

# Review of: "Christian Ethical Perspective on Sexual Orientation and Sexual Behavior"

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## Review of "Christian Ethical Perspective on Sexual Orientation and Sexual Behavior"

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How contemporary Christianity deals with issues of sexual diversity is of central importance. It is therefore good to have this submission from Daniel Dei, which makes a number of valuable points. In particular, I agree with a central premise of the submission, namely that "Sexual orientation, inclination, attraction, and sexual acts, behaviors, or practices are acutely connected" (p3) and "It is, therefore, inconsistent for a Christian community to strictly condemn sexual behaviors in same-sex relations while tolerating homoeroticism" (p8). I like the point made about judgment based upon outward appearance (p7). I do, though, disagree with his conclusion, most clearly presented in the final two paragraphs. From a theological perspective, this no doubt says something about how he and I differ in the ways in which we read the scriptures and understand how human appreciations of God's revelation can change over time (e.g., Reiss, 1990). From a pastoral perspective, I disagree with the conclusion that "Like all other sins, non-heterosexual orientation and behaviors are unacceptable in Christian circles" (p8).

There are a number of other ways in which I feel the submission could be strengthened. The phrase "the LGBTQIA+ community" is used somewhat unquestioningly. Is this really a community? Why are intersex individuals included in the acronym (though not mentioned in the text)? There is a growing literature on Christian understandings of intersex issues (e.g., Cornwall, 2013) and it would be good to see this reflected. Equally, trans issues do not feature here but raise theological issues (e.g., Mann, 2014). I found the concept of "sexual identity" to be potentially valuable but I wasn't quite clear precisely what was meant by it; at times it seemed to be used to mean the same as 'sexual orientation' (though the phrase "sexual orientation identity" is also used).

A lot of the writing could be more precise. For example, in the first paragraph of the Introduction, we read "Consequently, the acceptance of sexual expressions like homosexuality and bisexuality is increasingly becoming a concern in 21st-century society". But, of course, it is not becoming a concern to everyone, quite the opposite. Similarly, we are told "However, faith communities generally find these demands disturbing" (second paragraph of Introduction), yet the first

data we are given – “A survey by the Pew Research Center in 2015 revealed that 62% of Protestant denominations favor LGBTQIA+, 33% were against LGBTQIA+” suggests to me that “generally” is not the right word. What is meant by “paternalized” in “Sexual thoughts refer to mental images of interesting sexual behaviors. Sexual fantasy is a paternalized sexual thought that induces sexual arousal” (p4)? A reference is provided but I can’t see the word “paternalized” when I consult it. To give a further example, I do not find the use of “stereotyped” in the Abstract and Introduction to be clear. And is it really the case that the practice of asexuality is seen “as a contradiction of conventional Christian faith and practice” (p2)?

The submission could do with careful copy editing. Consider just the first two sentences of the Introduction: “Sexual expressions determine nearly all issues about the relationship between the genders. It shapes people’s identities”. For a start, the phrase “sexual expressions” may be misunderstood. The first hit I get for the phrase in Google begins “When people discuss sex in English, they use certain sexual expressions that anyone familiar with sex understands. The most common and very appropriate sexual expression that should be used when talking about sex is to have sex” (Whiteley, 2017) but this is not how the term is used in this submission. Then “the relationship” has problems – the use of the definite article is odd and why is “relationship” in the singular. Finally, in “It shapes people’s identities”, to what does ‘It’ refer? The singular antecedent noun phrase is “the relationship between the genders” but is this what is meant or does ‘It’ refer to the (plural) phrase “Sexual expressions”? Elsewhere, on a number of occasions, it is difficult to follow why certain material is included in a particular paragraph.

Cornwall, S. (2013). British intersex Christians’ accounts of intersex identity, Christian identity and church experience. *Practical Theology*, 6(2), 220-236. doi:10.1179/1756073X13Z.0000000001

Mann, R. (2014). “Queering” spiritual direction: Towards a trans\*-literary praxis. *Theology & Sexuality*, 20(3), 214-224. doi: 10.1179/1355835815Z.00000000051

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Whiteley, S. (2017). Sexual expressions in English. *QuickSilverTranslate*. <https://quicksilvertranslate.com/4780/sexual-expressions-english/>.