

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

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**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

Review of "Christian Ethical Perspective on Sexual Orientation and Sexual Behavior" by Daniel Dei, Valley View University

Daniel Dei asserts that Christian denominations that condemn homosexual behavior but not homosexual orientation are wrong to do so. He avers that "Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:28 shows that unhealthy sexual orientation is as toxic as unhealthy sexual behavior." (Matt 5:28: "anyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart")

It's not too surprising that Dei takes this perspective, since he works at a university run by the Seventh Day Adventists, who condemn both homosexual activity and relationships. According to Adventist doctrine: "Homosexuality is a manifestation of the disturbance and brokenness in human inclinations and relations caused by the entrance of sin into the world." If that's your starting point for discussing gay relationships, there's not really much need for discussion.

Publishing a Bible-based defense of the conservative position on same-sex relationships is perfectly fine, but it seems misleading to couch it in the language of science. He spends a lot of time discussing "the nature of sexual expression" and "sexual orientation versus sexual behavior" in psychological terms. But his fundamental argument boils down to this: the Bible and some theologians I admire condemn homosexuality, so therefore it's wrong.

The fact is that over the past 70 years there has been a explosion of biblical scholarship asserting that the Bible has little to say about loving same-sex relationships. Evidence has been accumulating that the so-called "clobber" passages from Scripture typically cited by

conservatives to condemn homosexuality are either misinterpreted or irrelevant. Dei falls into this trap. For example, he says that "Arsenokoitai refers explicitly to homosexuals, and they are mentioned among other sinners who need redemption (1 Tim 1:10)." The fact is that the Apostle Paul coined the word "Arsenokoitai," which was not translated as "homosexuals" in Bibles until 1946, and then primarily in English. German-language bibles typically translate it as "men who have sex with young boys."

The story of Sodom, from which we derive the term sodomy, has nothing to do with homosexuality, but has everything to do with maltreatment and domination of the stranger. Other passages that seem to address same-sex eroticism in the ancient world, do tend to be negative about such practices. But there is no evidence that they speak to same-sex relationships of love and mutuality. On the contrary, they speak of pederasty, violations of male honor, or the need to guarantee familial lineage. It's highly likely that the biblical authors had no category like sexual orientation. This implies that continuing opposition by Christian conservatives must be based on something beyond the biblical texts, or their unwillingness to re-examine their hermeneutics of scriptural interpretation.

A strong argument can be made that the Bible read holistically actually supports same-sex relationships. For example, see:

Matthew Vines. *God and The Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (Convergent Books, 2014)

James V. Brownson. *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013)

Dei cites favorably the opposition to homosexuality by Catholics, Adventists, and others as if that were representative of the Christian Church in general. He fails to mention that many Christian denominations (e.g., United Church of Christ, Unitarians, Metropolitan Community Churches) celebrate LGBTQ persons and relationships. Others such as the Episcopal, Methodist, and Lutheran churches are struggling with this issue. But the tide is certainly turning in the direction of inclusion.

Scientific and medical evidence is increasingly pointing to homosexuality as a perfectly natural variant of human (and non-human) sexuality. Christian biblical scholarship and theological reflection, at least in more progressive branches of Christianity, is coming to realize that GLBTQ folks are a full and equal part of God's created reality, and should be fully integrated into the church.