

prohibits some homosexual behavior. Ultimately, Greenberg offers one interpretation for a putatively Orthodox gay man and another for an Orthodox rabbi constrained by tradition. Greenberg's book is the leading entry in the field, though limited in scope to traditional Judaism as seen through an Orthodox lens and largely focused on the Levitical prohibition.

More recent efforts are broader in scope. *Torah Queeries*, an anthology edited by three gay Jewish men, Gregg Drinkwater, Joshua Lesser, and David Shneer, is a diverse collection of sixty LGBT commentaries on the *parashiyot*, the weekly Torah portions, written by a diverse range of authors. Andrew Ramer's *Queering the Text* is an imaginative collection of gay midrash, imagining LGBT characters in the margins of biblical text – not unlike lesbian rabbi Jill Hammer's *Sisters at Sinai*, a collection of tales on marginal biblical women. Jay Michaelson's *God vs. Gay? The Religious Case for Equality* argues that biblical values overwhelmingly affirm sexual diversity, with dozens of biblical citations. Surprisingly, the homoerotic story of David and Jonathan has received only limited attention from Jewish writers (e.g., Greenberg: 99–105; Michaelson: 94–102), despite scholarly studies by Susan Ackerman (2005), Theodore Jennings, David Halperin (1989), Martti Nissinen (1998), and Christian ones by Tom Horner (1978), John Boswell (1995), and others.

In general, engagement with the biblical text is rather limited in contemporary anthologies such as *Queer Jews* (2002), *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question* (2003), or the first anthology about the gay and lesbian Jewish experience, *Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian or Gay and Jewish* (1989). The anthology *Nice Jewish Girls* predated *Twice Blessed* by seven years, but was solely concerned with lesbian Jewish experience. *Twice Blessed* contains an interpretation of the Levitical texts by Rebecca Alpert, and a theological essay by Judith Plaskow, but most of the volume discusses communal aspects of being gay or lesbian and Jewish, not theology or biblical hermeneutics. Perhaps these anthologies take the anti-gay interpretations of biblical texts as a given, and seek to move beyond them. Perhaps they reflect editorial or even commercial priorities. For whatever reason, it is striking that the Bible plays such a small role in the significant output of recent gay and lesbian Jewish writing.

Jewish gay men's interpretation of the Bible is a literature still in its infancy, and one which cannot be separated from LGBT, queer, and feminist hermeneutics, whether written by Jews or non-Jews. Perhaps it is no coincidence that as such writing moves from apologetics to proper hermeneutics, the boundaries which define it are eroding.

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Jay Michaelson

## II. Christianity

Gay Christian men have interpreted the Bible through the lens of their own experiences since at least the early 1960s. The history of this interpretation can be divided into four roughly chronological strands: (1) apologetic; (2) pastoral; (3) queer; and (4) intersectional. For purposes of this article, a "gay man" is defined as a man who has an enduring pattern of romantic, emotional, and/or sexual attraction towards other men.

**1. Apologetic.** The first strand of gay men's biblical interpretation is apologetic. These interpreters wrote primarily with the church and the academy in mind, and they argued that the Bible does not condemn same-sex relationships as we understand them today. In his 1962 article "Homosexual Behavior in the Bible," Robert W. Wood, a gay United Church of Christ minister, examined seventy passages from the Bible relating to homosexual behavior and concluded that anyone who uses the Bible "as the final word" on homosexuality is "misusing the Scriptures" (Wood: 19). In his 1976 book *The Church and the Homosexual*, John J. McNeill, a gay Jesuit priest, argued that "mature homosexual relationships" that are grounded in "fidelity and mutual support" could be interpreted as "fulfilling the positive ideals of Scripture" (McNeill: 66). In 1980,

John Boswell, a gay history professor at Yale University, published his groundbreaking book *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. Closely examining Gen 19, Lev 18: 22, Lev 20: 13, Rom 1: 26–27, 1 Cor 6: 9, and 1 Tim 1: 10, Boswell concluded that there is only “one place” in the Christian Bible in which “homosexual relations per se are clearly prohibited – Leviticus” and that, even there, the larger social context “rendered [the prohibition] inapplicable to the Christian community, at least as moral law” (Boswell: 113). Boswell drew upon the 1955 book *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* by the Anglican priest Derrick Sherwin Bailey, which argued that biblical prohibitions of same-sex acts were primarily reactions by ancient Israel to the idolatry of neighboring cultures. Subsequent to Boswell, other gay or bisexual male scholars such as L. William Countryman, Theodore W. Jennings, and Dale B. Martin have engaged in pro-gay readings of the Bible, including biblical passages relating to same-sex relationships.

**2. Pastoral.** The second strand of gay men's biblical interpretation is pastoral. These interpreters wrote primarily to gay Christians who were struggling to reconcile their same-sex attractions – and their sexual acts – with their faith. The writers assured their readers that homosexuality was not incompatible with Christianity. In 1972, Troy Perry, the founder of the gay-affirming Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) denomination, published his autobiography, *The Lord Is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay*. Citing Matt 11: 28 and other biblical passages, Perry concludes that the Bible only condemns those “areas of destructive, excessive lust” and not the “sex drive that [God] has created in me” (Perry: 140). In the 1990s, a number of gay-affirming books were published by gay ministers from a variety of Christian denominations: *Just As I Am* by Robert Williams, an Episcopal priest; *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality* by Daniel A. Helminiak, a Roman Catholic priest; and *The Good Book* by Peter Gomes, the Pusey Minister of the Memorial Church at Harvard University. According to Gomes, the resistance by many Protestant evangelicals to homosexuality is “not about the Bible or texts,” but rather our collective cultural “squeamishness” about sex. As such, “more rather than less attention must be given to how we read the scriptures” (Gomes: 166). Other pastoral resources by gay Christian ministers include the 1994 book *The Word Is Out*, a collection of gay-affirming daily reflections on the Bible by Chris Glaser, an MCC minister.

**3. Queer.** The third strand of gay men's biblical interpretation is queer. Writing in a self-consciously transgressive manner that “challenges and disrupts the status quo” (Cheng 2011: 6), these interpreters are less interested in defending the “goodness” of same-sex acts or providing pastoral validation to gay Christians. Rather, they are more

focused on how the Bible can speak to the diverse experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Christians in surprising, playful, unexpected, and even shocking ways. For example, in his 2001 essay “Cruising as Methodology,” Timothy Koch analogizes the act of reading the Bible to how gay men seek out sexual partners by cruising for sex:

The only real motivations for even taking the time and energy to cruise then are because we want to, because we can, and because it is something we enjoy! (Koch: 175)

A leading gay male exponent of the queer strand of biblical interpretation is Robert Shore-Goss, an MCC minister. In his 1993 book *Jesus Acted Up*, Shore-Goss proposes a queer biblical hermeneutic that includes a “subversive memory of those who have suffered and died from oppression” (Goss 1993: 110). Goss has coedited two volumes of queer readings of the Bible: *Take Back the Word* and *The Queer Bible Commentary*. The latter work is the first biblical commentary that interprets the books of Genesis through Revelation through the lenses of LGBT people. Another key exponent of the queer strand of biblical interpretation is Ken Stone, a gay professor of Bible and the academic dean of Chicago Theological Seminary. Stone has written, edited, or coedited a number of volumes including: *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*; *Practicing Safer Texts*; and *Bible Trouble*. According to Stone, this strand of interpretation is not just about “queering” the biblical texts. Rather, the biblical narratives are intrinsically chaotic, and “the Bible is always already queer” (Hornsby/Stone: xii–xiii).

**4. Intersectional.** The fourth and final strand of gay men's biblical interpretation is intersectional. Drawing from the notion of intersectionality developed by black feminist theorists such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, these interpreters are not just interested in reading the Bible from the perspective of gay men, but also in exploring how other identities – e.g., race, ethnicity, and national origin – intersect with gayness. For example, Patrick S. Cheng, a gay Asian American professor at the Episcopal Divinity School, has proposed a queer Asian American biblical hermeneutic of multiplicity in his 2002 article “Multiplicity and Judges 19.” Similarly, Manuel Villalobos has written about reading the Bible as a gay Latino man in his 2011 article “Bodies *Del Otro Lado* Finding Life and Hope in the Borderland.” For Villalobos, an intersectional biblical hermeneutic that privileges the “dislocated and ambiguous people who live in borderlands” can help gay men of color like himself to experience God's “miracles of conversion and inclusion” (Villalobos: 218).

Possible future directions for the development of an intersectional biblical hermeneutic include the intersections of gay male experience with issues such as disability, interfaith dialogue, and the cross-

ing of transnational borders. Other possible resources include secular theoretical frameworks such as postcolonial theory and queer of color critique.

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### III. Islam

Passages in the Qurʾān regarding the prophet Lot (e.g., S 26:160–173; 27:54–58; 29:28–34) are partly parallels to the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:1–29). Traditionally, these texts have been interpreted as a ban on sexual relationships between men. However, the American convert to Islam, Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, has applied principles of interpreting these and other texts in a fresh way, and these are widely supported by progressive Muslim gays (Kugle 2003, 2010; Yip). He states that a sexuality-sensitive interpretation of the Qurʾān should take into account the sexual orientation of all its readers – gays as well as straights. This strategy complements and supports gender-sensitive interpretations that have paved the way for Islamic feminism, as well as race- and class-sensitive interpretations. His approach is based on ethical principles such as the dignity of all human beings, non-discriminatory justice and diversity according to how God has created humanity, as well as the understanding that ideal relationships are based upon love between individuals, family members, and sexual partners. Accordingly, scripture should be interpreted in the light of observed experience, scientific exploration, and sound reasoning regarding human nature. It should also affirm the integrity of the Qurʾān by interpreting the specific in light of the whole, rather than taking the specific

in isolation, as well as bearing in mind the original context in which the Qurʾān was revealed. The interpretation itself is an ongoing process that will never be complete (Kugle 2010: 41–42).

If gay men apply these principles and tools in interpreting the Lot texts, it can be shown how the emphasis in the texts is upon condemnation of violent sexuality and criticism of men for leaving their own wives in order to rape men. In the Qurʾānic account Lot seems to offer his own daughters in order to avoid same-gender relationships (S 11:78; 15:68–71), though Kugle argues that, from an Islamic point of view, a prophet never would offer his own daughters to be raped. As he sees it, Lot does no more than make a sarcastic comparison to show that rape is wrong, whoever is being misused: “On the surface, he (Lot) may appear to talk about the correct gender for men’s sexual orientation, but in reality he is preaching that both men and women deserve protection from rape and humiliation” (Kugle 2010: 56). The fact that Lot’s wife was punished for being involved in the immorality that ensued (S 7:83) implies that this immorality could not have been men’s sexual relationship with men (Kugle 2010: 49–63). Generally, an Islamic principle of equity, equality, and freedom for the oppressed is central in the argumentation (Eidhamar; Kugle 2010: 1–6, 33).

To a large extent, the same principles of befriending and queering the texts are shared by Christian gays in their way of interpreting the Bible, including the texts related to the story of Lot (Yip).

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### IV. Literature

The Bible’s influence in the articulation and regulation of relations between males extends beyond the cloister into literary culture. In the Old English *Beowulf* (see “Beowulf”), for example – written as Christianity gained a foothold in England – Lord Hrothgar’s “secret longing” (“dyrn langao” [line 1879]) for the eponymous Geat contrasts with the appetites of an enemy descended from the biblical Cain (line 105). Despite the tone, Hrothgar’s desire is for an heir not a lover: a warrior who will establish a new heroic line (Clark). This is not to force the text to suit heterosexual presumptions, but to