scott Bloom, (Burbank, CA: Tragoidia Moving Pictures), 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> "History of MCC"

<sup>7</sup> Perry, *Call Me Troy*.

<sup>8</sup> Melissa M. Wilcox, "Of Markets and Missions: The Early History of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 11.1 (2001), 85.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 85-86.

<sup>12</sup> Enroth and Jamison, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Wilcox, 102-103.

<sup>15</sup> Enroth and Jamison, 35.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>17</sup> Troy Perry and Nancy Wilson, "1997 Report to the President for the White House Conference on Hate Crimes," accessed via the LGBT Religious Archives Network, accessed on March 1, 2014, <<http://exhibits.lgbtran.org/exhibits/show/upstairs-lounge-fire/gallery?other-accounts#>>.

<sup>18</sup> Enroth and Jamison, 37.

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Goss, "Silencing Queers at the Upstairs Lounge: The Stonewall of New Orleans," *Southern Communication Journal* 74.3 (2009), 269.

<sup>20</sup> "June 24, 1973," accessed via the LGBT Religious Archives Network, accessed on March 1, 2014, <<http://exhibits.lgbtran.org/exhibits/show/upstairs-lounge-fire/gallery?upstairs-lounge#>>.

<sup>21</sup> Goss, 270.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 270.

<sup>23</sup> "June 24, 1973"

<sup>24</sup> Ed Tunstall, "Fire Toll Worst Ever for Orleans: Brief Fire Fatal to 29 In Quarter," *State-Times*, originally published on June 25, 1973, accessed via the LGBT Religious Archives Network, accessed on March 1, 2014, <<http://exhibits.lgbtran.org/exhibits/show/upstairs-lounge-fire/gallery?upstairs-lounge#>>.

<sup>25</sup> Bill Rushton, "New Orleans toll 32; arson evidence cited," *The Advocate*, originally published on August 1, 1973, accessed via the LGBT Religious Archives Network, accessed on March 1, 2014, <<http://exhibits.lgbtran.org/exhibits/show/upstairs-lounge-fire/gallery?upstairs-lounge#>>.

<sup>26</sup> Goss, 272.

<sup>27</sup> Goss, 272-273.

<sup>28</sup> Eric Newhouse, "Church Slates Mourning For Victims of N.O. Fire," *Morning Advocate*, originally published on June 26, 1973, accessed via the LGBT Religious Archives Network, accessed on March 1, 2014, <<http://exhibits.lgbtran.org/exhibits/show/upstairs-lounge-fire/gallery?upstairs-lounge#>>.

<sup>29</sup> Goss, 271.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 272.

<sup>31</sup> "Church Strives Following Fire: New Phase of Growth, Renewal—Pastor," *The Time-Picayune*, originally published on February 16, 1974, accessed via the LGBT Religious Archives Network, accessed on March 1, 2014, <<http://exhibits.lgbtran.org/exhibits/show/upstairs-lounge-fire/gallery?upstairs-lounge#>>.

<sup>32</sup> "MCC State of Church Report Includes Fire," accessed via the LGBT Religious Archives Network, accessed on March 1, 2014,

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<<http://exhibits.lgbtran.org/exhibits/show/upstairs-lounge-fire/gallery?other-press-coverage>>.

<sup>33</sup> Perry and Wilson.

<sup>34</sup> “40th Anniversary of the LA Church That Launched An International Movement,” *Metropolitan Community Church of Las Angeles*, first published on October 2, 2008, accessed on March 3, 2014,  
<<http://www.revtroyperry.org/photoAlbum/2008/20081003Anniv/40th%20Anniversary%20of%20the%20LA%20Church%20That%20Launched%20An%20International%20Movement.rtf>>.

<sup>35</sup> In her opening paragraph, Wilson specifically mentioned that Pastor Neil, Reverend Perry, and John Duran were in the audience. See, Wilson, “Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (1 of 3) MCC 40th Ann. Moderator’s A.” According to Geogg Kores, John Duran was West Hollywood’s mayor at the time. See Geoff Kors, “EQCA Board President Sworn in for Second Term as West Hollywood Mayor,” *Equality California*, posted on May 7, 2007, accessed on February 7, 2014,  
<<http://www.eqca.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=kuLRJ9MRKrH&b=4990109&ct=5200157>>.

<sup>36</sup> Wilson, “Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (1 of 3) MCC 40th Ann. Moderator’s A”

<sup>37</sup> Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, “An Introduction to Nancy L. Wilson,” *Christian Feminism Today*, published in 2008, accessed on February 7, 2014,  
<<http://www.eewc.com/Articles/nancy-wilson>>.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Celeste Michelle Condit, “The Functions of Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar,” *Communication Quarterly* 33.4 (1985), 289. Condit references Michael McGee. See, Michael C. McGee, “In search of ‘the people’: A rhetorical alternative,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61.3 (1975), 235-249.

<sup>40</sup> Condit, 289.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 289.

<sup>42</sup> David R. Novak, “Engaging Parrhesia in a Democracy: Malcolm X as a Truth-Teller,” *Southern Communication Journal* 71.1 (2006), 25.

<sup>43</sup> Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, (Los Angeles, CA: Somiotext, 2001).

<sup>44</sup> Maurice Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Peuple Québécois,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73.2, (1987), 133-150.

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<sup>45</sup> Pope Francis, "Pope: Mass on Feast of St. George," *Vatican Radio*, published on April, 23, 2013, accessed on March 4, 2014, <<http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-mass-on-feast-of-st-george-full-text>>.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> There are differences in how scholars spell this term. Both spellings—*parresia* and *parrhesia*—refer to the same concept of frank speech.

<sup>48</sup> Foucault, 85. Rhetorical and political theorists challenge Foucault's understanding of *parrhesia*, but there are also defenses of Foucault's use of the term. In the literature base, therefore, there is a vibrant discussion of what constitutes *parrhesia*. When engaging in this discussion, Pat Gehrke argues that it is important for scholars to note which *parrhesia(s)* that they are attempting to study. For the purposes of this chapter, Foucault's understanding and description of *parrhesia* best illuminates the how Wilson addresses her audience. See Pat Gehrke, "On the Many Senses of *Parrēsia* and Rhetoric," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 43.4 (2013): 361. For a more detailed discussion concerning how rhetorical theorists debate the meaning of *parrhesia*, see Arthur E. Walzer, "*Parrēsia*, Foucault, and the Classical Rhetorical Tradition," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 43:1 (2013), 1-21, and Pat J. Gehrke, Susan C. Jarratt, Bradford Vivian, and Arthur E. Walzer, "Forum on Arthur Walzer's '*Parrēsia*, Foucault, and the Classical Rhetorical Tradition,'" *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 43:4 (2013), 355-381.

<sup>49</sup> Raymie E. McKerrow, "Foucault's Relationship to Rhetoric," *The Review of Communication* 11.4 (2011), 260. Those who spell *parrhesia* as *parresia* also spell *parrhesiastes* as *parrhesiates*.

<sup>50</sup> David L. Tiede, "Act 1:6-8 and the Theo-Political Claims of Christian Witness," *Word & World* 1.1 (1981), 49.

<sup>51</sup> Foucault, 49-50.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 12-20.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 12-20.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 17, emphasis is mine.

<sup>55</sup> Walzer, 1.

<sup>56</sup> Ephesians 3:1-12, New King James Version. Emphasis is mine. Also, Andrew Greenwell argues that boldness is *parrhesia* in this passage. See, Andrew M. Greenwell, "Preaching Christ and His Church with 'Parresia,'" *Catholic Online*, published on April 25, 2013, accessed on March 4, 2014, <<https://www.catholic.org/hf/faith/story.php?id=50663>>.

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<sup>57</sup> Francis.

<sup>58</sup> Foucault, 137.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>61</sup> Genesis 3-4, New King James Version.

<sup>62</sup> Wilson was referencing Matthew 5:14. See Matthew 5:14, New King James Version.

<sup>63</sup> Wilson, “Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (1 of 3) MCC 40th Ann. Moderator’s A”

<sup>64</sup> Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, translated by Marcus Dods, (New York: Random House Publishing, 1950), 362.

<sup>65</sup> Matthew 5:14-16, New International Version.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> “Metropolitan Community Church,” *QLBTQ: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, & Queer Culture*, published in 2004, accessed on February 8, 2014, <[http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/metro\\_comm\\_church.html](http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/metro_comm_church.html)>.

<sup>69</sup> Foucault, 15.

<sup>70</sup> McKerrow, 260.

<sup>71</sup> Wilson, “Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (1 of 3) MCC 40th Ann. Moderator’s A”

<sup>72</sup> Karen Graves, “Political Pawns in an Educational Endgame: Reflections on Bryant, Briggs, and Some Twentieth-Century School Questions,” *History of Education Quarterly* 53.1 (2013), 1-20.

<sup>73</sup> Wilson, “Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (1 of 3) MCC 40th Ann. Moderator’s A”

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Foucault, 19.



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<sup>78</sup> This view of public memory is informed by Sara VanderHaagen's definition of public memory as "an actively reinterpreted resource for action in the present and future, negotiated by public discourse." See Sara VanderHaagen, "Practical Truths: Black Feminist Agency and Public Memory in Biographies for Children," *Women's Studies in Communication* 35:1 (2012), 21.

<sup>79</sup> Wilson, "Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (1 of 3) MCC 40th Ann. Moderator's A." In this passage, Wilson refers to MCC's "Latin ministry" which is the MCC congregations in Central and South America. For example, MCC has congregations in Haiti, Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Mexico. See "Latin America Church Listings," *Metropolitan Community Churches*, accessed on March 3, 2014, <<http://mccchurch.org/overview/ourchurches/find-a-church/latin-america-church-listing/>>.

<sup>80</sup> Human Rights Campaign, "The HRC Story: About US," accessed on February 8, 2014, <<http://www.hrc.org/the-hrc-story/about-us>>.

<sup>81</sup> Wilson, "Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (1 of 3) MCC 40th Ann. Moderator's A"

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Nancy Wilson, *Our Tribe: Queer folks, God, Jesus and the Bible*, (New York: HarpersCollins Publishers, Inc, 1995).

<sup>84</sup> Mona West, "Dr. Mona West," *The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Religious Archives Network*, last modified on February 4, 2005, accessed on February 8, 2014, <<http://lgbtran.org/Profile.aspx?ID=88>>. For her book, see West, Mona, and Robert E. Goss, *Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible*, (Pilgrim Press, 2000).

<sup>85</sup> "Bio and Dissertation of Rev. Dr. Neil Thomas," *Founders MCC*, accessed on February 8, 2014, <<http://www.mccla.org/grow-spiritually/reading-materials/dissertation-of-rev-dr-neil-thomas/>>.

<sup>86</sup> "Homosexuality and the Bible," *Founders MCC*, accessed on February 8, 2014, <<http://www.mccla.org/grow-spiritually/reading-materials/homosexuality-and-the-bible-2/>>.

<sup>87</sup> Wilson, *Our Tribe: Queer folks, God, Jesus and the Bible*, 146.

<sup>88</sup> Foucault, 12.

<sup>89</sup> Wilson, "Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (1 of 3) MCC 40th Ann. Moderator's A"

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Mollenkott, "An Introduction to Nancy L. Wilson."

<sup>100</sup> Wilson, "Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (1 of 3) MCC 40th Ann. Moderator's A"

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Thomas R. Dunn, "Remembering Matthew Shepard: Violence, Identity, and Queer Counterpublic Memories," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 13.4 (2010), 620.

<sup>104</sup> Anita Bryant quoted by Gillian Frank. See Gillian Frank, "'The Civil Rights of Parents': Race and Conservative Politics in Anita Bryant's Campaigning against Gay Rights in 1970s Florida," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 22.1 (2013), 127.

<sup>105</sup> "Those Who Died," The Upstairs Lounge Fire Exhibit, *The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Religious Archives Network*, accessed on February 8, 2014, <<http://exhibits.lgbtran.org/exhibits/show/upstairs-lounge-fire/gallery?other-press-coverage#>>.

<sup>106</sup> Troy Perry and Nancy Wilson, "Report to the President: for the White House Conference On Hate Crimes," In The Upstairs Lounge Fire Exhibit, *The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Religious Archives Network*, published on November 1, 1997, accessed on February 8, 2014, <<http://exhibits.lgbtran.org/exhibits/show/upstairs-lounge-fire/gallery?other-press-coverage#>>.

<sup>107</sup> Scott Harris and Catherine Gewertz, "Gay Activists Vent Rage Over Wilson's Veto," *Los Angeles Times*, published on October 1, 1991, accessed on February 8, 2014, <[http://articles.latimes.com/1991-10-01/news/mn-3344\\_1\\_gay-activists](http://articles.latimes.com/1991-10-01/news/mn-3344_1_gay-activists)>.

<sup>108</sup> Wilson, "Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (1 of 3) MCC 40th Ann. Moderator's A"

<sup>109</sup> Deuteronomy 19:5-6, New International Version.

<sup>110</sup> Wilson, "Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (1 of 3) MCC 40th Ann. Moderator's A"

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Foucault, 17.

<sup>119</sup> Novak.

<sup>120</sup> Wilson, “Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (1 of 3) MCC 40th Ann. Moderator’s A”

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR: MATTHEW VINES AS A GAY CHRISTIAN PROPHET**

Matthew Vines was a devoutly religious individual. He loved God and believed in Him. Raised in a conservative home, he was intimately familiar with the Bible and its supposed condemnation of homosexuality. For him, his father, and his Presbyterian congregation, homosexuality was a sin, and that was “the final word on [that] issue.”<sup>1</sup> However, in 2010, his view dramatically shifted when he admitted to himself that he was gay. Later, he indicated that in that moment, “I was both relieved and crushed – relieved because everything that hadn’t made sense about my life finally did, and because love no longer seemed like an impossibility for me, but crushed because of the likelihood that I would be rejected and lose the community I had always called home.”<sup>2</sup> At that moment in his life, he was living a contradiction. He was both gay and Christian—an identity that did not initially appear to be possible.

The perceived impossibility of his identity did not stop Vines. With his newfound gay identity and his Christian identity, he decided he was going to learn how he could be both gay and Christian. To do so, he took a two-year leave of absence from his college, Harvard, in order to study what the Bible said about homosexuality. In 2011, after extensive research, he began articulating to members of his congregation arguments that indicated the Bible did not condemn homosexuality. After interviewing Vines, Douglas Quenque of the *New York Times* wrote that during that time, “one by one, he took parishioners to dinner and made his case” and that “his father even helped him distribute his now eight-page [research] paper to the church’s governing board.”<sup>3</sup> Tragically, the church family that Vines had known since he was a child rejected his arguments, and he left the church.

This rejection still did not stop him. After being rebuffed by his congregation, Vines searched for another church where he could present his non-traditional interpretation. He stated, “I didn't even bother trying the conservative churches because I knew that nothing was going to happen there. And eventually, I went to this Methodist church in town that's also a very open, progressive congregation.”<sup>4</sup> That church’s website stated that the church welcomed “into full membership and participation in all aspects of our church life persons of every race, national origin, language, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, physical or mental ability, economic or marital status, and faith background, and we affirm and celebrate all loving and comitted [sic] relationships.”<sup>5</sup> On March 8, 2012, armed with his two years of research on the subject, Vines approached a podium at the College Hill United Methodist Church in Wichita, Kansas – his hometown.<sup>6</sup> For more than an hour, Vines spoke to his audience about the subject of homosexuality and the church. Specifically, he provided theological interpretations of the Bible that indicated that it did not condemn homosexual practices.<sup>7</sup> He invited Christian individuals to interpret the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, the book of Leviticus, and the writings of Saint Paul in ways that did not condemn loving, committed, and monogamous same-sex relationships.

During this speech, Vines had two purposes and two distinct audiences. Specifically, he invited his audience of traditionalists to imagine a Bible that did not condemn homosexuality, but then he admonished those individuals for using the Bible to condemn homosexuality. However, he also provided theological arguments to gay Christians and their allies, empowering them to defend their position as gay Christians and as allies of gay Christians. In particular, after giving his speech, Vines wrote:

My heart breaks for all the LGBT kids in churches around the world that do not understand or accept them, and I know firsthand how much fear and pain that causes them. The goal of this video is to reach those kids, no matter where they are, and to walk them through, step by step, these few passages in the Bible. Then, they can share it with their parents and friends, and they can have something solid to stand on when asking their communities for acceptance.<sup>8</sup>

By interpreting the Bible in a manner that affirmed homosexuality, Vines provided a biblical interpretation that reversed the traditional biblical interpretations, but also provided individuals with the rationale to defend their affirmation of gay Christians.

Even though the particular church he was addressing did not subscribe to the traditional interpretations of the biblical texts, Vines still deployed his strategy believing that his speech was going to reach the ears of traditionalists, because his speech was broadcast on YouTube. Before giving this speech, he noticed the books, articles, and speeches discussing homosexuality and Christianity were not “intentionally and respectfully addressed to Christians who are ‘traditionalists’ on this issue. So I set out to make my own [speech that addressed traditionalists].”<sup>9</sup> Because he intended to create a speech that generated dialogue with those individuals, Vines targeted traditionalists via the dissemination of his speech on YouTube.

However, as he had more than one audience, Vines did more than refute. At times, he even clearly articulated and advocated the traditional position, seemingly arguing that homosexuality was a sin. Throughout his speech, he shifted his identity between ostensibly contradictory identities. In particular, he was gay and Christian. He was a traditional biblical interpreter and a non-traditional biblical interpreter. He invited,

but also prophesied. Before listening to this speech, an individual may have thought it was impossible for an individual to be gay and to be Christian, or to be traditional and to be progressive. Yet, in this speech, Vines invited his audiences to recognize a new identity—the identity of the gay Christian. The concept of the gay Christian, I argue, has developed through contradictory and fluid understandings of self. Because his identities seemingly appeared to be malleable, fluid, and contradictory during his speech, Vines performed his identity development as a gay Christian. For example, the organization of his speech mirrored the process that gay Christians undergo when they attempt to reconcile their two seemingly contradictory identities; as Vines’ impersonation of traditionalists diminished, his embodiment of the gay Christian simultaneously flourished. Following Vines’ lead, my analysis develops sequentially through Vines’ speech, because his speech reflected the chronological development of the gay Christian identity.

When Vines established himself as a gay Christian, he was inviting his audience of gay youth to see themselves as gay Christians. He had experienced traditionalists using the “texts of terror” against him.<sup>10</sup> His experiences drove him to discover affirming interpretations of the Bible. In this speech, he invited his audience of gay Christians to see themselves as being affirmed by the Bible, and thus by God. Vines invited them to believe that there was not a forced choice between being gay and being Christian. He also invited this audience to use his arguments to defend themselves in their homes, communities, and congregations. As such, I will invite my readers to understand Vines’ rhetoric as an act of “invitational rhetoric” as conceptualized by Sonja Foss and Cindy

Griffin.<sup>11</sup> Throughout the speech, he invited his audience members, even the traditional ones, to change their understandings of homosexuals, Christians, and themselves.

However, Vines also admonished the traditionalists in his audience for their interpretation of the Bible. According to him, those members of his audience were not following the word of God because they were harming fellow Christians with their biblical teachings. At the beginning of his speech, he invited those members of the audience to know an affirming Bible, yet by the end of his speech, he reprimanded that audience for holding onto the traditional interpretation. During this reprimand, he functioned as a prophet.<sup>12</sup> While there was certainly backlash to his invitation and his admonition, his rhetoric enhanced the debate about the Bible and homosexuality. Ultimately, I argue that Vines' discourse opened space that allowed and continues to allow gay Christians to defend, validate, and even vindicate their gay Christian identities.

### **Vines, the Insider**

Vines begins his speech simply, yet profoundly. He states:

My name is Matthew Vines, I'm 21 years old, and I'm currently a student in college, although I've been on leave for most of the last two years in order to study the material that I'll be presenting tonight. I was born and raised here in Wichita, in a loving Christian home and in a church community that holds to the traditional interpretation of Scripture on this subject [referring to homosexuality].<sup>13</sup>

Vines attempts to establish his insider *ethos*. Because he was "born and raised" in Wichita, he is trustworthy. He is a member of the community who wishes to create necessary dialogue in that community. Later, Leonard Pitts, who won a Pulitzer Prize in



2004 while working at the *Miami Herald*, described Vines as an insider: “Matthew Vines is not some godless heathen lobbing bombs at Christianity from outside its walls. No, he lives inside Christianity’s walls, still holds the faith in which he was raised. So this is not an outsider’s attack. It is an insider’s plea.”<sup>14</sup> Because he was raised in a “Christian home” and also a “church community that holds to the traditional interpretation,” he is also an individual who understands what his audience believes about the issue. He knows that community and is a part of it.

By establishing himself as an insider, he begins to develop his prophetic persona. According to James Darsey, “The prophet is simultaneously insider and outsider; he compels the audience, but only by use of those premises to which they have assented as a culture. The discourse is, then, both of the audience and extreme to the audience.”<sup>15</sup> In his introduction, therefore, Vines establishes his rhetoric as being of the audience. He distances himself from the traditionalists until much later in the speech, but his efforts at this moment allow him to be an insider, which allows him to enact the role of the prophet later in his speech.

After these introductory remarks, Vines articulates a purpose for speaking:

I want to begin tonight by considering the traditional interpretation of Scripture on this subject, in part because its conclusions have a much longer history within the church, and also because I think that many who adhere to that position feel that those who are arguing for a new position haven’t yet put forth theological arguments that are well-grounded in Scripture as their own, in which case the most biblically sound position should prevail.<sup>16</sup>

In accordance with this statement, Vines, armed with a plethora of interpretations, indicates that the Bible did not condemn homosexuality. Given this purpose, one might expect him to devote nearly all of his time to refuting biblical interpretations that condemn homosexuality. For parts of his speech, this is what he does. However, there are parts of his speech that run contrary to this expectation. For example, immediately following his statement of purpose, Vines personifies a traditionalist.

### **Vines' Personification of Traditionalists**

Because of the tension between Vines' purpose and traditional views on homosexuality,<sup>17</sup> Vines' performance of the traditionalist seemingly contradicts his purpose. However, given that the gay Christians often know the traditional interpretations of the Bible before they gain an understanding of their sexuality, it is fitting that Vines begins by performing the traditionalist.<sup>18</sup> While embodying the traditionalist, he argues in favor of biblical interpretations that condemned homosexuality. Convincingly, he states:

[The passages that condemn homosexuality] gain broader meaning and coherence from the opening chapters of Genesis, in which God creates Adam and Eve, male and female. That was the original creation – before the fall, before sin entered the world. That was the way that things were supposed to be. And so according to this view, if someone is gay, then their sexual orientation is a sign of the fall, a sign of human fallenness and brokenness. That was not the way that things were supposed to be. And while having a same-sex orientation is not in and of itself a sin, according to the traditional interpretation, acting upon it is, because the Bible is clear, both in what it negatively prohibits and in what it positively approves. Christians who are gay – those who are only attracted to members of the same sex

– are thus called to refrain from acting on those attractions, to deny themselves, to take up their crosses and to follow Christ. And though it may not seem fair to us, God’s ways are higher than our own, and it’s not our role to question, but to obey.<sup>19</sup>

While this is not the only time Vines’ personifies the traditionalist’s position,<sup>20</sup> this is the most remarkable for two reasons. First, this is the first argument in his speech about how his audience should read the Bible in relation to homosexuality. Yet, he does not invite his audience to interpret the Bible in a gay- and lesbian-affirming manner. He does the opposite. Second, he does not refute this argument until much later in the speech. If someone would have listened to only the first five minutes of this speech, he or she would have believed that Vines believed that the Bible condemns homosexuality.

Vine’s personification of the traditionalists is a specific rhetorical tactic. Of personification, the author of *Rhetoric Ad Herennium* indicates that it “consists in representing an absent person as present, or in making a mute thing or one lacking form articulate, and attributing to it a definite form and a language or a certain behavior appropriate to its character.”<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Aristotle writes that if “a speaker uses the very words which are in keeping with a particular disposition, he will reproduce the corresponding character.”<sup>22</sup> In his speech, Vines uses the exact words that traditionalists use and consequently personifies them.

By voicing the traditionalists’ arguments, Vines cements himself as an insider.<sup>23</sup> He demonstrates that he is knowledgeable of traditionalist thought concerning the Bible and homosexuality. In doing so, he identifies with the traditionalists in his audience and established his own *ethos* with traditionalists.<sup>24</sup> He demonstrates that he understands their

position, which strengthens his image as an insider. Because he was raised in a conservative home and a traditional church, he has insider knowledge of what traditionalists thought about the Bible in relation to homosexuality.

Vines' personification of traditionalists is what Kristine Bruss calls a persuasive *ethopoeia*. At its origin, *ethopoeia* was the practice of impersonating another during a speech—a faithful characterization of another. Bruss expands the concept by arguing that *ethopoeia* allows for a rhetor to establish *ethos*. She writes that *ethopoeia* “is concerned with . . . the creation of persuasive *ethos*.”<sup>25</sup> She argues that for Dionysius *ethopoeia* is a persuasive proof. For instance, through *ethopoeia*, a speaker uses “spontaneous language that does not call attention to itself or reflect negatively on the character of the speaker but rather contributes to an impression of moderation and fair-mindedness.”<sup>26</sup>

Through Vines' persuasive *ethopoeia*, he creates a situation that invites his audience to understand his view of the Bible in relation to homosexuality. In describing invitational rhetoric, Foss and Griffin explain that the rhetors demonstrate that they value the opinions of their audience. When discussing how a rhetor creates value, Foss and Griffin state, “Value is conveyed to audience members when rhetors not only listen carefully to the perspectives of others but try to think from those perspectives.”<sup>27</sup> Foss and Griffin further indicate that invitational rhetors have the “capacity to reverse perspectives and to reason from the standpoint of others.”<sup>28</sup> When this occurs, the audience members “feel rhetors care about them, understand their ideas, and allow them to contribute in significant ways to the interaction.”<sup>29</sup> After two years of studying the multiple interpretations of the Bible and homosexuality, Vines has listened to the voices of traditionalists before giving this speech. Also, because Vines convincingly articulates

the viewpoint of the traditionalists, he expresses that he values the viewpoint of the traditionalists. Vines' display of traditional values shows that he understands his audience, which further establishes him as an insider for his traditional audience. While it seems unlikely that Vines could ever value traditional biblical interpreters, for Vines, it is not difficult. After all, the traditionalists are his family, his friends, and those with whom he grew up. Because he has valued those individuals for the majority of his life, it would not have been difficult for him to value them now. Because he values his audience, he displays their thoughts, which allows for interaction and an insider status.

Vines' persuasive *ethopoeia* allows him to personify a prophet at the conclusion of his speech. In Michael Leff and Ebony Utley's evaluation of Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," they describe the prophet as "a member of the tribe, and so, to be a prophet among the Hebrews, one must be a Hebrew."<sup>30</sup> Then, they ask and answer a question about King and the prophetic nature of his speech. They state, "What is required to be a prophet among white Americans? That is a role King neither inherits by birth nor gains through any other easy access."<sup>31</sup> Even so, they understand King's letter to be prophetic even for white audience members. To illuminate how this may be the case, they indicate that King "must argue himself into [the prophetic tradition]" and that his letter "constructs King as an agent who grounds his identity in the religious, intellectual, and political values of the American tribe, and it enacts a form of agency that sustains connection between author and reader even in the presence of disagreement."<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, King establishes himself as prophetic by arguing himself into that position. Similarly, Vines constructs himself as a prophet through his persuasive *ethopoeia*. In his personification of traditionalists, Vines appears to his audience as a traditionalist. In his

authentic and genuine depiction of the traditionalist, he establishes himself as being a part of that community.

By enacting the traditionalist, he identifies with his gay youth and demonstrates to the gay youth in his audience that he understands how other Christians misuse the book of Genesis against homosexuals. In doing so, Vines' echoes his audience's and his own identity development as a gay Christians. Before Vines admitted to himself that he was homosexual, he believed that the Bible condemned homosexuality. However, later in his speech, Vines indicates that he has altered what he believed about the Bible in relation to homosexuality; now, he believes the Bible does not condemn homosexuality. In vocalizing his own transformation, he shows that an individual can believe in the traditionalist interpretation and change to believe in an affirming interpretation of the Bible. This moment in his speech is the beginning of his invitation to gay youth to transform their view of themselves. Vines invites gay youth to see themselves as being gay Christians even if they currently believe the traditionalist interpretations of the Bible.

Vines abruptly transitions from personifying an insider to personifying an outsider. After embodying the traditionalist, he responds to the traditionalist, and in doing so, he becomes an outsider. He first states the traditionalist perspective: "Within this [traditionalist] framework, gay people have a problem, and that is that they want to have sex with the wrong people. They tend to be viewed as essentially lustful, sexual beings. So while straight people fall in love, get married, and start families, gay people just have sex."<sup>33</sup> Then, he responded to that position:

Family is not about sex, but for so many of us, it still depends upon having a companion, a spouse. And that's true for gay people as well as for straight people.

That is what sexual orientation means for them, too. Gay people have the very same capacity for romantic love and self-giving that straight people do. The emotional bond that gay couples share, the quality of love, is identical to that of straight couples. Gay people, like almost all of us, come from families, and they, too, long to build one of their own.<sup>34</sup>

Immediately after valuing the traditionalist as an insider, Vines shifts to valuing those who support homosexuality as an outsider.<sup>35</sup> Instead of arguing as if he is a traditionalist, he critiques the position of the traditionalists. He does not challenge the traditionalists' interpretation of the biblical text, but he argues that the traditionalists' social view of homosexuals is flawed. By making this argument, he disassociates himself from those audience members and makes himself an outsider.

Vines' supporting material also separates him from his audience. Notably, Vines does not use any biblical evidence to support his argument. Here, he merely conjectures without substantiation. Because Vines does not use biblical evidence at this time, his *ethos* is in contrast to the traditionalist *ethos* that he establishes by referencing the Genesis creation story. Robert Stephen Reid claims that the Christian *ethos* and reasoning "is quintessentially a tradition-based form of reasoning grounded in the commitment that its canonical texts embody a divine communication revealed in and through a record of divine acts."<sup>36</sup> Because his argument is not supported by the Bible or other Christian texts, Vines' reasoning does not come from a commitment to the canonical texts of Christianity. His *ethos* here is non-traditional, and it creates distance between Vines and the traditionalists, who expect him to reason and argue from canonical texts. By altering

his *ethos*, Vines separates himself from his audience both by his argument and by his lack of supporting material for the Bible.

The separation that Vines creates between himself and his audience allows Vines to invite his audience to see the world of an outsider. According to Foss and Griffin, an invitational rhetor “offers an invitation to understanding—to enter another’s world to better understand an issue and the individual who holds a particular perspective on it. Ultimately, its purpose is to provide the basis for the creation and maintenance of relationships of equality.”<sup>37</sup> By describing his view of homosexuality, Vines creates a worldview of homosexuals that does not view homosexuals as distinct from heterosexuals. Homosexuals, like heterosexuals, value monogamy, commitment, and marriage. However, at this moment in his speech, he does not provide evidence to suggest that this is the correct view of homosexuality. Instead, he describes his view of homosexuality and invites his audience to share his view.

### **The Seeming Contradiction of Vines’ Gay Christian Identity**

The juxtaposition between Vines’ insider and outsider personae is exemplified when he introduces himself as gay.<sup>38</sup> Before coming out to his audience, he refers to Matthew 5 and Philippians 2:4:

Philippians 2:4 tells us to look not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others. And in Matthew 5, Jesus instructs that if someone makes you go one mile, go with them two miles. And so I’m going to ask you: Would you step into my shoes for a moment, and walk with me just one mile, even if it makes you a bit uncomfortable? I am gay. I didn’t choose to be gay. It’s not something that I would have chosen, not because it’s necessarily a bad thing to be, but



because it's extremely inconvenient, it's stressful, it's difficult, and it can often be isolating and lonely – to be different, to feel not understood, to feel not accepted.<sup>39</sup>

For the first time, Vines personifies the gay Christian. Because Vines' argument stems from the passages of Matthew 5 and Philippians 2:4, his *ethos* is traditionally Christian. Even so, Vines does not use these passages in order to defend interpretations of the Bible that affirmed homosexuality. Instead, he uses the Bible to suggest to his audience members that they have an obligation to accept Vines' invitation to listen to his view of homosexuality.

Vines' reference to Matthew 5 and Philippians 2:4 establishes rhetoric of equality. This rhetoric is similar to, but not the same as, the rhetoric of Harvey Milk. When discussing Milk's rhetoric, Karen Foss writes that Milk's rhetoric creates a situation of inclusion and equality where "Not all participants will agree with all positions, but their right to be in the conversation is accepted and valued. Milk's strategies ultimately encompassed gay and straight and valued all perspectives as necessary to a successful San Francisco."<sup>40</sup> In Vines' reference to Matthew 5 and Philippians 2:4, he asks his audience for an open dialogue where all perspectives are heard. On the surface, this invitation means that the audience has an obligation to listen to Vines' gay- and lesbian-affirming interpretation of the Bible. However, in his reference to this passage, he also suggests that he has an obligation to understand the traditionalists' position. By investigating those positions for two years, he has demonstrated that he has fulfilled his obligation to his audience. Now, it is his audience's turn to demonstrate its commitment to Vines.

Immediately after his invitation, Vines comes out to this audience. Yet, when he identifies himself as gay, Vines has not invited his audience to believe in gay- and lesbian-affirming biblical interpretations. In embodying his homosexuality at this moment of the speech, he is at odds with the traditional *ethopoeia* that he has exemplified. In addition, when he describes himself as a gay, his supporting material is his personal experience; he does not even reference the Bible. He simply states that “I didn’t choose to be gay,” instead of stating that God has created him as a gay individual. Moreover, he references biblical passages to indicate that his audience has an obligation to listen to him, not to prove the Bible affirms homosexuality. Therefore, at this moment, his Christianity and homosexuality appear to be separate, distinct entities.

Shortly after creating this separation, Vines reunites his Christian and homosexual identities. He states his intention to remain abstinent until marriage and describes his desire to have a family: “I’ve never been in a relationship, and I’ve always believed in abstinence until marriage. But I also have a deeply-rooted desire to one day be married, to share my life with someone, and to build a family of my own.”<sup>41</sup> This statement is traditionalist. Significantly, those whom Vines identifies as traditionalists would identify with Vines’ belief that he should remain abstinent until marriage.<sup>42</sup> Before when he had stated that he does not choose to be gay, his Christian and traditional identities appear to be conflicting. However, at the end of this passage, his traditionalist identity and his gay identity become one, because even though he is homosexual he plans to remain abstinent until marriage as a traditionalist would. By identifying himself as gay, who holds himself to traditional standards of being abstinent until marriage, Vines invites his audience to see

the possibility of an individual being both gay and traditionally Christian—a gay Christian.

This moment is short lived. As quickly as he becomes a gay Christian, Vines alters the performance of his identity in a manner that separates his Christianity from his homosexuality:

But according to the traditional interpretation of Scripture, as a Christian, I am uniquely excluded from that possibility for love, for companionship, and for family. But unlike someone who senses a calling from God to celibacy, or unlike a straight person who just can't find the right partner, I don't sense a special calling to celibacy, and I may well find someone I grow to love and would like to spend the rest of my life with. But if that were to happen, following the traditional interpretation, if I were to fall in love with someone, and if those feelings were reciprocated, my only choice would be to walk away, to break my heart, and retreat into isolation, alone. And this wouldn't be just a one-time heartbreak. It would continue throughout my entire life. Whenever I came to know someone whose company I really enjoyed, I would always fear that I might come to like them too much, that I might come to love them.<sup>43</sup>

Vines' identities are distinct and separate. He began this section as a gay individual who was excluded from love and family. During this moment, he performs the traditionalist who believes that it is a sin to act upon his homosexual orientation. Then, he shifts into a non-traditionalist individual who believes that he is not called to celibacy. Through voicing these shifting beliefs, Vines is a gay individual who is struggling to reconcile his faith with his sexuality, echoing sociologist Krista McQueeney's description of the

process that gay Christians go through when confronted with the tension between Christianity and homosexuality.<sup>44</sup> Vines' rapidly altering identities demonstrate the chaotic identity formation that gay Christians undergo. For instance, the gay Christian once thought that the Bible condemned homosexuality, but then the gay Christian discovers affirming interpretations of the Bible. However, the gay Christian still experiences doubt in the compatibility of homosexuality and Christianity. Similarly, Vines' identity in this speech moves from a traditionalist to a gay Christian, but his speech is not smooth in this transition. Because the transition is uneven, Vines' speech mirrors the formation of the gay Christian identity.

Vines' conflicting identities continue to disconnect when Vines embodies the prophet for the first time during his speech. Prophetically, he states:

You [a homosexual individual] will never share in those joys yourself – of a spouse and of children of your own. You will always be alone. Well, that's certainly sad, some might say, and I'm sorry for that. But you cannot elevate your experience over the authority of Scripture in order to be happy. Christianity isn't about you being happy. It's not about your personal fulfillment. Sacrifice and suffering were integral to the life of Christ, and as Christians, we're called to deny ourselves, to take up our crosses, and to follow Him.<sup>45</sup>

According to James Darsey and Joshua Ritter, the prophetic persona denotes an individual "sent by God to carry His message of judgment on a people that had fallen away from the covenant. The terms of the covenant in the prophetic message are immutable; the message is inexorable. The message, given the exigence that produced it, is necessarily unpleasant."<sup>46</sup> In this moment of his speech, Vines impersonates a prophet

who admonishes gay individuals. In particular, he warns gays that they are destined to suffer for their choice. He implies that gay individuals put their personal experiences before the teachings of God.<sup>47</sup> According to Vines, gays are not in line with God's covenant, because they ignore their obligations to God in order to be happy. He indicates that for homosexuals to be in line with God's covenant, they have to sacrifice their homosexual identities to follow God. Here, Vines personifies what a traditionalist would say and makes their argument convincingly. His concerned voice creates *pathos* which invites his audience to see him as a traditionalist, even if he actually is not. Because he demonstrates he understands and can perform traditional arguments, in this passage, Vines further demonstrates his commitment to understanding the views of his audience.

As the traditionalist prophet, Vines' rhetoric differs vastly from the rhetoric that he used as the gay Christian only moments earlier. Because of this, he demonstrates the complexity of the issues surrounding homosexuality and Christianity to his audience of traditionalists and to his audience of gay youth. On the form of invitational rhetoric that Vines' deploys, Foss and Griffin write that the "rhetoric and audience alike contribute to the thinking about an issue so that everyone involved gains a greater understanding of the issue in its subtlety, richness, and complexity."<sup>48</sup> In his demonstration of the complex and fluid nature of the emerging gay Christian identity, Vines enriches his audiences' understanding of the gay Christian. The gay Christians and homosexuals, more broadly, are not individuals who simply choose to be gay, but are individuals who labor to comprehend how they could be gay. By performing the gay Christian's changing understanding of self, Vines augments his audience's insight concerning the experience of the gay Christian.

After this prophetic moment, Vines' identities initially appear to be discombobulated. He is a traditionalist that condemned homosexuality, but he is also gay. However, his identity swiftly progresses into a religious identity that appears to be consistent with his gay identity. He becomes a nontraditional reader of the Bible. Vines states:

In Matthew 7, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns against false teachers, and he offers a principle that can be used to test good teaching from bad teaching. By their fruit, you will recognize them, he says. Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Good teachings, according to Jesus, have good consequences.

Vines also indicates that:

Good teachings, even when they are very difficult, are not destructive to human dignity. They don't lead to emotional and spiritual devastation, and to the loss of self-esteem and self-worth. But those have been the consequences for gay people of the traditional teaching on homosexuality. It has not borne good fruit in their lives, and it's caused them incalculable pain and suffering. If we're taking Jesus seriously that bad fruit cannot come from a good tree, then that should cause us to question whether the traditional teaching is correct.<sup>49</sup>

The Bible can be read in multiple, and at times, contradictory ways.<sup>50</sup> In this passage, Vines demonstrates his awareness of this fact. In particular, Vines concludes that the traditional set of interpretations is incorrect. In making this argument, he is reading against the traditional, dominant reading of the Bible. His reading is a secondary reading

in a fashion that is similar to Raymie McKerrow's description of a polysemic critic. When arguing that rhetorical critics should examine the polysemic elements of texts, McKerrow indicates that "a polysemic critique is one which uncovers a subordinate or secondary reading which contains the seeds of subversion or rejection of authority, at the same time that the primary reading appears to confirm the power of the dominant cultural norms."<sup>51</sup> Arguably, Vines is a polysemic critic, because he rejects the traditional interpretation of scripture through a secondary reading. In this passage, Vines reclaims the bad fruit metaphor for those who support Vines' new, non-traditional reading of the Bible. In the past, traditionalists have used the bad fruit metaphor in order to indicate that those who argue homosexuality is not a sin have bad teachings. However, Vines now uses the metaphor to argue that those who say the Bible condemns homosexuality are the ones who were spreading bad teachings.

Through the metaphor of the bad fruit, he also begins embodying a prophet who admonishes traditionalists. Because traditionalists use interpretations that are bad fruit, those traditionalists are not in line with the true teachings of God. Instead, those interpretations emotionally and spiritually damage fellow Christians. In this moment, Vines is prophetic. When describing the prophet, James Jasinski indicates, "Prophetic visions and the prophetic speech that represents them do not argue; put differently, argument is subordinated to vision in prophetic speech. Prophetic visions reveal truth; they remove blindness and replace it with clarity."<sup>52</sup> If Jasinski is correct, then Vines' rhetoric, here and later in the speech, is prophetic because it reveals that traditional interpretations of the Bible are bad fruit and harm Christians. Vines is removing the

blindness of the traditionalists who previously did not see the harm their interpretation of the Bible causes fellow Christians.

Vines' use of the metaphor of the fruit also highlights the development of his gay Christian identity. Before gay Christians admit to themselves that they are homosexual, they believe that the traditional interpretations of the Bible are good fruit. For them, it is correct to believe that homosexuality is a choice and that the Bible condemns homosexuality. However, by admitting to themselves that they are homosexual, gay Christians experience "emotional and spiritual devastation" and "loss of self-esteem."<sup>53</sup> During this stage, gay Christians experience uncertainty about the compatibility of their gay and Christian identities because of the traditional interpretations of the Bible. At the next stage of development, gay Christians realize that the traditional interpretations are bad fruit, because they cause uncertainty, anxiety, and emotional turmoil. The knowledge that the traditional interpretations are the wrong teachings force gay Christians to look for the good fruit. In that search, gay Christians find progressive readings of the Bible.

### **Vines' Invitation**

During the majority of his speech, Vines prophetically invites his audience to recognize that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality. He is not arguing that one subjective interpretation is superior to another subjective interpretation. Instead, he is inviting both of his audiences to gain newfound understanding of the "texts of terror." He invites the traditionalists to interpret the Bible as not condemning same-sex relationships. He invites gay youth to believe that it is possible for them to be gay and Christian. He also invites those individuals to use his rationales to defend themselves against those who use the Bible to belittle them. Throughout, he invites both of his audiences to interpret the



Bible in the manner that he interprets it. Furthermore, by interpreting his gay identity as being affirmed by the Bible, he also invites his audience to view him as a part of their community further allowing him to embody a prophet at the conclusion of his speech.

In developing his invitation, Vines responds to all to of the “texts of terror.” In particular, he tells his own story of Sodom and Gomorrah, and he reframes Leviticus in a manner that does not condemn monogamous same-sex relationships. He invites his audience to view the traditional readings of the letters from Saint Paul as being incorrect.<sup>54</sup> Remarkably, Vines covers the vast majority of the biblical debate about homosexuality during his presentation. In referring to all six “texts of terror,” he continues to show his commitment to the views of traditionalists.

Vines starts his invitation by indicating that the Sodom and Gomorrah story does not denounce consensual same-sex relationships. To do this, he makes a clear distinction between the Sodomites and members of same-sex relationships. According to Vines’ invitation, Sodomites violently attempted to rape the angel visitors. The sin was rape, not homosexuality. According to Vines, same-sex relationships are “consensual, monogamous, and loving,” which is distinct from what occurred in Sodom and Gomorrah.

Furthermore, Vines invites his audience to recognize that the story of Sodom and Gomorrah was not interpreted to have a sexual component until the Middle Ages. He stated:

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was not originally thought to have anything to do with sexuality at all, even if there is a sexual component to the passage we just read. But starting in the Middle Ages, it began to be widely

believed that the sin of Sodom, the reason that Sodom was destroyed, was homosexuality in particular. This later interpretation held sway for centuries, giving rise to the English term “sodomy,” which technically refers to any form of non-procreative sexual behavior, but at various points in history, has referred primarily to male same-sex relations. But this is no longer the prevailing interpretation of this passage, and simply because later societies associated it with homosexuality doesn’t mean that’s that what the Bible itself teaches.<sup>55</sup>

As he describes this, he assumes that his audience does not have any understanding of how the church used this passage historically, so he describes and instructs his audience about its history. Vines does not argue why his audience should interpret the Bible in a particular manner. Instead, he invites his audience to view the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in another manner after informing his audience of the passage’s history.

Similarly, Vines informs his audience about the history of sexual violence during biblical times. In order to reframe the interpretation that the crimes of Sodom and Gomorrah are associated with same-sex relationships, he indicates that during ancient times, men would gang rape other men in order to shame and humiliate them. Then, he concludes that the crime of Sodom and Gomorrah was a lack of hospitality. He is educating his audience about the historical context that was involved in the story to allow his audience to understand the crime of Sodom and Gomorrah differently.

Not only does Vines present contextual support for his argument, he also includes biblical references to warrant his interpretation. He references 20 passages of the Bible that suggest the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah is not homosexuality.<sup>56</sup> For instance, he refers to Ezekiel 16:49 and indicates that the passage states, “now this was the sin of your

sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.”<sup>57</sup> Again, he infers that his audience is unaware of the 20 other biblical passages about Sodom and Gomorrah. As such, he first tells his audience about those passages, their meaning, and then invites his audience to use those other passages to interpret the story of Sodom and Gomorrah as a passage that does not condemn homosexuality.

As Vines refutes the remaining “text of terror,” he consistently requests that his audience understand his interpretation of the text. He informs his audience that he believes that the Levitical laws do not apply to Christians today. He indicates that the Levitical rules had banned a multitude of actions that Christians still perform, including “eating pork, shrimp, and lobster” and “planting two kinds of seed in the same field; wearing clothing woven of two types of material; and cutting the hair at the sides of one’s head.”<sup>58</sup> Then, he explains his view that homosexuality and bestiality should not be compared. After this, he contextualizes the Levitical laws by indicating that the Israelites wrote those laws in order to distinguish themselves from foreign nations; In explaining this argument, he redefines traditional conceptions of the word abomination; he states, “The nature of the term ‘abomination’ in the Old Testament is intentionally culturally specific; it defines religious and cultural boundaries between Israel and other nations. But it’s not a statement about what is intrinsically good or bad, right or wrong, and that’s why numerous things that it’s applied to in the Old Testament have long been accepted parts of Christian life and practice.”<sup>59</sup> Finally, he teaches his audience that for two thousand years Christians have viewed Christ’s death as an annulment of the Levitical prohibitions.

All the while, he is providing a justification for his interpretation of this biblical passage. Simply, he is revealing his truth about Sodom and Gomorrah.

Vines addresses the writings of Paul in similar fashion. First, he speaks about Paul's teachings in Romans 1:26-27.<sup>60</sup> In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes that "men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men."<sup>61</sup> Vines indicates that the passage needed to be read within the context of the rest of Romans 1. Accordingly, he views this passage as being about the sin of idolatry, not homosexuality. In addition, the passages' use of "unnatural" does not have meaning that most people assign to the word. He claims the passage is a prohibition on *lust*, not *love*. For him, there is a large distinction between the two. In making this argument, however, Vines cites several sources that are not seen religious, such as the Greek philosopher Dio Chrysostom. He uses these sources in order to establish that when Paul writes about same-sex relationships, he refers to heterosexual men who were overcome by lust. According to Vines, Paul's writing does not apply to homosexuals, who are naturally homosexual. As he reminds his audience, this is not to say that homosexuals are not affected by this passage, as a homosexual could be overwhelmed by lust and participate in opposite-sex relations. After this, Vines further defines the word "natural" to mean "custom" by indicating that Paul defines "nature" to mean "custom" in his letter to the Corinthians.<sup>62</sup> Then, he applies the meaning of natural in the other passage to Roman 1:26-27. In doing so, Vines indicates that Paul defines same-sex behavior as not being unnatural in the sense that it violates God's natural order, but unnatural in the sense that it was not the custom of that particular society.

After this, Vines addresses 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10.<sup>63</sup> In his response, he contends that translators have not accurately translated these passages. Because the term homosexuality was not coined until the nineteenth century, Vines indicates that anyone who translates any of the terms in these passages to homosexual is not properly interpreting the passage. Next, Vines turns his attention to the term *arseokoites*, which is the word some biblical translators have translated to mean homosexuals. Vines indicates that *arseokoites* typically appears in lists of terms that involve economic sins, not sexual sins. Because of this, Vines concludes that *arseokoites* refer to “coercive and exploitative forms” of same-sex relationships, not “loving, faithful relationships.”<sup>64</sup>

Throughout this section of his speech, Vines instructs his audience in how they can view the biblical text in a manner that does not condemn homosexuality. He suggests that his view of the Bible is mutually-exclusive with the traditionalist view of the Bible. In doing so, he invites his audience to use a hermeneutical approach that he indicates is superior to the hermeneutics of the traditionalists. He assumes that his interpretation is the truthful interpretation, and invites his audience to learn his correct interpretation. Even though at this moment of the speech he invites his audience to change their understandings of the Bible, he is still prophetic, because he is attempting to reveal the truth through his invitation. However, it is not until the end of his speech that Vines fulfills the other roles of a prophet.

### **Vines, the Prophet**

In *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*, Darsey describes how a prophetic speech shatters rhetoricians’ traditional understandings of rhetorical

genres. Customarily, rhetoricians have described Aristotle's three distinct categories of speech: deliberative, forensic, and epideictic.<sup>65</sup> The deliberative speech is concerned with the future and what a group should do. The forensic speech focuses on the past, what happened, and justice or injustice. Lastly, epideictic speech concerns the present and also blames or praises an individual or action. Traditionally, rhetors perform these types of speech on separate occasions. However, according to Darsey, the prophetic address combines all of these forms of speaking into one. The prophetic address is deliberative, because it directs its audience to change in the future. It is forensic, because it argues that past actions of a community were unjust and not in line with the teachings of God.

Furthermore, Darsey argues that:

Even more essential than this judicial function, it might be argued, is the epideictic function of prophecy, not only in the celebration and encouragement of common values, but in the sense that epideictic both depends upon and recreates community. Indeed, it is only in the presence of a viable community that the declaratory impulse in prophecy has adequate credibility to insist on engagement.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, prophetic rhetors rebuke communities for current practices that are not in line with the covenant. In doing so, the rhetors attempt to reinvent those communities in order to alter how they act in the future.

While he concludes his speech, Vines enacts Darsey's description of the radical prophet. He begins his rebuke of his audience and its traditional interpretation of the Bible by stating:

These arguments [referring to arguments based on traditional interpretations] are always made by people who are themselves heterosexual, who have always fit in, who haven't endured years of internal torment and agony because they have a different sexual orientation than their friends, than their parents, than seemingly everyone else in the world. And, there's something terribly unseemly about straight Christians insisting that gay Christians are somehow inferior to them, or broken, or that gay people only exist because of the fall, and that God really intended to make everyone straight like them.<sup>67</sup>

In this moment, Vines establishes a prophetic *pathos*. On this subject, Darsey writes that prophetic rhetoric “exhibits an unabashed emphasis on emotional appeal, on awakening the feelings, on speaking to the heart. Prophetic reformers were confident that if the people could simply be made to feel the truth, reform would follow as a necessary consequence.”<sup>68</sup> Vines’ rhetoric aligns with the prophetic *pathos*. By indicating that heterosexuals do not experience “internal torment and agony,” he is also suggesting that homosexuals did experience it. Because of this, he pushes his audience to contemplate the plight of the gay Christian. Even though he is pained and condemned by other Christians, he still loves and is still loved by God.

Then, Vines rebukes the traditionalists in his audience. He specifies that the past and present actions of traditional readers of the Bible are unjust and violate God’s teachings. Speaking directly to traditionalists, he states, “You are taking a few verses out of context and extracting from them an absolute condemnation that was never intended. But you are also striking to the very core of another human being and gutting them of their sense of dignity and of self-worth.”<sup>69</sup> In a clear reprimand, Vines indicates that

traditional readers are taking select texts out of context in order to condemn homosexuality. Those readers are inflicting pain upon homosexuals. Forensically, he argues that traditional readers have acted unjustly, because they have violated the teachings of God.

Vines continues his enactment of the prophet by furthering his prophetic *pathos*:  
Being different is no crime. Being gay is not a sin. And for a gay person to desire and pursue love and marriage and family is no more selfish or sinful than when a straight person desires and pursues the very same things. The Song of Songs tells us that King Solomon's wedding day was "the day his heart rejoiced." To deny to a small minority of people, not just a wedding day, but a lifetime of love and commitment and family is to inflict on them a devastating level of hurt and anguish.<sup>70</sup>

In this emotional appeal, Vines argues that the traditional interpretation of the Bible prevents the hearts of gays and lesbians from being able to rejoice, because that interpretation prevents gay and lesbians from experiencing a wedding day. Instead, the traditional interpretation only causes "hurt" and "anguish." When he describes the prophetic *pathos*, Darsey cites Abraham Heschel, a Jewish theologian, as stating that the primary purpose of prophets is "'to move the soul, to engage the attention by bold and striking images, and therefore it is to the imagination and the passions that the prophets speak, rather than aiming at the cold approbation of the mind.'" <sup>71</sup> As prophets do, Vines speaks to the passions of his audiences through his descriptions of family, love, hurt, and anguish. He calls his audience to contemplate the joy of a wedding day, then he calls them to image a world without that joy—the despair of being unable to have a life of love



and commitment. Afterwards, he tells his audience that traditional interpretations cause that despair.

Vines continues his emotional appeal as he transitions from the forensic function of prophetic rhetoric to the deliberative one:

The Bible is not opposed to the acceptance of gay Christians, or to the possibility of loving relationships for them. And if you are uncomfortable with the idea of two men or two women in love, if you are dead-set against that idea, then I am asking you to try to see things differently for my sake, even if it makes you uncomfortable. . . .Gay people should be a treasured part of our families and our communities, and the truly Christian response to them is acceptance, support, and love.<sup>72</sup>

In his final statement, Vines indicates that in order to act in accordance with biblical teachings, Christians need to accept homosexuality. Implicitly, he is arguing that in the future Christians must act in a manner that demonstrates acceptance, support, and love to homosexuals. To act in accordance with biblical teachings, Christians need to fight for the families of homosexuals as much as they would fight for their own families.<sup>73</sup>

Prophetically, Vines admonishes the current practices of his audience, and then indicates that his audience must change in order to be in line with God's teachings.

The prophetic tradition comes alive in Vines' speech. Forensically, he rebukes traditionalists for unjustly violating the teachings of God. Deliberatively, he indicates that the church should welcome, love, and support gays and lesbians. In doing so, he invites the Christian community to align themselves with biblical teachings. His *pathos* is

prophetic. He is an insider, but also an outsider. Simply, he embodies Darsey's description of the prophet.

Because Vines' rhetoric is prophetic, rhetorical scholars must rethink their descriptions of the prophet. For instance, according to Darsey, gay rights rhetoric is not prophetic, because there is no commitment to judgment in such rhetoric. Darsey argues:

Gay rights rhetoric is almost apolitical, perhaps even antipolitical, in that it addresses the multitude as a mass of individuals, not as a political unity. Its appeal is not to *de cive* but to each person as the maker of his or her own destiny. It is a rhetoric of disengagement. In all this, the rhetoric of gay rights establishes itself, not as a rhetoric of judgment, but as a rhetoric of nonjudgment. There is no potential for radical commitment in such a discourse.<sup>74</sup>

Furthermore, Darsey indicates that "gay liberation has, in fact, been decisively excluded from claims on the divine,"<sup>75</sup> and that "homosexuals have been decisively excluded from assuming such a [radical and moral] position. In an age that subscribes to the morality presented here, it is preposterous to believe that God would favor the violation of His law."<sup>76</sup> Finally, when referring to gay rights rhetoric, Darsey also argues:

There is no radical potential in sin or in sickness. A society may work to cure or to exorcise sickness or moral failing, and in doing so it transforms the problem into a problem of the individual rather than one of the social order. Social protest is not an option where such a transformation has been successful. In this way, deviant groups are made politically marginal. The sick and the fallen, like lost sheep, await the shepherd who will lead them back into the fold or to the slaughterhouse.<sup>77</sup>

Unlike Darsey's suggestion, Vines' rhetoric illustrates that rhetoric supporting gay rights can be prophetic and demonstrate radical commitment. In his description of gay rights rhetoric, Darsey reports that others believe that homosexuality is a sin and that it violates God's law. However, Vines' rhetoric complicates Darsey's views on the prophetic tradition, as Vines is gay, but also plays the part of the prophet. In particular, in the conclusion of Vines' speech, he judges his audience for harming others. Then, he invites his audience to understand that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality. He indicates that God created all. Therefore, people do not choose their sexual identities. God did. As such, Vines demonstrates radical commitment to God and the biblical text.

Furthermore, because Vines is gay, he is positioned in a manner that allows him to establish a prophetic persona. When arguing that Darsey's book fails to include women in the prophetic tradition, Kerith Woodyard indicates that "prophecy not only includes the most marginalized of voices, but this genre is typified by the rhetorical practices of these disaffected groups."<sup>78</sup> Woodyard also states:

Because the outsider status of the would-be prophet makes radical rhetorical action both possible and necessary, women, as well as other historically marginalized peoples, are perhaps better positioned to assume the prophetic role, a realm of rhetorical action often inaccessible to those privileged by, and centered within, existing social systems.<sup>79</sup>

Vines' sexuality allows him to evoke a prophetic *ethos*. According to Jasinski, "The truth or validity of the prophet's vision is reinforced through a prophetic ethos that embraces persecution and suffering; the prophet's willingness to suffer demonstrates the nobility of his or her cause and calling."<sup>80</sup> Because he reveals his identity as a gay Christian, Vines

demonstrates his willingness to undergo suffering and persecution in order to deliver his message. In particular, he was excluded from the church where he grew up because of the message that delivers during his speech.<sup>81</sup> His willingness to face persecution establishes his prophetic *ethos*.

Even though some gay rights rhetoric might not be prophetic, it would be incorrect to assume that all rhetors who promote gay rights are excluded from the tradition. In fact, Darsey's suggestion that individuals view homosexuals as sinful, sick, and deviant demonstrates that homosexuals have the opportunity to be radical by challenging the interpretations of the Bible that indicate that they are sinful, sick, and deviant. Vines' speech admonishes those who believed that homosexuality is necessarily excluded from Christian potentials, and his own radical commitment complicates Darsey's descriptions of the prophetic tradition.

As Vines concludes his speech, he is prophetic. He rebukes Christians for holding an interpretation of the Bible that does violence to other Christians. He instructs his audience that in order for them to align themselves with the teachings of the Bible, they have to change how they interpret the Bible in relation to homosexuality. He is willing to suffer in order to argue for a gay- and lesbian-friendly biblical interpretation and demonstrates a radical commitment to his argument—an argument that he does not alter for his audience, because he is delivering a message from God, as all prophets do.<sup>82</sup> While he presents this particular speech in front of a progressive congregation, the reaction of his childhood church and his mediated audience demonstrate that he has sacrificed himself to make these arguments.

### **Vines' Identities and the Queer Christian Rhetorical Situation**

Throughout his speech, Vines gave voice to his many, ever changing, and even seemingly contradictory identities. He was a traditionalist. He was a gay man. He was a non-traditionalist. He was an inviter. He was a prophet. As the traditionalist, he was an insider. Yet, as the gay man, he was an outsider. Initially, his identities appeared to be mutually-exclusive. Because of this seeming inconsistency in his identities, his embodiment of all of his identities established a singular identity—the gay Christian identity. By evoking his gay Christian identity and the tensions he experienced with that identity, throughout his speech, he allowed his audience to experience the journey that gay Christians faced when they resolved the perceived incompatibility they had of their identities. By doing so, he unsettled and disrupted his audience's understanding of what it meant to be gay and to be Christian. His audience was forced to recognize and come to terms with the gay Christian.

Through his alteration of identity, Vines at times identified with his audience, but at other times he dissociated from them; in doing so, he allowed his audience to see him as both a Christian and a gay individual whereas they may not have done so before he spoke. When he embodied the traditionalist, those in his audience who were traditionalists would have identified with him. However, when he was the gay man, those same individuals would have disassociated with him. In this manner, he was similar to Harvey Milk, or at least Karen Foss's descriptions of Milk's rhetoric.<sup>83</sup> Foss wrote:

The situation of San Francisco politics was framed in dichotomous terms: gay/straight, public/private, appropriate/inappropriate, open/closed. From his first campaign, however, Milk refused to accept these boundaries. He consistently acknowledged the boundaries of the dominant worldview and stirred them up; he

recognized the limits and at the same time crossed them. These strategies allowed him to negotiate an opening – a rhetorical space for “both-and” rather than “either-or” - in which a different world could emerge.<sup>84</sup>

Under traditional interpretations, gay and Christian were dichotomous. To be gay would have meant that an individual could not be Christian. However, Vines’ own identity indicated that an individual could be both gay and Christian. He was limited by the perception that Christianity and homosexuality were incompatible, yet he defied that limit. According to Foss, “Milk’s strategies were effective because they decentered the norms and boundaries of his audiences, and in the resulting imbalance his audience members were able more easily to hear and see new possibilities.”<sup>85</sup> Like Milk’s rhetoric, Vines’ rhetoric established a both-and: the both-and of the gay Christian. Out of his rhetoric, therefore, a “different world could emerge.” Through his discourse, a world of gay Christians became possible for traditionalists members of his audience who previously thought that the Bible’s supposed condemnation of homosexuality made the gay Christian an impossible identity.

Vines asked his audience to witness the gay Christian, but also invited his audience to experience the gay Christians’ journeys of coming to know their identity. Vines organized his speech to mirror the identity development of gay Christians, which was also his own experience. Because Vines’ transitioned between identification and disassociation, he invited his audience to experience uncertainty of the gay Christian. Vines was a familiar insider, but also a strange outsider. The Christian did not expect to develop intimate feelings for the same sex. The Christian, after hearing about the traditional interpretation of Leviticus, did not expect to fall in love with someone of the

same sex. Yet, the gay Christian did develop those feelings and did fall in love with that individual. When that occurred, the gay Christian might have anticipated love and support from their churches. Unfortunately, some church communities, such as Vines' church community, violated expectations by excommunicating the gay Christian. After this emotional damage, the gay Christian might not have expected to find, learn, and believe in non-traditional biblical interpretations concerning homosexuality, but that did happen. Simply, when attempting to reconcile their homosexuality and Christianity, gay Christians experienced insecurity and uncertainty. By consistently identifying, and then distancing, Vines' speech invited his audience to undergo what gay Christians experienced.

However, not only did Vines call his audience to see the possibility of the gay Christian, he also invited his audience to question their own identities and understandings of the Bible. Through his demonstration of a shifting and fluid identity, his speech called on this audience to view their own identities and understandings as malleable. Again, Foss's writing proved to be informative because she described how a rhetor's shifting identity can invite audience members to contemplate their own identities:

Milk did not whitewash, deny, or distort his identity in any way, but he made his gay identity critical and at the same time just another part of who he was. He was different from some people because he was gay, but he was similar to many people in spite of being gay. In other words, Milk presented shifting and multiple framings of his identity at any one time and invited others to similarly consider the various ways they also negotiate and present their own identities to others.<sup>86</sup>

In the beginning of his speech, when he shifted between the traditionalist and the gay man, Vines certainly presented fluid understandings of his own identity. Because his rhetoric disturbed his audience's understandings of being Christian and being a homosexual, his speech also prompted his audience to rethink their own identities and understandings. If it was now possible for an individual to be both a Christian and homosexual, then what other possibilities could the audience members find? Audience members were "free to invent themselves in new ways, just as" Vines "himself was doing."<sup>87</sup> In addition, Foss indicated that the importance of this type of rhetoric was "not agreement so much as the freeing up and fluidity of possibilities – new ways of thinking and behaving – that were not available before."<sup>88</sup> Once Vines enacted several, seemingly, competing and contradictory identities, he showed his audience that identities that they previously thought were incompatible in fact were compatible.

In this act of disruption, Vines allowed his audience to see the possibility of a gay-and lesbian affirming Bible. His rhetoric was rhetoric of possibility that offered new potentialities about how Christians need to act to follow biblical teachings. When describing the rhetoric of possibility, William Kirkwood indicated that:

The need to evoke possibilities of the human condition is central to the rhetorical enterprise, transcending any one school or strategy. However, narrative is perhaps the foremost means by which such possibilities are disclosed. Through storytelling, rhetors can confront the states of awareness and intellectual beliefs of audiences; through it they can show them previously unsuspected ways of being and acting in the world.<sup>89</sup>



Through the narrative that he developed in his speech, Vines raised his audience's awareness of the gay Christian. More importantly, by starting his speech as a traditionalist and ending his speech as a prophet who argued for gay-and lesbian inclusion in the church, he validated the possibility of a traditionalist becoming a gay rights supporter. In doing so, he requested that the traditionalists in his audience begin to view themselves as gay rights supporters. He showed them a new way of being in the world—a way that would have been unexpected for an individual who previously believed that Christianity and homosexuality were incompatible. As Vines altered his identity throughout the speech, he too invited his audience to change in a manner that would be more aligned with biblical teachings.

### **The Refused Invitation: The Traditionalists' Backlash**

Vines allowed his audience to alter their perception of homosexuality, Christianity, and of themselves. However, he merely opened the door and invited his audience to enter. That did not mean that everyone in his audience moved. Conversely, traditional members of his audience re-entrenched their positions. They argued that Vines forced the Bible to speak in a certain way instead of organically allowing the Bible to speak for itself. For his audience, Vines was not a messenger from God, but a false prophet who was leading Christians astray. For others, including Sharon Welch, he was an “enemy” who was attempting to “twist” the scripture.<sup>90</sup> This backlash to Vines' speech demonstrated how those who oppose the notion of the gay Christian closed the openness created by Vines' rhetoric. This is similar to Foss' description of the reaction to Milk's rhetoric. She wrote, “There were many in Milk's audience who chose to focus on the disruptions his rhetoric caused rather than the possibilities it contained, who were afraid

of rather than willing to embrace the contradiction and change inherent to his queering of the rhetorical situations.”<sup>91</sup> While Vines’ speech suggested openness and change, the hostile response of some members of his audience demanded closedness and the continuation of the status quo. Moreover, the openness of his speech allowed his audience to attempt to create closure in a matter that solidified the traditional interpretations of the Bible.

One of the individuals who responded to Vines’ speech was Rev. James White, who was an elder in the Phoenix Reformed Baptist Church and a member of Vines’ mediated audience.<sup>92</sup> In a five-hour presentation, White refuted Vines’ arguments. Like Vines’ speech, White’s presentation was posted on YouTube.<sup>93</sup> Because his speech was so lengthy, it was split into 21 videos when it was posted. In one of the comment sections, an individual stated:

I spent my afternoon listening to all 21 of these videos and come to the same conclusion that I did the very first time I saw Matthew's video and that is, Matthew Vines is a lost little boy who refuses to accept the fact that God will not accept his immoral sexual choice. Matthew Vines preaches a twisted doctrine which is a greater sin than his choice of sexual behavior and then [attempts] to make others feel guilty for his brokenness, well that shows what a sicko he truly is.<sup>94</sup>

This poster’s view clearly demonstrated that members of Vines’ audience resisted his message. In particular, because this poster did not believe that homosexuality and Christianity were compatible, he claimed that Vines’ arguments were incorrect and

immoral. This poster foreclosed the possibility of the gay Christian, instead of allowing for it.

Other audience members argued that Vines was not a neutral arbiter of the biblical text. Instead, he had read the Bible with the specific intent of stating that the Bible did not condemn homosexuality. To these audience members, Vines choose a specific hermeneutical approach in order to prove his argument. He did not study what the Bible said on homosexuality; he molded the Bible to make it say what he wanted it to say. For instance, Joshua Gonnerman stated:

Vines is approaching Scripture as though it were a puzzle to be solved. His impassioned plea . . . raises serious questions about the role of gay people in the Church, but the answer he seeks has clearly determined his engagement with the text. If Scripture is merely a code to be broken, then we can enter into it by ourselves, armed with lexicons and concordances, to declare its true meaning. But a deeper reflection will reveal that this leaves us with no defense against our own prejudices and the ways in which we have been shaped by our culture.<sup>95</sup>

According to Gonnerman, Vines was guilty of approaching the Bible for a specific purpose. Vines was not a neutral individual who was interpreting the Bible. Because his interpretations of the Bible were shaped by a culture that promoted gay rights, he read the Bible in a manner that was inclusive of homosexuals. In other words, for members of his audience, Vines' gay persona meant that his account of the Bible was biased.<sup>96</sup>

While indicating that his evidence was biased, individuals who refuted Vines' speech also demanded more evidence. This left Vines in an impossible position. On one hand, if he provided evidence, he would be accused of subjectively searching for

evidence. On the other hand, if he did not provide evidence, he would not be able to prove his argument. Evan Lenow, who spend several months writing articles to refute Vines' claims, wrote, "Almost nothing about his argument is new; instead, he has repeated the same points that have been made by proponents of homosexuality for the last 40–50 years."<sup>97</sup> Gonnerman echoed Lenow's claim by stating, "His [Vines'] arguments are nothing new. They are the same historical and exegetical claims that have driven revisionist readings on this question for decades."<sup>98</sup> Yet another YouTube commentator wrote to Vines stating "You are young, you do not have it all figured out yet."<sup>99</sup> All of these responses indicated that two years of research were inadequate for Vines to be able to gain an understanding of the Bible in relation to homosexuality. For these members of the audience, the arguments that Vines used were already successfully refuted.

These individuals demanded more evidence from Vines and argued that Vines' evidence was biased.<sup>100</sup> In their contradictory demands for proof, members of his audience attempted to make it impossible for Vines to prove his reading of the Bible was the correct one. In his article "My Old Kentucky Homo," Charles Morris described how historians responded a speech by Larry Kramer. In this speech, Kramer argued that President Lincoln was in a same-sex relationship with Joshua Speed. According to Morris, the historians who responded to Larry Kramer's claim imposed an "impossibly rigorous standard in interpretive the evidence . . . of Lincoln's relationship with Speed."<sup>101</sup> In their response to Vines' speech, the traditionalists held him to the same impossibly high standard of evidence that the historians employed against Kramer. For the traditionalists, Vines' two years of research was not significant to generate any new claims in the biblical debate about homosexuality. Even so, Vine's two years of research

demonstrated that he was biased. He had done too little and too much research to make an argument about what the Bible said about homosexuality.

Some members of Vines' audience hastily attacked Vines even though other audience members demanded that Vines do more research. One commentator wrote, "Gay Christian is an oxymoron a gay person is not a christian [sic]." <sup>102</sup> Another wrote, "Matthew Vines you are not of the True Vine you 23 year old punk homosexual. You, your father the devil and all who you are misleading will one day be living in an eternal torment by the which [sic] you have never imagined." <sup>103</sup> Still another wrote, "1) There is no debate..Satan wants the Church to debate this by emotion and feelings..2) Im [sic] sorry that you want to be married and have a family of your own, but God did not create you in the state your in..you did this to yourself by being attracted to the same sex." <sup>104</sup> The quick, hasty, ad hominem attacks used against Vines functioned to silence his gay and lesbian-affirming biblical interpretation. <sup>105</sup> In a sense, these responses were representative of the homosexual panic, which was defined by Morris as "the homophobic terror of guilt by homosexual association that subtly governs our social bonds and warrants visceral and vicious responses to any potential encroachment by the queer contagion." <sup>106</sup> When writing about this concept, Morris referred to the backlash to Kramer's suggestion that Lincoln was attracted to men. However, in the case of Vines' speech, the homosexual panic was in response to an argument that the Bible did not condemn homosexuality. For members of his audience, it was offensive to consider the possibility that homosexuality was not a sin. These traditionalists were so concerned with these possibilities that they panicked and attacked Vines for making such inflammatory suggestions. Certainly, not everyone who responded negatively to Vines' speech was in a

homophobic panic, those individuals who hastily attacked Vines fit Morris' description of an individual who was experiencing homophobic panic.

These members of his audience quickly burned and discarded Vines' invitation, which demonstrated their unwillingness to think about the possibility of the gay Christian. The rejection of Vines' invitation echoed the rejection of Kramer's gay Lincoln. When describing the backlash to Kramer's speech, Morris indicated that "the rather predictable volley of ad hominem and threat exhibits the limited rhetorical options available to those . . . threatened by an 'out-law' memory, a flexing of vernacular muscle so as to insulate and protect the multiple (economic, social, familial) investments in a sanctioned and cherished official memory."<sup>107</sup> According to Morris, those who believed in the official memory of Lincoln—that he was heterosexual—refused to allow the belief that Lincoln was homosexual to enter public deliberation, which created the memory of Lincoln as a homosexual as out-law. Similarly, members of Vines' audience attempted to silence his belief in a gay- and lesbian-inclusive Bible. Yet, this reaction may have been more dismissive and violent than the reaction to Kramer's gay Lincoln. Even though members of the public were invested in their beliefs about Lincoln, those members of the public likely were more invested in their beliefs of God and the Bible. After all, their belief in God provided them hope in a life after death. As such, in challenging his audience's view of the Bible, Vines was also challenging their views of salvation and condemnation. Not only was Vines' rhetoric rejected from the community as being outlawed, his rhetoric was an agent of the devils [sic]; it invited them into the fiery underworld. Because they saw his rhetoric as being demonic, his audience not only killed Vines' biblical interpretation, but also condemned him for uttering it.<sup>108</sup>

The openness and disruptions of Vines' speech allowed for his audience to reimagine their identities and to see the potentiality of the gay Christian. Yet, in its openness, this speech also allowed for others to attempt to close that potential. Certainly, members of his audience tried. They attacked Vines for being biased, because he was gay. They argued that he had too little and too much evidence. They hastily accused him of being a false prophet. His audience aggressively defended that the Bible condemned homosexuality. The openness of Vines' speech allowed others to create closure. That closure precluded the possibility of the gay Christian.

While it is true that Vines' disruptions allowed individuals to attack his argument, it is also true that his disruptions generated a debate about the Bible and homosexuality. In the debate that followed, the gay Christian was assumed to be possible even though that possibility was violently rejected at times. By merely responding to Vines' speech, the traditionalists understood that the gay Christian was now possible. If they wished to prove that the Bible condemned homosexuality, they would have to articulate that the Bible did so. While some traditionalists were flippant in their rejection of the gay Christian, they did have to respond; they did have to enter the debate. As such, Vines' rhetoric opened up space for debate and discussion about the Bible and homosexuality. However, unlike previous disputes about those issues, the members of those deliberations could not assume the Bible condemned homosexuality.

Moreover, the Vines' rhetoric augmented the deliberation about the Bible and homosexuality. When discussing the debate about reparations for slavery, Jacqueline Bacon indicated that the supporters for reparations advanced their cause by creating a discussion about race in the United States. According to Bacon, "if you are confronted in

a debate with stories, evidence, or historical actors that do not fit the frameworks on which you rely, the hegemony of the structures of memory is undermined.”<sup>109</sup>

Furthermore, because Vines’ rhetoric was invitational in nature, it undermined the traditional interpretations of the Bible. Foss and Griffin wrote that through invitational rhetoric:

There may be a wrenching loose of ideas as assumptions and positions are questioned as a result of an interaction, a process that may be uncomfortable. But because rhetors affirm the beliefs of and communicate respect for others, the changes that are made are likely to be accompanied by an appreciation for new perspectives gained and gratitude for the assistance provided by others in thinking about an issue.<sup>110</sup>

Vines brought forth an alternative reading of the Bible which challenged those who read the Bible as a document that judged homosexuality as a sin. While there was backlash to his arguments, he enriched the debate because he challenged the authority of the traditional interpretation. In doing so, he undermined the traditional, dominant memory that indicated that the God abhorred homosexuality. He questioned the assumption that the God believed homosexuality was a sin and, in doing so, provided an opening for individuals to gain new perspectives about the Bible and homosexuality.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout his speech, Vines embodied many distinct identities. He was a traditionalist. He was a progressive. He was a gay man. He was a prophet. Because of his embodiment of all of these ostensibly competing, contradictory, and shifting identities, he was also the gay Christian. As the gay Christian, he invited his audience to experience



what gay Christian's experience. While there was resistance and backlash to that invitation, the invitation itself cemented the possibility of the gay Christian into the discourse concerning the Bible and homosexuality. In doing so, he altered that particular deliberation by undermining the hegemony of the traditionalists' interpretation of the Bible.

Therefore, Vines' speech demonstrates that those who are attempting to create gay and lesbian-affirming churches, theologies, and interpretations of the Bible are not doing so in vain. After his speech, Vines' wrote:

I am still absolutely committed to seeing my old church change and to seeing homophobia eradicated at that church one day. But for me, as one person up against so much opposition at the time, it seemed hopeless. So now I want to contribute to a conversation that starts to chip away at people's prejudices and at their belief that the Bible supports them in their views. It's going to take time, but the truth will win.<sup>111</sup>

In this statement, Vines demonstrates that he knows what it will take in order to change traditional congregations' beliefs about the Bible and homosexuality. When writing about how women rhetors, who were socially marginalized, created social change, Angela Ray writes, "the history of woman suffrage activism in the United States teaches the importance of perseverance in persuasive efforts to elicit social change."<sup>112</sup> Ultimately, in order to ensure that gay and-lesbian affirming biblical interpretations become the dominant biblical interpretations, non-traditional interpreters need to persist and continue to challenge the traditionalist interpretation. The rhetoric in Vines' speech established the possibility of the gay Christian, and promotes a debate where neither side can assume the

gay Christian is not possible. Now, with time, dedication, persistence, and determination, the possibility of the gay Christian can become reality. “The prophet achieves identification only when the holy remnant has joined him in the purity of the wilderness; the people must come to God; He [or she] cannot come to them.”<sup>113</sup> By his admonishment of his community, Vines invites his audience to join him in believing God’s true feelings concerning homosexuality. While some reject his invitation, the invitation itself nudges his audience closer to God. They will slowly continue on that path.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Vines, "The Bible and Homosexuality: Why I Left College and Spent Two Years Finding Out What the Scriptures *Really* Say," *The Huffington Post*, published on March 26, 2012, accessed on August 14, 2013, <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-vines/bible-homosexuality\\_b\\_1378368.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-vines/bible-homosexuality_b_1378368.html)>. In addition, according to some accounts, the Presbyterian Church acted against homosexuals during this time period. Mark Sandlin, who is a minister in the Presbyterian Church, wrote, "My denomination, the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America, at its national gathering this year voted against marriage equality. Some of those who opposed recognizing marriage equality stood up and basically equated same-sex relationships with bestiality." See Sandlin, Mark, "I'm Not Saying You're Homophobic; I'm Just Saying You're Homophobic," *Huffington Post*, accessed on January 15, 2014, published on July 10, 2012, <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-sandlin/im-not-saying-youre-homophobic-im-just-saying-youre-homophobic\\_b\\_1656240.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-sandlin/im-not-saying-youre-homophobic-im-just-saying-youre-homophobic_b_1656240.html)>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Quenqua, "Turned Away, He Turned to the Bible," *New York Times*, published on September 14, 2012, accessed on December 15, 2013, <[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/16/fashion/matthew-vines-wont-rest-in-defending-gay-christians.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=0&adxnmlx=1388481589-XAIAv/j4i3e3CLI3LQn%20Lg](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/16/fashion/matthew-vines-wont-rest-in-defending-gay-christians.html?pagewanted=1&_r=0&adxnmlx=1388481589-XAIAv/j4i3e3CLI3LQn%20Lg)>.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Vines, "Matthew Vines," *Evelyn & Walter Haas Jr. Fund*, accessed on January 10, 2013, <<http://www.haasjr.org/matthewvines>>.

<sup>5</sup> College Hill United Methodist Church, "About CHUM," accessed on January, 10, 2014, <<http://collegehillumc.org/#/college-hill>>.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Vines, "Op-ed: Don't Give Up on Christian Gays," *The Advocate*, published on May 1, 2013, accessed on August 14, 2013, <<http://www.advocate.com/op-ed/2012/05/01/opinion-do-not-give-christian-gays>>.

<sup>7</sup> I will note here that Vines uses the term "traditional" to describe interpretations of the Bible that condemn homosexuality. Like, Vines, I too will use this term during this particular chapter to mirror Vines' descriptions of the debate. To watch Vines' speech, see "The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality," March 10, 2012, accessed on September 7, 2013, YouTube, <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezQjNJUSraY&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezQjNJUSraY&feature=player_embedded)>.

<sup>8</sup> Vines, "The Bible and Homosexuality: Why I Left College and Spent Two Years Finding Out What the Scriptures *Really* Say "

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>10</sup> The term “text of terror” is used by Nancy Wilson. However, Wilson indicates that this term was first used by Robert Goss in its application to biblical texts that are used to condemn gay and lesbian individuals. However, the term was originally created by Phyllis Trible to refer to biblical passages that involve gender violence. See Nancy Wilson, *Our Tribe: Queer folks, God, Jesus and the Bible*, (New York: HarpersCollins Publishers, Inc., 1995), 94. Also, see Robert Goss, *Jesus Acted Up* (San Francisco: HaperSanFrancisco, 1993), and Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

<sup>11</sup> Sonja K. Foss, and Cindy L. Griffin, “Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric,” *Communication Monographs* 62 (1995), 2-18.

<sup>12</sup> In order for me to argue that Vines’ established a prophetic persona, I will have to intervene in the rhetorical theory concerning the prophetic persona. In essence, I will make a similar argument to the one Kerith M. Woodyard made concerning the prophetic tradition. Woodyard argued that concept of the Prophet is based on patriarchal assumptions about the Bible. Similarly, I will argue that rhetorical scholarship’s understanding of the Prophet is based on heteronormative assumptions about the Bible. See Kerith M. Woodyard, “Depatriarchalizing in Rhetorical Theory: Toward a Feminist Prophetic Tradition,” *Ohio Communication Journal* 48 (2010), 27-42.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Vines, “The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality,” March 10, 2012, accessed on September 7, 2013, <<http://www.matthewvines.com/transcript>>.

<sup>14</sup> Leonard Jr. Pitts, “Don’t blame the Bible,” *Miami Herald*, accessed on January 15, 2014, published on May 1, 2012, <<http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/05/01/2778054/dont-blame-the-bible.html>>.

<sup>15</sup> James Darsey, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*, (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 202.

<sup>16</sup> Vines, “The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality”

<sup>17</sup> The term “traditionalist persona” is a term of my own creation. This particular persona is a religious persona that believes that the Bible condemns homosexuality. I use the term “traditionalist” here, because that is the word that Matthew Vines uses to refer to individuals who believe the Bible condemns homosexuality.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew Vines has indicated that this was how his identity as a gay Christian began. He “knew” that the Bible condemned homosexuality before he admitted to himself that he was gay. See Vines, “The Bible and Homosexuality: Why I Left College and Spent Two Years Finding Out What the Scriptures Really Say”

<sup>19</sup> Vines, “The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality”

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<sup>20</sup> Throughout the speech, Vines appeared to indicate that an individual who believed that the Bible condoned a homosexual orientation, but not the practice would be considered an individual. For instance, Vines stated that “But unlike someone who senses a calling from God to celibacy, or unlike a straight person who just can’t find the right partner, I don’t sense a special calling to celibacy, and I may well find someone I grow to love and would like to spend the rest of my life with.” However, while he indicated what a traditionalist believed, he was personifying the traditionalist. See, *ibid*.

<sup>21</sup> *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, translated by Harry Caplan, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 399.

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, *The Rhetoric*, 1408a.

<sup>23</sup> I owe much to Karen A. Foss for the terminology that I use throughout this chapter, and I also owe her much as her article afforded me many insights as I wrote this chapter. See, Karen A. Foss, “Harvey Milk and The Queer Rhetorical Situation,” in *Queering Public Address: Sexualities in American Historical Discourse*, ed. Charles E. Morris III (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 74-92.

<sup>24</sup> Here, I am referring to Kenneth Burke’s concept of identification. Burke indicated that “You persuade a man insofar as you talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his.” As such, when I indicate that Vines was identifying with his audience, I am also indicating that Vines was establishing a connection with his audience that would enable him to be able to persuade his audience. See Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (New York, 1962), 579. In addition, in my use of *ethos*, I am referring to Aristotle. Specifically, Aristotle wrote, “persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him [or her] credible.” See Aristotle, 1356a. During this essay, I will refer to Vines’ *ethos* with traditionalists as his traditionalist *ethos*.

<sup>25</sup> Kristin S. Bruss, “Persuasive *Ethopoeia* in Dionysius’s *Lysias*,” *Rhetorica* 31.2 (2013), 36.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 56.

<sup>27</sup> Foss and Griffin, 12.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Leff, and Ebony A. Utley, “Instrumental and Constitutive Rhetoric in Martin Luther King Jr.’s ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail,’” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 7.1 (2004), 47.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>33</sup> Vines, “The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality”

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> I use the term “insider” to refer to an individual who identifies with those who interpret the Bible in a traditional manner. The term “outsider” refers to individual who do not identify with traditionalists.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Stephen Reid, “A Rhetoric of Contemporary Christian Discourse,” *Journal of Communication and Religion* 31 (November 2008), 117.

<sup>37</sup> Foss and Griffin, 13.

<sup>38</sup> This term, like the “traditionalist persona,” is a term that I created. In particular, the gay persona is of an individual who identifies as homosexual.

<sup>39</sup> Vines, “The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality”

<sup>40</sup> Foss, “Harvey Milk and The Queer Rhetorical Situation,” 87.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Various Christian dominations uphold the notion that an individual should be abstinent until marriage. For a more detailed discussion, see “Abstinence Before Marriage,” *Focus on the Family*, published during 2008, accessed on December 17, 2013, <<http://www.focusonthefamily.com/socialissues/social-issues/abstinence-before-marriage.aspx>>. In addition, Melissa Browning has argued that “religious traditions have been teaching abstinence in various forms for centuries.” See Melissa Browning, “Acting Out Abstinence, Acting Out Gender: Adolescent Moral Agency and Abstinence Education,” *Theology & Sexuality* 16.2 (2010), accessed on December 15, 2013 online at <<http://omnilogos.com/acting-out-abstinence-acting-out-gender-adolescent-moral-agency-and-abstinence-education/>>.

<sup>43</sup> Vines, “The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality”

<sup>44</sup> Krista McQueeney, “‘We are God’s Children, Y’All:’ Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Lesbian- and Gay-Affirming Congregations,” *Social Problems* 56.1, (2009): 156.

<sup>45</sup> Vines, “The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality”

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<sup>46</sup> James Darsey and Joshua Ritter, "Religious Voices in American Public Discourse", *The Sage Handbook of Rhetorical Studies*, ed. Andrea A. Lunsford, Kirt H. Wilson, and Rosa A. Eberly (Boston, MA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 559.

<sup>47</sup> During this speech, it is likely that Vines did not believe this given his intent to refute traditional interpretations of the Bible. However, it is possible that Vines thought this when he was attempting to understand his gay Christian identity. Furthermore, it is also plausible that gay Christians experience this feeling when they admit to themselves that they are attracted to the same-sex; they might condemn their own same-sex attractions.

<sup>48</sup> Foss and Griffin, 5.

<sup>49</sup> Vines, "The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality"

<sup>50</sup> Here, I am referring to Leah Ceccarelli's work. In particular, Ceccarelli has argued that there are multiple interpretations of texts, and a rhetorical critic can and should argue for different readings of a particular text. In other words, texts allow for distinct explanations, and the critic should illuminate the various possibilities in those texts. See Leah Ceccarelli, "Polysemy: Multiple meanings in rhetorical criticism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 84.4 (1998), 395-415.

<sup>51</sup> Raymie E. McKerrow, "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis," *Communication Monographs* 56 (1989), 108.

<sup>52</sup> James Jasinski, *Sourcebook on Rhetoric: Key Concepts in Contemporary Rhetorical Studies*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2001), 460.

<sup>53</sup> Vines, "The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality"

<sup>54</sup> Vines, "The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality." Vines' responded to Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and 1 Timothy 1.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Vines did not state all of the twenty verses. However, he did reference several of them. He stated, "In Ezekiel 16:49, the prophet quotes God as saying, 'Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.' So God Himself in Ezekiel declares the sin of Sodom to be arrogance and apathy toward the poor. In Matthew 10 and Luke 10, Jesus associates the sin of Sodom with inhospitable treatment of his disciples." See Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> See Romans 1:26-27, New International Version which states: “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.”

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Vines, “The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality.” Vines was referring to 1 Corinthians 11:13-15. In the New International Version, this passages reads: “Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering.”

<sup>63</sup> In the New International Version, 1 Corinthians 6:9 states, “Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men[a],” and 1 Timothy 1:10 states, “for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.”

<sup>64</sup> Vines, “The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality”

<sup>65</sup> Darsey, 111.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>67</sup> Vines, “The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality”

<sup>68</sup> Darsey, 203.

<sup>69</sup> Vines, “The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality”

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Darsey, 77. Darsey cites Abraham Heschel. See Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, Colophon edition, v. 2 (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 38.

<sup>72</sup> Vines, “The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality”

<sup>73</sup> Here, Vines asked a series of rhetorical questions. He stated, “How deeply do you care about your family? How deeply do you love your spouse? And how tenaciously would



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you fight for them if they were ever in danger or in harm's way? That is how deeply you should care, and that is how tenaciously you should fight, for the very same things for my life, because they matter just as much to me." See Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Darsey, 184.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 206.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 177.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 177.

<sup>78</sup> Woodyard, 39.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>80</sup> Jasinski, 461.

<sup>81</sup> Vines, "Op-ed: Don't Give Up on Christian Gays"

<sup>82</sup> Vines did not change his arguments when he presented them to the traditional church in which he grew up and the non-traditional church where he gave this speech.

<sup>83</sup> There were certainly differences between the rhetoric of Vines and Milk. However, there were also similarities. In particular, the manner in which Vines and Milk invited their audiences to experience contradicts between being an insider and an outsider was similar.

<sup>84</sup> Foss, 85-86.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>89</sup> William G. Kirkwood, "Narrative and the Rhetoric of Possibility," *Communication Monographs* 59 (1992), 32.

<sup>90</sup> Sharon Welch, commenting on "The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality"

<sup>91</sup> Foss, 88.

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<sup>92</sup> Alpha & Omega Ministries, “Does the Bible Teach Predestination?: An Exegetical Debate,” accessed on January 15, 2014, last modified in 2006, <<http://vintage.aomin.org/JWDB0.html>>.

<sup>93</sup> “James White responds to Matthew Vines Part 1,” July 8, 2012, accessed on December 15, 2013, YouTube, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9XrHu2uopI&list=PLpYE85IiudODhvxBTOnY7kWBCEO1f9v1v>>. When I first accessed the video, only 6,000 individuals had viewed it.

<sup>94</sup> Bernhardt Heckendorn, commenting on Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Joshua Gonnerman, “Why Matthew Vines Is Wrong About the Bible and Homosexuality,” published on October 11, 2012, accessed on December 15, 2013, <<http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2012/10/why-matthew-vines-is-wrong-about-the-bible-and-homosexuality>>.

<sup>96</sup> Jacqueline Bacon makes a similar argument about the debate over reparations for slavery. She writes, “Those without cultural authority are positions so that they seem too personally involved and, thus, ‘improper, excessive, and merely subjective.’ In the reparations debate, media commentators and reparations opponents frequently suggest that African Americans who support reparations are motivated by inappropriate, personal interests.” Similarly, Vines’ opposition saw him as being motivated by personal interests. See, Jacqueline Bacon, “Reading the Reparations Debate,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89:3 (2003), 187.

<sup>97</sup> Evan Lenow, “Answering Matthew Vines: What Did Jesus Teach About Homosexuality?,” *Theological Matters*, published on November 6, 2012, accessed on December 31, 2013, <<http://www.theologicalmatters.com/index.php/2012/11/06/answering-matthew-vines-what-did-jesus-teach-about-homosexuality/>>. Also, see, Lenow, Evan, “Answering Matthew Vines: Does the Denial of Same-Sex Marriage Inflict Undue Pain?,” *Theological Matters*, published on October 29, 2012 accessed on December 31, <<http://www.theologicalmatters.com/index.php/2012/10/29/answering-matthew-vines-does-the-denial-of-same-sex-marriage-inflict-undue-pain/>>, and Lenow, Evan, “Answering Matthew Vines: Is Being Alone a Sin?,” *Theological Matters*, published on October 8, 2012, accessed on December 31, 2013, <<http://www.theologicalmatters.com/index.php/2012/10/08/answering-matthew-vines-is-being-alone-a-sin/>>.

<sup>98</sup> Gonnerman, “Why Matthew Vines Is Wrong About the Bible and Homosexuality”

<sup>99</sup> Elias Wedde, commenting on “The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality”

<sup>100</sup> Again, see Gonnerman, “Why Matthew Vines Is Wrong About the Bible and Homosexuality”

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<sup>101</sup> Charles E. III Morris, "My Old Kentucky Homo: Abraham Lincoln, Larry Kramer, and the Politics of Queer Memory," in *Queering Public Address: Sexualities in American Historical Discourse*, ed. Charles E. Morris III (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 107.

<sup>102</sup> Ashtin lewis, commenting on "James White responds to Matthew Vines Part 1"

<sup>103</sup> Roy G, commenting on Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> FireOfTheHolyGhost, commenting on "The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality"

<sup>105</sup> I refer to these responses as ad hominem responses because they attack Vines' character (i.e., call him the son of the Devil) instead of responding to the logic of his argument.

<sup>106</sup> Morris, 103.

<sup>107</sup> Morris, 104.

<sup>108</sup> Charles Morris indicates that the historians killed the Kramer's memory of the gay Lincoln. In doing so, he coins the term "mnemonicide" to represent the historians "assassination of memory . . . for the sake of perpetuating a hegemonic connection to our ostensibly straight past." See Morris, 108. I borrow Morris' term to represent how members of Vines' audience assassinated Vines' credibility and his speech. I also indicate that the reaction of Vines' audience was more violent than the historians, because of the negative attributes his audience associated with him, such as sicko, punk, and of the devil.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>110</sup> Foss and Griffin, 6.

<sup>111</sup> Vines, "Matthew Vines"

<sup>112</sup> Angela G. Ray, "Ritual as Revolution: When Casting a Vote Challenged a Nation," *Communication Currents* 2.3 (2007).

<sup>113</sup> Darsey, 22.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: TOWARDS A QUEER CHRISTIAN RHETORICAL ARCHIVE**

The internal deliberations within churches that concern what the Bible says about homosexuality are as intricate as secular debates about gay rights. In those internal disputes, traditional readers use the “texts of terror” to argue that homosexuality is sinful.<sup>1</sup> However, liberal interpreters reframe those particular passages in a plethora of ways by defining and redefining words and by providing context to critical passages. Still, another group of readers, those promoting queer interpretations, argue that there are same sex-relationships in the Bible and “out” David, Jonathon, Ruth, Naomi, Lazarus, and Jesus.

Over the past century, Christians, homosexuals, theologians, activists, pastors, prophets, queers, and gay Christians have developed, re-developed, deployed, and re-deployed these arguments in the public sphere. In the early 1900s, pastors deployed the traditional interpretation of the Sodom and Gomorrah story to argue that San Francisco was the “Sodom by the Sea.”<sup>2</sup> Even though they faced intimidation and brutality, gays and lesbians in San Francisco would find political victories in the 1960s and 1970s. During that time, the Council on Religion and the Homosexual formed, state sodomy laws disappeared, gay rights ordinances passed, and the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders.<sup>3</sup> These successes angered traditional readers of the Bible. Led by Anita Bryant, those individuals formed the Christian anti-gay movement and began to fight against gay rights ordinances and proposed legislation banning homosexuals and their supporters from becoming teachers (e.g., the Briggs Initiative). This movement ignited a fierce debate between gay rights

organizations and churches. As a result of this ongoing quarrel, many believe Christianity is incompatible with homosexuality. Now, when gay Christians speak and act, they must respond to the perception that their identity is an oxymoron; they must justify being a gay Christian.

For many, these arguments have material effects. This biblical contestation continues to result in violence, death, and despair. Throughout its history, the Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) have been attacked. MCC has watched its places of worship burn to the ground. They grieved on the day when one-third of MCC New Orleans died in a fire-bombing. They have been assaulted, and they have prayed for Matthew Shepard. In its short history, the gay church has known violence for believing that God loves and affirms gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, and queers. Even so, the church still aims at providing safe spaces for queer individuals and at convincing the world that homosexuality is not a sin.

This thesis enriches understanding of the historical debates over gay rights and in doing so complicates rhetorical scholarship's perceptions of both religious rhetoric and queer rhetoric. In chapter three, I deepen rhetoric's relationship to the term *parrhesia*. While there has been debate about the meaning of the term, I indicate that in order to understand fully the term that rhetorical scholars must engage with theological and religious scholarship. In particular, Foucault and rhetorical scholars utilize Plato and Isocrates to develop their understanding of *parrhesia*.<sup>4</sup> However, there is also a religious tradition to this term with which political and rhetorical theorists have not grappled. The religious tradition of *parrhesia* is significant because it proposes that a group of individuals can function as *parrhesiastea*.

I use this theoretical intervention to evaluate Reverend Nancy Wilson's speech at the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of MCC. Specifically, I argue that Wilson uses the memories of her audience members in order to constitute them as *parrhesiastea* who are positioned to act as such in the future. She therefore addresses her audience as people who frankly, dutifully, and truthfully critique others even when they are in danger. She envisions her audience as *parrhesiastea* fighting against Proposition 8, creating new safe spaces for gay youth, and challenging homophobia in Nigeria, Pakistan, and Uganda.

In chapter four, I theorize about prophetic tradition in two respects. First, I agree with Michael Leff's and Ebony Utley's argument that prophets may have to argue themselves into that role.<sup>5</sup> In particular, I argue that Matthew Vines uses persuasive *ethopoeia* in order to establish the insider *ethos* that is necessary for him to perform the role of the prophet. Second, I challenge James Darsey's argument that gay rights rhetoric cannot be prophetic by demonstrating that Vines' speech is prophetic.<sup>6</sup> What Darsey overlooks is that, by admonishing Christians for believing that homosexuality is sinful, the rhetoric of gay Christians can be prophetic.

I also argue that Vines' speech mirrors his own identity development as a gay Christian. His speech begins by personifying traditionalists. Then, he personifies traditionalist prophets who admonish homosexuals for their lifestyle choice. However, over the course of his speech, Vines changes and refutes traditional biblical interpretations. In his conclusion, he embodies the gay Christian prophet who admonishes traditionalists for their damaging biblical interpretations. The progression of his speech invites his audience to change as well. As his audience watches his transformation, they

too can see themselves transforming from traditionalists to liberal interpreters of the Bible.

### **Genre and the Rhetoric of Gay Christians**

Because both Vines and Wilson identify as gay Christians, my evaluations of them are also evaluations of rhetoric produced by gay Christians. One could term both of their rhetorics as gay Christian rhetoric, and it is true that their speeches have similarities. Both Vines and Wilson indicate that they tell objective truths derived from their respective relationships with God. They both also construct themselves as individuals who are in danger or have experienced discrimination—Vines because he was excommunicated from his previous church and Wilson because of her construction of MCC as being a target of violence.

However, there are also differences between Vines and Wilson. Vines is a liberal reader of the Bible, whereas Wilson advances a queer reading. He does not believe, as Wilson does, that David and Jonathan were in a loving relationship. For instance, in an interview after his speech, he indicates that he is knowledgeable about queer interpretations. He states, “There may be three positive examples of gay relationships in Scripture, but because our understanding of them hinges largely on speculation, I didn’t include them in my argument. The first and most famous potentially gay relationship in the Bible is that between David and Jonathan in the Old Testament. The second is Ruth and Naomi, and the third is the account of the Roman centurion and his slave in Matthew 8.”<sup>7</sup> After stating his, he argues that “the problem with these cases, as I said, is that they rely on speculation, and it’s possible that that speculation is mistaken.”<sup>8</sup> These statements may not definitively state Vines’ personal stance on the sexuality of those biblical

figures, but they do prove that he is not willing to make arguments about the sexuality of those individuals in public. When he speaks, therefore, it is not the case that Ruth, Naomi, David, Jonathan, Lazarus, Jesus, the Roman centurion and his slave were gay, lesbian, or bisexual. However, that is the truth for Wilson—a queer *parrhesia* who boldly speaks everything that is on her mind.

Additionally, Vines' and Wilson's identity development as gay Christians appear to be distinct. As mentioned in chapter one, Krista McQueeney argues that gay Christians resolve the perceived incompatibility of their two identities in three distinct manners. Some minimize their sexuality, some normalize their sexuality, and others moralize their sexuality.<sup>9</sup> Those who minimize treat their Christian identity as more important than their homosexual identity. Those who normalize engage in normal Christian behavior and view themselves as being equal to Christian heterosexuals. Those who moralize believe that their sexuality is a special calling from God.

Vines has normalized his sexuality whereas Wilson has moralized her sexuality. In Vines' speech, he indicates that he plans to remain abstinent until he is married.<sup>10</sup> He also indicates that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality as a justification for why homosexuals and heterosexuals should be treated equally in congregations. On the other hand, in her book, Wilson indicates that homosexuals have particular spiritual gifts including being able to evangelize those with HIV/AIDS.<sup>11</sup> Also, during her speech, she argues that God has specifically and especially called MCC to minister to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, and queers. The differences between Vines' and Wilson's arguments also suggest that individuals who have normalized their sexualities produce



and deploy arguments in different manners than individuals who have moralized their sexualities.

This distinction echoes rhetorical scholarship on the rhetoric of women's rights. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell argues that in the rhetoric of women's rights there are two distinct types of arguments: natural rights arguments and arguments based on expediency.<sup>12</sup> Based in the concept of "womanhood," which indicated that women had superior qualities to men, expediency arguments, as Campbell writes, are "arguments detailing the benefits of woman's participation in public life."<sup>13</sup> However, natural rights arguments based in "personhood"—the belief that gender should not determine an individual's role in society—indicate that women are equally deserving of rights as men. Likewise, the arguments of Wilson and Vines represent an analogous distinction. In particular, Wilson's arguments concerning the spiritual gifts of queer individuals function similarly to expediency arguments, because they indicate that queer individuals are better at ministering to other lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals and to individuals with HIV/AIDS than non-queer individuals. In contrast, Vines' arguments are natural rights arguments because he indicates that God has created gay, straight, queer, and non-queer individuals as equals. Therefore, gay Christians justify their identities to themselves in distinct manners (i.e., they minimize, normalize, or moralize) and also publicly (i.e., through natural rights or expediency arguments).

In this thesis, I do not attempt to define a genre of gay Christian rhetoric, but Vines' and Wilson's speeches and my analysis of them do justify investigation into the potentiality of a genre of gay Christian rhetoric. According to Kathleen M. Hall Jamieson, "a genre of rhetoric contains specimens of rhetoric which share characteristics

distinguishing them from specimens of other rhetorical genres.”<sup>14</sup> Future examination therefore should explore if there is a genre of gay Christian rhetoric. Said differently, does the rhetoric of queer Christians have distinct features that differentiate it from other forms of rhetoric? If so, are there characteristics of particular forms of queer Christian rhetorics that distinguish them from other forms of queer Christian rhetoric? Are there recurring situational characteristics that gay Christian rhetors face?

Investigating the question of whether or not there is a genre of gay Christian rhetoric may enable rhetorical critics to better understand the rhetoric of gay Christians. Jamieson argues that “an understanding of genre will enable the critic to explicate a work, to explore the continuity and discontinuity of rhetorical forms, and to cast a work into productive perspectives.”<sup>15</sup> She also indicates that “the critic who ignores genre risks clouding rather than clarifying the rhetoric he [or she] is attempting to explain.”<sup>16</sup> In particular, an exploration of queer Christian rhetoric and genre may be able to answer questions concerning whether this rhetoric emerges out of the evolution of queer rhetoric, the evolution of Christian rhetoric, the coevolution of both rhetoric, or none of the above. Furthermore, a generic understanding of this rhetoric could enable a closer examination of the argumentative development of gay Christians.

However, critics should ensure that this investigation does not obscure the differences among particular rhetorical acts within the potential genre of gay Christian rhetoric. As Jamieson notes, genres can evolve. She writes that “genres should not be viewed as static forms but as evolving phenomena. One should approach study of genres with a Darwinian rather than a Platonic perspective. While traditional genres may color rhetoric they do not ossify it. Rhetors perpetually modify genres.”<sup>17</sup> Walter Fisher echoes

Jamieson's argument. He cautions rhetorical critics against relying solely on generic forms because the critic might miss distinctive qualities in particular rhetorics.<sup>18</sup> For instance, a critic might overlook the many distinct ways that gay Christians and other liberal Christians have responded to the "texts of terror." There are also significant differences in how queer and liberal readers of the Bible develop and articulate their arguments. It would be unfortunate if a genre of queer Christian rhetoric did not account for such distinctions. Another potential problem with developing this genre would be if a critic assumed that because a rhetor was a queer Christian that that rhetor's rhetoric was necessarily a part of the queer Christian genre. A generic study of queer Christian rhetoric could be illuminating, but the critic should be cognizant of these potential drawbacks.

Studying both queer and liberal readings is essential, because they develop in distinct ways and potentially reinforce each other. For instance, upon initial survey, it would appear as if queer readings of the Bible can function to augment the persuasiveness of liberal readings and liberal hermeneutical approaches. When traditionalists respond to queer readings of the Bible, they engage in a hermeneutical approach that is similar to the liberal hermeneutical approach that undermines the "texts of terror." For example, to respond to the argument that David and Jonathan were a same-sex couple, traditionalists argue that the word "love" that David uses in his lament for Jonathan does not necessarily imply sexual connotations, because there are other instances in the Bible where it does not.<sup>19</sup> Yet, this is the same hermeneutical technique that liberal Christians use to respond to traditional Leviticus arguments when they argue that abomination means ritualistically unclean because that is what it means at other

places in the Bible.<sup>20</sup> Thus, when traditionalists respond to queer arguments, they justify and use approaches that liberals take to undermine traditional arguments. In this view, queer arguments function not to prove that the Bible affirms homosexuality, but to undermine the interpretative stance of those who argue that the Bible condemns homosexuality. Therefore, queer and liberal arguments complement each other because the queer approach forces traditionalists to use liberal hermeneutical techniques—an act that justifies the use of those techniques.

### **Final Remarks**

This thesis disrupts traditional understandings of debates over gay rights. Too often, the discourse surrounding gay rights pits Christians against homosexuals and precludes the possibility of gay Christians. By examining the rhetoric of gay Christians, the proceeding chapters illustrate that the discussions concerning gay rights are more complex than the simplistic assumption that Christians believe the Bible condemns homosexuality. This thesis has enhanced rhetorical understanding of gay rights rhetoric by examining queer and liberal interpretations of the Bible and how individuals deploy those two interpretations publically.

This thesis therefore answers Charles Morris' call for the construction of a queer archive. He argues that "the history of GLBTQ discourse must be acknowledged, and engaged, and taught, and written about—in short, circulated—with the same increasingly felt obligation that attends discourses of race and gender in our [scholarship]."<sup>21</sup> This thesis attends to the discourse of gay individuals, but this thesis also adds another shelf in the queer archive by analyzing gay Christian rhetoric. By filling the archive with new works, I enable it to affect more individuals such as individuals who are resolving the

tensions between their sexual and religious identities. As Morris has indicated, queer archives are moving for queer individuals and “affect [them] viscerally, evoking deep yearning and defiant purpose.”<sup>22</sup> By acknowledging and engaging the rhetoric of queer Christians, I allow the archive to affect gay Christians in a similar manner. As Dana Cloud has noted, “a gay student might feel more confident and self-affirming on finding out that an admired historical figure was gay or lesbian. There is a powerful sense in which breaking historical silences makes a significant contribution to criticism, pedagogy, and politics.”<sup>23</sup> This thesis therefore may allow gay Christian readers to feel more confident in their identities even as it breaks historical silences surrounding the Bible and homosexuality.

As such, this thesis, and the queer archive in general, operates similarly to feminist historiography in that it is also a consciousness-raising rhetoric. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell argues that “consciousness-raising is the thread that links the recovery of texts, their recuperation through criticism, and the extraction of theoretical principles” in feminist historiography.<sup>24</sup> According to Campbell, the recovery stage of feminist historiography “mimics the effort to share women’s experiences” in consciousness-raising rhetoric.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, I believe that in Morris’ call for a queer archive is also a call for the recovery of rhetorical artifacts that share the experiences of queer individuals. My thesis brings a similar, yet distinct, process of recovery by sharing the experiences of queer Christian individuals. For example, by illuminating the debate between traditional, liberal, and queer readers of the Bible, this thesis allows gay Christians to hear the words of others who affirm their identity. Also, by sharing how Vines came to understand his

gay Christian identity, this thesis also shares gay Christian experiences in a manner that is akin to consciousness-raising.

Yet, it is important to remember that our archives are not merely collections of relics of the past as these artifacts continue to have material impacts on people here and now.<sup>26</sup> Congregations are still embroiled in battles about homosexuality. Gays and lesbians are still excommunicated and excluded from church as Vines was. Women still bravely bring stones to city council meetings. Protesters still claim “God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.” Queer individuals are still called sodomites. Many still view the Bible as condemning homosexuals, and homosexuals and Christians alike accept this as fact. The discourse of those who believe that homosexuality and Christianity are incompatible actively *negates* gay Christians.<sup>27</sup>

Rhetorical critics are well positioned to challenge this negation of gay Christians. Rhetorical critics must do so to ensure that we do not reinforce the same binary that current public discourse creates. When we theorize about religious rhetoric, we should not assume that that rhetoric cannot be accessed by queer rhetors. Similarly, when we theorize about queer rhetoric, we should not assume that Christians do not use those rhetorics. If we were to make those assumptions, then we too would be guilty of negating gay Christians as public discourse often is. I do not mean to argue that all queers are Christians and all Christians are queers. Certainly, that is not the case. However, if we exclusively study Christian and queer rhetoric separately, we limit the potential of our scholarship and negate individuals who identify as queer Christians.

To prevent limitation and negation, we must continue using criticism to recuperate rhetorical texts and theory. In this thesis, I use two contemporary texts, but

further research should recover historical texts and evaluate those texts in manner that is similar to how I evaluated the texts in this thesis. On this matter, Campbell writes that “recuperation . . . requires the analytical and interpretive works of critics.”<sup>28</sup> As critics interpret recovered texts, they must develop, challenge, and alter rhetorical theories that allow them to understand the rhetoric of marginalized groups. As Campbell notes, these investigations therefore function “as a process of recovery from and resistance to traditional ways of seeing the world and partly as a stimulus to the development of new theory,” which enables the critic to begin to understand the “nature and causes” of oppression.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, to prevent the negation of gay Christians in our scholarship, our criticism in part must be cognizant that the gay Christian has experienced marginalization by discourse that situates Christianity in opposition to homosexuality. If our criticism acknowledges this, then it will not only not negate the gay Christian, but also generate theory and understanding about queer Christians’ rhetoric and their oppression.

In writing this thesis, therefore, I once again follow, yet complicate, one of Morris’ suggestions. He indicates that “we must listen not only for eloquent and disciplinary silences, but also for unconventional resistive articulations, muteness that articulated complicity in relations of power, and those powerful discourses that gave voice to the otherwise mute. And those multiple silences and voices puzzle for us the stakes involved in our modes of inquiry.”<sup>30</sup> In this spirit, this thesis listens to those who challenge traditional readings of the Bible by resisting powerful discourses that state homosexuality is a sin and that a homosexual cannot be a Christian. Those liberal and queer biblical readers voice arguments and identities that might otherwise remain silent.

This thesis therefore listens to voices that break silence and, in that process, the project itself also breaks silence.

This investigation also avoids Cloud's criticism concerning how the queer archive could be deployed. In particular, Cloud has argued that queer memory scholarship should not seek to "out" individual closeted historical figures, but instead seek to "circulate new meaning of their private and public lives in order to shape how they are remembered and to encourage public reflection on the conditions of possibility for particular kinds of identities to be intelligible in public."<sup>31</sup> Cloud also argues that the project of outing historical figures and creating visibility does not go far enough. In her concluding thoughts, she writes:

In acts of civil disobedience, queer people in cities across the United States are lining up to demand marriage licensees . . . this is the kind of instrumental project to which our work should be connected. We ought not settle for scandalous visibility when there are major instrumental projects—including equal rights and protection in the workplace and in private life and a real fight against AIDS—that need real advocates, not mysterious figures from the past.<sup>32</sup>

While there are elements of this thesis that could be characterized as creating visibility such as its attention to the queer arguments about David and Jonathan, and Ruth and Naomi, this thesis also involves a major instrumental project—the project of queer inclusion in Christian denominations. Because traditionalists have been opponents of non-discrimination ordinances in public deliberations, discussing how liberal and queer Christians counter traditionalists can also serve Cloud's instrumental project by



equipping rhetors with arguments they can deploy in public discourse to respond to traditionalists' arguments.

Even so, there is much more to be done. This thesis provides insight but is only a beginning. As Morris writes, "To make such an indelible mark on the public record and public discourse requires tireless cruising in vexed pursuit of the elusive artifacts of our queer histories. The paths of recovery and preservation are long and arduous, and any achievement that comes from treading them is aptly figured by those memorable words of the elderly woman who walked Montgomery for the sake of racial justice: 'My feet [sic] is tired, but my soul is at rest.'"<sup>33</sup> This thesis is only a beginning of an arduous pursuit of queer Christian rhetorical texts. I am not yet tired, and my soul is not yet at rest. I know that "those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."<sup>34</sup>

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Wilson, *Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus and the Bible*, (New York: HarpersCollins Publishers, Inc., 1995), 94. Wilson borrows the term “texts of terror” from Phyllis Tribble who uses the term to refer to biblical texts that are oppressive towards women. See Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life & Times of Harvey Milk*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 49.

<sup>3</sup> Tina Fetner, “Working Anita Bryant: The Impact of Christian Anti-Gay Activism on Lesbian and Gay Movement Claims,” *Social Problems* 48.3 (2001), 411-428.

<sup>4</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, (Los Angeles, CA: Somiotext, 2001). Also, see Arthur E. Walzer, “Parrēsia, Foucault, and the Classical Rhetorical Tradition,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 43:1 (2013), 1-21, and Pat J. Gehrke, Susan C. Jarratt, Bradford Vivian, and Arthur E. Walzer, “Forum on Arthur Walzer’s ‘Parrēsia, Foucault, and the Classical Rhetorical Tradition,’” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 43:4 (2013), 355-381.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Leff, and Ebony A. Utley, “Instrumental and Constitutive Rhetoric in Martin Luther King Jr.’s ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail,’” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 7.1 (2004), 47.

<sup>6</sup> See Darsey, James, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*, (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 177, 184, and 206.

<sup>7</sup> Chelsea Link, “Six Verses: A Conversation with Matthew Vines,” published on April 18, 2012, accessed on March 9, 2014, <<http://nonprophetstatus.com/2012/04/18/six-verses-a-conversation-with-matthew-vines/>>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Krista McQueeney, “‘We are God’s Children, Y’All:’ Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Lesbian- and Gay-Affirming Congregations,” *Social Problems* 56.1, (2009): 156.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Vines, “The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality,” March 10, 2012, accessed on September 7, 2013, YouTube, <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezQjNJUSraY&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezQjNJUSraY&feature=player_embedded)>.

<sup>11</sup> Wilson, 64.

<sup>12</sup> Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “Femininity and feminism: To be or not to be woman,” *Communication Quarterly* 31:2 (1983), 101-108.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>14</sup> Kathleen M. Hall Jamieson, "Generic Constraints and the Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 6.3 (1973), 162.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 168.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 168.

<sup>18</sup> Walter R. Fisher, "Genre: Concepts and Applications in Rhetorical Criticism," *The Western Journal of Speech Communication* 44 (1980), 293.

<sup>19</sup> S. Michael Houdmann, "What was the relationship between David and Jonathan?," accessed on March 17, 2014, <<http://www.gotquestions.org/David-and-Jonathan.html>>.

<sup>20</sup> Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg, "Modern Day Moabites: The Bible and the Debate About Same-Sex Marriage," *Biblical Interpretation* 16 (2008), 457.

<sup>21</sup> Charles E. Morris, "Archival Queer," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9.1 (2006), 149.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>23</sup> Dana L. Cloud, "The First Lady's Privates: Queering Eleanor Roosevelt for Public Address Studies," in *Queering Public Address: Sexualities in American Historical Discourse*, ed. Charles E. Morris III (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 23-24.

<sup>24</sup> Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Consciousness-Raising: Linking Theory, Criticism, and Practice," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31.1 (2002), 45.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>26</sup> For this thesis, the "here and now" refers to March of 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Philip Wander refers to the third persona as an audience that is not present in a text. He writes, "The Third Persona . . . refers to being negated. But 'being negated' includes not only being alienated through language—the 'it' that is the summation of all that you and I are told to avoid becoming, but also being negated in history, a being whose presence, though relevant to what is said, is negated through silence." See Philip Wander, "The Third Persona: An Ideological Turn in Rhetorical Theory," *Central States Speech Journal* 35 (1984), 210. Gay Christians are told both by Christians and homosexuals that they should avoid the other part of themselves. Christians tell gay Christians that they should

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not be gay, and homosexuals tell gay Christians that they should not be Christian. The presence of gay Christians is also silenced when discourse situates Christianity as being opposed to Christianity.

<sup>28</sup> Campbell, "Consciousness-Raising: Linking Theory, Criticism, and Practice," 59.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 59-60.

<sup>30</sup> Charles E. Morris, "Introduction," in *Queering Public Address: Sexualities in American Historical Discourse*, ed. Charles E. Morris III (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>31</sup> Cloud, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>33</sup> Morris, "Archival Queer," 148. In the quote, Morris is citing Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," in *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Signet Books, 1964), 94.

<sup>34</sup> Isaiah 40:31, New International Version.

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## CURRICULM VITA

Joshua Miller  
13985 Ridgewood Dr.  
Holland, MI 49424  
(616) 738-8597  
josh.h.miller08@gmail.com

### Education

University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
M.A., Communication Studies (Rhetoric) '14  
Committee: Sara VanderHaagen (chair), Thomas Burkholder, David Henry,  
Gregory Borchard (Journalism and Media Studies)  
Thesis: *The Rhetoric of Gay Christians: Matthew Vines and Reverend Nancy  
Wilson as Exemplars*  
Current GPA: 3.96

Michigan State University  
B.A., Social Relations and Policy '12  
Senior Paper Advisor: Illana Blumberg (English). Senior Seminar Advisor: Anna  
Pegler-Gordon (American Studies)  
GPA: 3.42

West Ottawa High School  
Honors Diploma '08  
GPA: 3.96

### Conference Presentations

“\_\_\_\_\_”: Silence and the Vagina Battle of Michigan.” Competitively  
selected, Rhetoric Society of America Convention, San Antonio, TX, 2014.

Josh Miller, Carly Sorenson, Erin Sahlstein Parcell, and Theresa Boucher, “Why'd You  
Post That?": Family Conflict and Facebook.” Competitively selected,  
Interpersonal Communication Interest Group, Western States Communication  
Association, Anaheim, California, 2014.

“Responding to anti-gay face attacks: Towards a more holistic impoliteness theory.”  
Panel paper presentation competitively selected by the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual,  
Transgender, and Queer Communication Studies Division, National  
Communication Association Convention, Washington, D.C., 2013.

### Awards and Scholarships

Chancellor's Fellowship Award, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	'14
Greenspun College Research Symposium Participant	'14
Department of Communication Studies Travel Funding Award, UNLV	'14
Graduate & Professional Student Association Travel Funding Award, UNLV	'14
Lambda Pi Eta Membership	'13
Dean's Associates Travel Funding Award, UNLV	'13
Department of Communication Studies Travel Funding Award, UNLV	'13
Graduate Assistantship, UNLV	'12-13
Dean's List, MSU	'08-12
Debate Team Scholarship, MSU	'09-11
Advanced Placement Scholar with Honor	'08
State of Michigan Merit Scholarship Award	'08

### Teaching Experience

#### *University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

Seminar on "Teaching the Basic Course" by Dr. David Zarefsky, University of Nevada,  
Las Vegas, Spring 2013

#### Guest Lecturer

Argumentation Theory Course, J. Thompson, Spring 2014  
Public Memory and Rhetoric Course, S. VanderHaagen, Fall 2013  
Rhetoric of Women's Rights Course, T. Burkholder, Fall 2013

#### Instructor of Record

Communication Studies 101: Introduction to Public Speaking  
Summer Session Two 2013, Section 2 (21 students)

#### Graduate Assistant

I was the lab instructor in a course that had both lectures and lab sessions throughout the semester. My responsibilities included creating lesson plans for lab days, leading lab activities, and grading speeches.

#### Communication Studies 101: Introduction to Public Speaking

Spring 2014, Section 32 (26 students)  
Fall 2013, Section 36 (25 students)  
Spring 2013, Section 10 (24 students)  
Spring 2013, Section 22 (25 students)

Fall 2012, Section 36 (24 students)

Research Experience

*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

Research Assistant to Dr. Erin Sahlstein Parcell

I coded data for Dr. Erin Sahlstein Parcell's military families study. She currently plans to seek publication with this data set.

Debate Work Experience

Office Assistant, Spartan Debate Institutes	'13-
Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI	
Assistant Debate Coach, University of Nevada, Las Vegas	'12-14
Instructor, Traverse City Central High School Debate Institute	'12
Traverse City, MI	
Assistant Debate Coach, Traverse City Central High School	'12
Resident Assistant, Spartan Debate Institutes	'09-12
Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI	
Assistant Debate Coach, West Des Moines Valley High School	'10-11
Assistant Debate Coach, West Ottawa High School	'08-09

Departmental Service

UNLV's Public Speaking Contest, Invited Judge, Spring 2014  
UNLV's Public Speaking Contest, Invited Judge, Spring 2013  
UNLV's Public Speaking Contest, Invited Judge, Fall 2012

Other Work Experience

Factory Assembly Worker	'07-08
R-BO, Zeeland, MI	

Volunteer Experience

Judge/Coach, Las Vegas Debate League	'12-14
University of Nevada, Las Vegas,	
Las Vegas, Nevada	

## Tutor

Wainwright Magnet School, Lansing MI	‘11
Speech and Debate Tutor	
Waverly Middle School, Lansing, MI	‘10
History, Geography, and Government Tutor	
Everett High School, Lansing, MI	‘09
History, Geography, and Government Tutor	

## Course Work

Thesis—S. VanderHaagen, T. Burkholder  
Argumentation Theory—J. Thompson  
Rhetoric and Public Memory—S. VanderHaagen  
The Rhetoric of Women’s Rights, 1832-1920—T. Burkholder  
Conflict Management—E. (Sahlstein) Parcell  
Independent Study— S. VanderHaagen, T. Burkholder  
Rhetorical-Critical Research Methods— S. VanderHaagen  
Empirical Research Methods—T. McManus  
Survey of Communication Studies—E. Sahlstein  
Theories of Communication—D. Conley  
College Teaching in Communication—W. Belk