Revisiting and re-evaluating same-sex sexual acts in Christian ethics
– four evaluations and a suggestion

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Abstract
This paper investigates three questions; how an exegetically sound basis for a biblical ethics concerning same-sex sexual acts might be construed, what role the Bible, and other sources of ethical insight, should play in construing Christian ethics, and what a Christian ethic founded on the answers to those questions would say concerning same-sex sexual acts today. To perform these investigations, the hermeneutical issue regarding biblical texts, as well as the relation between revelatory and non-revelatory ethical sources within Christian ethics, is discussed, and the construed Christian ethics concerning same-sex sexual acts and sexuality of Lisa Sowle Cahill, Samuel W. Kunhiyop, Richard B. Hays, and Peter Coleman are evaluated before a suggestion is presented.

That suggestion states that a sound exegetical basis demands a historical-critical reading that aims at understanding the language agreement between first recipients and author(s). It also claims that it is the perspective of the text that should be in focus in forming biblical ethics. Further, it is suggested that the Bible should be considered as having a unique role in Christian ethics by means of supplying a unique perspective on other sources for ethics, as well as on the insights of Scripture itself. This perspective is based on revelation, and should be formed from the central Scriptural notion of imitatio Dei/Christi. The Bible should also be recognized as a unique source of Christian ethical insight. However, an awareness of the impossibility of perfect understanding of Scripture opens the need for a dialog with other sources of ethical insight, such as experience, tradition, and secular reason, through which they are able to play a role in construing Christian ethics.

Finally, the Christian ethics concerning same-sex sexual acts holds such acts to be in need of a discriminating division between good and bad; those that are performed within a loving and caring relationship and those that are not. The former are tentatively commended based on an understanding of the clearly encouraged homosocial love they might result of, as well as positive human experience, while the latter are vehemently condemned because of their damaging nature to one or both of the people involved.
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1. Introduction

In the spring of 2015, there was a debate in one of the national Christian newspapers in Sweden concerning same-sex sexual acts. 22 pastors wrote that it was their duty to be true to the teachings of the Bible and tell homosexual men and women that to practice homosexuality was sinful.¹ Some ten years ago, another pastor was prosecuted for hate speech after saying that homosexuality was a “cancer to society” and might lead to sex with animals.² He was freed from charges, since the court did not find itself able to claim with certainty that the pastor was not presenting a legitimate reading of what he considered a holy text, an integral part of his religion. He could in effect not be convicted, since a conviction could, in the eyes of the court, infringe on his religious freedom.³

When that took place, I was merely 12 years old and not able to participate in the debate. However, last spring I did write a short answer to the pastors,⁴ criticizing them from an exegetical point of view. I found myself in a position to do so since I was writing a one year master thesis on one of the verses they were using to support their claim (First Corinthians 6:9). The debate however got me thinking about Christian ethics, the Bible, and exegetics. Were the pastors right in “calling it as they saw it” concerning same-sex sexual acts, even if the exegetical foundation they supplied was quite slim? Was my article relevant in what was more of a discussion on ethics than exegetics? What foundation is there for building Christian ethics with an exegetical awareness? Such questions led me to the present paper, and even though they are not in focus, they linger in the background.

This paper will argue that the Bible, and the imitation of God/Christ, should have a central part in construing Christian ethics, while still holding other sources of ethical insight in dialog with Scripture. Concerning same-sex sexual acts it will be argued that they are not in themselves commended or condemned in the Bible, while however love between people of the same sex is commended and exploitative and/or in other ways deliberately damaging sexual acts are condemned. Christian ethics should then follow suite, and by integrating different sources of ethical insight (primarily experience), we will attain a demarcation between damaging sexual acts and those based on mutual care and love, where the latter are tentatively commended and the former vehemently condemned. It will also be clear that further studies, not least into Christian tradition, the relevant biblical verses, the secular sciences, and the relation between Scripture and other sources of ethical insight, is relevant for a more thorough construction (and for testing the presented suggestions) than is possible given the limitations of this paper.

¹ http://www.dagen.se/debatt/bibeln-tydlig-om-homosexualitet-1.349464 (seen 20/4-2016).
³ https://www.advokatsamfundet.se/Advokaten/Tidningsnummer/2011/Nr-72011-Argang77/Fakta-Ake-Green-malet/ (seen 20/4-2016)
⁴ http://www.dagen.se/debatt/%C3%A4r-bibeln-verkligen-tydlig-om-homosexualitet-1.350998 (seen 20/4-2016).
Aim and problem of the study

The aim of this study will be to examine how an exegetically sound basis for a biblical ethics could be construed, what role the Christian Bible and biblical ethics should play in the construction of Christian ethics, the relation between revelation and other sources of ethical insight in Christian ethics, and finally, how, given the answers to these questions, a Christian ethic concerning contemporary same-sex sexual acts might be construed. This paper, then, will have both an abstract-theoretical part and a constructive, concrete-practical part. The reasons for choosing the specific subject of same-sex sexual acts for the constructive part of the paper are twofold. First, it is a subject in which I have some previous experience of the exegetical questions, and second, it is (relatively) easy to limit in terms of relevant passages (however still spanning over 15 verses).

Few will likely find it hard to discern the relevance of a study of this sort, since the discussion on Christian ethics in general and its relation to same-sex sexuality in particular is a discussion that is constantly recurring. However, I find this paper motivated also from another scholarly point of view. Scholars writing about Christian ethics will often (perhaps always) make references to the Christian Bible, but there seems to me to be quite different ways in which the texts are understood and appropriated. I hope to highlight how texts are sometimes at risk of being silenced and used not to influence the reader and the ethics s/he creates, but to support what ethical positions the reader already holds to be true. While such a reading is not necessarily wrong, I still find it important that the text is allowed to be heard in its own right – I will in this paper develop both how and why such a process, in my view, should be performed.

It will not be possible, within the scope of this paper, to supply a comprehensive, thorough account of the Christian tradition with regards to same-sex sexual acts. What I will do is instead to discuss the relation between the Bible and other sources usually considered relevant in construing Christian ethics, and then I will construe a tentative Christian ethics concerning same-sex sexual acts. Since the relation between revelation and other sources of ethical insight will be dealt with prior to that, the construed ethics will be equipped with “criteria” for how it might be altered given, as an example, some strand of tradition or secular reason that I have not taken into account. I hope

5 Defined here as containing the books approved by Orthodox Churches, Roman-Catholics, and most Protestant Churches alike.
6 I will, in this paper, use the term "same-sex sexual acts” and such to describe the sexual acts between people of the same biological sex without including inclination or preference. In an attempt to escape the contemporary connotations of the word "homosexuality" and its derivatives, I will not use it unless I am discussing the contemporary world. I will also place it within brackets when it is used by an author that I am discussing, since our differing contexts make this quite central term open to different interpretations depending on the reader. Of course, "same-sex sexual acts” is not without its problems either. I have noted in a previous paper that it risks implying and applying a kind of scientific language that is completely foreign to the ancient world. However, I am yet to find a solution I find to be better, and until then I do I will use this term.
7 Note, then, that while one might not agree with, say, the exegetical conclusions, one might still agree with the process and perspectives argued.
thereby to supply a framework for new interpretations and constructions, where the importance of a thorough exegesis is combined with a thorough understanding of the construction of ethics.

Questions

- How could an exegetically sound basis for a biblical ethics concerning same-sex sexual acts be construed?
- What role should the Bible, tradition, experience, and secular reason play in constructing Christian ethics?
- What would a Christian ethic founded on the answers to the aforementioned questions say concerning same-sex sexual acts today?

Materials

In order to answer these questions, I will engage in critical conversations with a few selected scholars who have written about biblical and Christian ethics, the interpretation of texts, the relation between different sources of ethics, and Christian ethics concerning same-sex sexual acts. By doing so, I will be able to construe and argue my own position. Many scholars have not dealt with all of these issues, but are specialized in one or two of them. However, there are a few who have dealt with them all. Among these are Lisa Sowle Cahill, Richard B. Hays, Peter Coleman, and Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, and these four will be in focus in this paper. Cahill, who I will discuss based on two of her books – *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics* (1996) and *Between the sexes* (1985) – can be said to represent a western, feminist perspective. She is a defining voice of Roman-catholic feminism at the moment, and has written more than these books on the subject at hand. However, these seem to be her “main works” in the area (if one can talk about such),\(^8\) so therefore I will focus on them. Kunhiyop (*African Christian Ethics* 2008) supplies a contemporary perspective (one of many, of course) from South Africa, where he holds a position as Head of the Postgraduate School at the South African Theological Seminar. He was educated in Oregon and Illinois, but clearly states as his aim to create an *African* Christian ethics. He is also a minister of the Evangelical Church of West Africa. I find it valuable to include him here since I have yet to find a non-Western perspective on the present issues discussed by other Western scholars, which is needed given the fact that Christianity has become a primarily African- and South American- based religion.

In Hays (*The Moral Vision of the New Testament* 1996), a moderately conservative New Testament (NT) scholar, we find the most thorough investigation of NT ethics examined for this

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\(^8\) Judging from which works are most frequently referred to by Hans-Erik Nordin *Bibeln i kristen etik: en analys av olika uppfattningar om relationen mellan Bibeln och kristen etik* Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 1999, especially 93-121.
paper. It has been called a “landmark study”, and offers an exegetical exposé that is not found in the other scholars, which makes in quite valuable to me in forming my own position. To find such a thorough investigation of the NT in Hays is no surprise given that when he wrote the presented work he held a position as professor of the New Testament at Duke University Divinity School.

Finally, we have Coleman (Gay Christians – A Moral Dilemma 1989), who I find to represent a moderately liberal western perspective. At the time of writing the book, Coleman was bishop of Crediton, Devon, and his book is not aimed at scholars but as a guide to the discussion on same-sex sexuality within the (Anglican) church. Therefore, it presents a somewhat different perspective and way of writing, while still engaging in the discussions that the other scholars also undertake. He is then an interesting representative of a perspective aimed at people living in congregations that deal with same-sex sexuality and Christian ethics, and not at scholars studying it.

These four scholars all reach different conclusions regarding the matter of same-sex sexuality, coming from more or less differing perspectives on how the Bible should and/or can be used in Christian ethics, and its relation to other possible sources of ethical insight. They will therefore supply quite a wide range of perspectives, speaking geographically as well as confessionally and scholarly. In one way they could be read as supplementary to each other; for instance, while Hays deals quite extensively with the exegetical issue but pays less attention to motivating the importance of the Bible in Christian ethics, the other three could be read to fill in the gap, as Hays instead fills in some of the exegetical blanks left by them. In another way, they contrast each other, reaching different conclusions and presenting sometimes widely different perspectives and interpretations, as we will see. These properties make for good discussions, through which I will argue my own perspective. Since I am setting out to undertake a content analysis of each scholar, my reading will not be one of supplementariness but one of contrast.

**Method**

This paper will mainly be built on three pillars. One is the hermeneutical foundation, which will be construed and then used to analyze the scholars in focus of the paper, as well as to supply my own theoretical standpoint and exegetical perspective with a foundation. Such a hermeneutical foundation is not always clearly discussed by scholars, even when it is presupposed, a problem which I hope to highlight later on. I find it relevant to engage in this discussion, since it will show why historical criticism is even considered relevant in this paper in discussing contemporary Christian ethics, and how it is here found to function in understanding a text.


It is important to note that historical criticism is not a single entity. Rather, it is made up of many different methods for understanding a text, with different perspectives and aims. Some focus on the author, some on the text, some on the recipients – and then there are of course different combinations. However, they all have in common the aim to situate the text in its historical context, so that it can be interpreted in light of its contemporary literary and cultural conventions.

The second pillar is a discussion on the relation between revelation (of different sorts) and other possible sources of ethical insight in Christian ethics, a discussion which aims at construing a position that, together with the hermeneutical foundation, will serve as critical perspectives in the third pillar. In that final pillar, I will first conduct a content analysis of the four scholars (respectively), and then critically discuss them using the aforementioned perspectives. The content analysis will, for the sake of comprehensiveness, be focused on the three questions of this paper, which naturally results in the critical analysis also being focused on them.

Drawing on these three pillars, a building will be construed, consisting in part of my own solutions to the problems I find not to have been sufficiently dealt with by the scholars investigated, or perhaps even dealt with in a substandard way, and in part of ideas these scholars have presented and which I support. I will also undertake a small exegetical discussion concerning relevant verses not discussed by the four scholars, and very briefly (given the restricted nature of this paper) give a basic motivation to why I find *imitatio Dei/Christi* to be the most central notion of Scripture, which in turn affects the construction of Christian ethics.

As I will discuss later, interpretation is relevant in all forms of reading. I will argue that the way in which language is understood and regulated in the context of the author and first recipients affects the meaning of the text. This is of course also relevant when reading the four scholars, who all come from different backgrounds. Cahill is writing in North America, as is Hays, but they are not necessarily part of the same interpretive community as she, for example, is primarily an ethicist while he is primarily an exegete. Coleman is writing in an English context from the perspective of a bishop to a faith-community, while Kunhiyop is writing in a South African context but not necessarily with only African recipients in mind. These facts, among many others, influence the way they write, and my context as a student in Sweden affects my understanding of the language.


12 John Joseph Collins, *The Bible after Babel: historical criticism in a postmodern age*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005. 4. In order to keep this paper comprehensive, I will assume that definition as a starting point in the exegetical analysis, instead of going through the different methods of historical criticism one by one.

they use. I will at times note what I find to possibly be cultural influences, but it should be made clear that it is always hard to discern such, especially when being close to the texts; there is a cultural and geographical distance, but due to globalization and the (quite) contemporary nature of the sources, I am close to them in a way that is not the case with, for example, texts from antiquity.

Theory
The hermeneutical foundation of this paper argues that to understand a text, one has to understand the language agreement between author and first recipients,\(^{14}\) since that agreement affects and informs the words and sentences of the text in a fundamental way. To understand this language agreement, one needs to attain as much knowledge as is possible concerning the author(s),\(^{15}\) the first recipients, and the milieu in which they operated. Behind this theory lies the assumption that texts were in most cases more or less understandable to its contemporary communities, and although that assumption is not free from problems, it seems to me to be more reasonable than the opposite. The theory further does not postulate an exact agreement; there are always different readings given that humans are different. Yet, some basic agreement concerning words, syntax, and possible connotations have to be presupposed if we are to be able to see reading and writing as a way of actual communication.\(^{16}\)

Concerning the relation between non-revelatory sources and revelation, there seems to be three different main strands of opinions. The first claims that revelation alone is sufficient for ethical insight and the only real source of it, the second that non-revelatory sources are sufficient and that revelation adds nothing new. The third is found in a position that combines the importance of both kinds of sources – none of them is self-sufficient as a source for ethics, since both of them supply unique ethical insight.\(^{17}\) My position is that in an ethics bearing the name *Christian*, the Bible must have a primary role, while still not being an absolute authority since our understanding of it can never be perfect. The sources of experience, secular reason, and tradition should function in dialog with the Bible.\(^{18}\) In this dialog, the Bible and its ethical insight is seen as supplying a

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\(^{14}\) I avoid the term "readers" and instead use "recipients" since texts were often, in a society where most people were illiterate, read aloud by one person to many, and both the reader and the hearers are important in understanding the language agreement since both were part of it.

\(^{15}\) Since there is often uncertainty as to the authorship of biblical texts, the possibility of multiple authors often cannot be excluded. However, to use the plural term would, I find, imply knowledge of multiple authors, and to always use (s) would disturb the flow of the text. Therefore, I shall use the singular form, but without placing emphasis on the singularity in cases where the author or authors are not known.

\(^{16}\) See Grenholm *Att förstå religion*, 200, stating that a text can generally be seen as a means of communication between people.


\(^{18}\) These three sources will be discussed as "non-revelatory", as opposed to "revelatory". Tradition is hard to categorize since it spans both fields, but I will here place it in the non-revelatory, and discuss revelation as a separate phenomenon even if it might be contained within tradition – the "might" motivates this division. "Secular reason" is
perspective on the other sources, and thereby constituting a framework of morally acceptable
courts to a Christian, while still not being self-sufficient given the limits of human understanding
of it. This inference, then, places me in the third category, with a clear emphasis on the role of
Scripture in Christian ethics.

Earlier research
In his doctoral thesis Bibeln i Kristen Etik (1999) the then soon to be bishop of the diocese of
Strängnäs Hans-Erik Nordin describes and critically analyzes five contemporary suggestions to how
the Bible should be used in Christian ethics, and then creates a suggestion of his own. He calls that
suggestion “agapemodellen” (the model of agápê). This model holds the love (agápê) of God in
Christ to be the center of the Bible, and this postulation results in love being what, according to
Nordin, should hold biblical ethics together. There is some tension here between the “bible
criterion” that he postulates, where the salvation of God through the life, death, and resurrection of
Christ is considered the center of the Bible and of an acceptable Christian ethics, and the
postulation of love as the center. However, the tension might be resolved by seeing the love of God
as exemplified by the salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Nordin further
promotes an ethics of discipleship, of following Christ, which together with agápê is a sort of inner
disposition towards the world and oneself.

Nordin further gives three criteria for how the Bible should be used in Christian ethics; the
criteria of textual interpretation, of integration, and of ethics. The first mostly describes the
hermeneutical spiral, the second holds that knowledge given through Scripture, tradition and
revelation should be integrated with scientific knowledge, moral reflection, and experiential
knowledge, as far as is ever possible. The last criteria postulates that the content of the Bible
should be evaluated in light of the center of the Bible, central positions of biblical ethics, moral
intuition, and that which we can give good reason to hold to be good and right. I find that position
to be interrelated with his position that a person is able to reach some knowledge about God without
revelation, so therefore revelation is not the only legitimate source of knowledge.

Another important Swedish scholar is Göran Bexell (Etiken, Bibeln och Samlevnaden
also quite difficult to separate from, for example, experience. In this paper, I will define secular reason as the non-
revelatory deliberation on insights from secular scientific disciplines, and experience as simply what humans
experience in life (when not considered divinely revealed), and the insights we might draw from that.

19 Nordin Bibeln i kristen etik, 21, 216.
20 Nordin Bibeln i kristen etik, 44, 46.
21 Nordin Bibeln i kristen etik, 224 seems to warrant such a reading.
22 Nordin Bibeln i kristen etik, 221.
23 These categories recur, in slightly different forms, in many scholars as a basis for Christian ethics.
24 Nordin Bibeln i kristen etik, 60-61.
25 Nordin Bibeln i kristen etik, 40-41.
Bexell, a then soon to be professor of ethics at the University of Lund, sets his aim at creating a method for how to construct a contemporary Christian ethics, and then he applies it to four different questions (marriage, cohabitation without marriage, divorce, and female-male equality). His structure, then, is similar to the one I have intended for this paper, with an abstract-theoretical part and a concrete-practical part. It is also worth noting the influential role ascribed by Bexell to sound exegetics based on historical-critical methods in counter-acting interpretational relativism and subjectivism, as well as an awareness of the interpreter's context.26

Bexell goes on to state the Gospel as the center of the Bible, in light of which biblical, and also Christian, ethics must be interpreted. He further points out a basic ethical norm – the double commandment of love.27 By that interpretation, Bexell is able to hold that although the Bible does not give clear rules for all situations, it gives the mindset (“grundhållning”) of Jesus which is to be taken over by the believer and applied to specific situations. However, he also holds that it is not enough to consider the mindset, since the Bible also gives examples of when actions and consequences are in focus – therefore, biblical ethics can never be characterized as simply virtue ethics.28 Finally, it should be noted that Bexell does not find revelation to supply new ethical insight, but rather motivation through a larger framework, and a focus through the basic ethical norm.29

Moving outside of Sweden, we find Margaret Farley, a Gilbert L. Stark Professor Emerita of Christian Ethics at Yale University, and her work Just Love (2007), which is interesting to read in relation to Cahill. One of her points of divergence from Cahill, and the other scholars examined, is found in the supreme role she ascribes to experience in construing Christian ethics; she then holds a position that emphasizes not only the non-revelatory sources of ethical insight, but one particular source. To Farley, “moral truth must make sense”, and if a deeply held belief is challenged by the other sources without giving sway in a way that makes denying it an act of “violence to our moral sensibilities, our affective capacity to respond to the good, and our very capacity for knowing”, then that belief must “function also as a measure against which the other sources are tested.”30 As she explores the question of same-sex sexuality in particular, it will also be interesting to note that she concludes that the question should not be focused on same-sex sexuality in particular, but what kind of sex in general that is good or bad, since love can be both good and bad.31

The then dean of the Theological School at Drew University, Thomas W. Ogletree, is the

27 Bexell Etiken, Bibeln och samlevnaden, 78, 80.
28 Bexell Etiken, Bibeln och samlevnaden, 94, 139-140.
29 Bexell Etiken, Bibeln och samlevnaden, 80, 127; Nordin Bibeln i kristen etik, 82-83.
31 Farley Just love, 207, 288.
author of *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (1984) which is more often than not referred to in discussions on Christian ethics and the Bible. In it, he starts by stating that already in going to the Bible for ethical advice, one has given it importance by recognizing “that the biblical texts have in the course of history been able to prove themselves over and over as saying something true.” He goes on to quite thoroughly discuss the hermeneutical issue, in many ways following Hans-Georg Gadamer, and holds that the historical meaning of a text is not enough – there is a surplus of meaning stemming from the subject of which the text speaks.\(^{32}\) There is, then, a pre-understanding here that entails that the biblical texts can say something important to us in our own context, and the study is aimed at developing a better connection between biblical studies and Christian ethics.\(^{33}\) For this discussion, he sometimes uses the term “biblically informed ethics”, and concludes that such ethics should be eschatologically directed, embodying the “dawning reality” of the “promised new age” as well as maintaining critical distance to the dominant culture, so as to not assign Christian ethics a lower standing than, for example, liberal or socialist values.\(^{34}\) Finally, he finds the Bible to contain mostly deontological and virtue ethics, but contemporary Christian ethics must regard consequences, since the functioning of the modern world requires “consequentialist thinking”.\(^{35}\)

Last, we shall look at a landmark study from the 1970s, which has had a huge impact on the field; *Bible and ethics in the Christian life* (1976)\(^{36}\) by Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen, respectively a scholar of the Hebrew Bible (HB) and a social ethicist. This is the study that most of all will influence my own perspective in this paper, so we will also have reason to return to it later.

Birch and Rasmussen hold that the Bible is the most important document for forming Christian ethics. Its authority stems from the church recognizing that the whole of the canon has something important to say about the will of God.\(^{37}\) They also hold that there are two areas which constitute morals; character and decision-making. These are of course not completely separated, but still dealt with respectively. Birch and Rasmussen holds that the major role of the Bible should not be in decision-making, where focus often has been, but in character-building. The character will influence the doing, as well as the doing will influence the character, or the being. Therefore, even if the Bible does not have something to say on all ethical issues of today, it might set a framework of control, which constitutes acceptable outcomes of the moral deliberations of a Christian.\(^{38}\)

The two scholars resist affirming any center of Scripture. Instead, they hold that all of the

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\(^{33}\) Ogletree *The use of the Bible*, xii, 176.

\(^{34}\) Ogletree *The use of the Bible*, 176, 182.

\(^{35}\) Ogletree *The use of the Bible*, 193-194, 204-205.

\(^{36}\) In some instances I will complement the discussion with the second edition from 1989.


\(^{38}\) Birch & Rasmussen *Bible and ethics* (A), 101-104, 193.
canon should be heard and enlisted as a criterion of interpretation. Yet, there is to them a focus on the Jesus-story in Christian ethics.\(^{39}\) Another criterion of interpretation is the church, which is the primary community of interpretation of the Bible. The church is also supposed to relate Scripture to other sources of ethical insight, through a dialogical process.\(^ {40}\) Yet, the Bible does have a special place, and in cases where it contains clear moral imperatives, other ethical sources may not override them. However, most of the time the biblical witness will, in decision-making, work in dialog with other sources; not least since it often is some other source that brings the question to mind. When it comes to character-formation, the primacy of the Bible is somewhat clearer, and the Bible should create an identity which”provides a chief influence in shaping the perception of current ethical matters.”\(^ {41}\) Finally, it should be noted that ”careful exegesis” is both described and assigned a pivotal role in rendering the discussion between community and Scriptural witness something more than a confirmation-seeking monologue with a muted text.\(^ {42}\)

The structure of the paper

The paper, when moving from this introductory chapter, will start its analytic effort by construing and elaborating on a theoretical framework in chapter two. This framework will focus on the hermeneutical foundation and the relation between revelation and other sources of ethical insight.

Once the framework is done, we will turn to look at the four scholars in focus of this paper, which will comprise chapters three to six. Scholar by scholar, the ideas found in their texts will be presented, focusing on the ideas relevant to answer the questions of this paper.\(^ {43}\) Following each presentation there will be a critical evaluation of the ideas and perspectives in focus, which will point forward towards the perspective I will present later in the paper.

After these evaluative chapters, we will turn to a concluding chapter comprised of a presentation of my suggested answers to the questions of the paper, which the chapter will be structured around. These answers will be presented and shortly argued in light of the then undertaken critical evaluation of the four scholars, the theoretical foundation, as well as a few new suggestions concerning relevant Scriptural passages and the notion of imitatio Dei/Christi.


\(^ {40}\) Birch & Rasmussen *Bible and ethics* (A), 145, 149-151.

\(^ {41}\) Birch & Rasmussen *Bible and ethics* (A), 149, 157.

\(^ {42}\) Birch & Rasmussen *Bible and ethics* (A), 174.

\(^ {43}\) To present in that way is of course to impose questions on the authors that they themselves did not necessarily want to answer. However, to make this study comprehensive, such a measure seems unavoidable to bring some focus to the presentation.
2. Theoretical framework

We now turn to address two important issues – the hermeneutical foundation, and the in this paper presupposed construction of the relation between revelation and other sources of ethical insight. These issues will be foundational to the critical analysis (combined with an exegetical analysis) and in construing a suggestion with regards to Christian ethics and its view on same-sex sexual acts.

Hermeneutical foundation

The hermeneutical foundation is built around a quite common idea; reading entails interpretation. However, does that mean that the text has no inherent meaning, but is wholly dependent on what meaning the reader creates? Some literary theorists hold such a position, and no matter if one agrees, it does provide a valid perspective – who is speaking when we read; the text, the author, and/or the reader? Can a text mean just about anything? If yes – can the Bible have a normative role? If no – how do we limit its meanings? These questions will be addressed in this paragraph.

When faced with a text, we always bring prejudices and a pre-understanding to it, and we always project a meaning from these. As we read, our projection will be falsified and altered, and thereby we face the text with an altered pre-understanding. Here is the hermeneutical circle, or spiral. We can never escape our prejudices or our pre-understandings, and according to Gadamer, that is a good thing – positive prejudices enable understanding. There are however also negative prejudices, which enable misunderstandings. The hermeneutical work should then aim at avoiding such misunderstandings.

So how is that done? The answer to that might help us escape the issues of complete relativism concerning meaning and reading as a reader's monologue.

To find a solution, we turn for inspiration to another giant in the area of hermeneutics. Paul Ricoeur holds that in a speech-event, there is always a point of reference for meaning – the speaker him/herself and the context in which the speech is delivered. However, that point of reference is lost in a text, which makes its meaning more open, or vulnerable, to different readings. Ricoeur offers a few suggestions as to how this can be at least partially solved, but he also admits that those suggestions all come down to guessing. To escape such a situation of meaning relativism, I find a

44 The, to my knowledge, most famous proponent being Stanley Fish, see Stanley Eugene Fish, *Is there a text in this class?: the authority of interpretive communities*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980.
47 Ricoeur *Interpretation theory*, 76-79, mentioning the act of construing the text as a whole which will include ascribing some parts to the margins, identify genre and class, and see multiple meanings, of which some should be ascribed to the margins. All three are based on guessing, and to Ricoeur, the hermeneutical circle, or spiral, indeed moves between guess and validation, working only with probability.
solution to be the creation of a new point of reference, a point that can fill the vacancy left from the speech-event. This, then, is where historical knowledge and historical criticism becomes essential.

The reader and the writer, when part of more or less the same community, are influenced by similar interpretive principles. These principles, coming from interpretive communities in which the individual takes part at the same time as s/he helps to maintain it, will limit the acceptable understandings of a word or a sentence. There is some form of language agreement between them. As an example; 3+5 would not immediately entail the answer “8” if I was not part of an interpretive community that stated how to understand arithmetic of this sort. I would not understand “+” as a sign of adding together, and have good grounds for believing that the reader of this paper does the same, if there was not some form of consensus behind it. Of course, the prospect of an exact consensus concerning words might be grimmer than in mathematics, if not impossible. Yet, when I say “carrot”, there is probably some form of resemblance in the ideas that come to my mind and the mind of others in a context similar to my own, where people are also speaking the same language as I am. Given this perspective, the point of reference needed in order to make the meaning of the text intelligible is the language agreement between author and first recipients. By as far as possible understanding that agreement, we can further our understanding of the text, since we understand what sort of ideas that informed the words and sentences of it. We discover the mutual points of reference held by author and recipients, and we postulate the idea that those ideas should be constitutive to the meaning of the text. To refer us back to Gadamer, the understanding of the language-agreement will serve as a positive pre-understanding, which will enable understanding. In both Ricoeur and Gadamer, appropriation and application is an important part of understanding, and I agree with that; we understand also by living and doing. Since this paper is concerned with the application of theoretical ethics to a practical, concrete issue, I should then note that the hermeneutical foundation described affects more than just the level of reading; it affects how we may justifiably appropriate a text in our own time. It affects how, for example, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 can be understood in our own time, and with that understanding the hermeneutical foundation also implies a normative should, because only by understanding the language agreement is the text itself allowed to break the reader's monologue. I am, given this perspective, happy to have found in Bexell what he calls “nytolkning” (new interpretation), which entails that the idea

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48 The terms “interpretive principles” and “interpretive communities” are drawn from Fish Is there a text, 12, 14.
50 Ricoeur Interpretation theory, 43-44, Gadamer et. al. Truth and method, 318-320.
51 I have discussed the issue of cultural appropriation in relation to these verses and their historical context in my one year master thesis, Simon Hedlund, “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.” (Lev 18:22, 20:13) – Come again?” Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 2016. In that paper, I have also discussed the perspective on the hermeneutical foundation which is presented here.
content of a text should be clarified and “translated” so that the original meaning can be clarified to the new interpreter. However, he considers the meaning found by the first recipients to be a “nytolkning”, and he does not really discuss how to find the original meaning of the text, or the idea that is to be passed on.

He goes on to state that the goal is not to just pass on the words of the Bible as they stand, since not even the biblical writers themselves did so – rather, one should do as Paul did, or as Matthew did, by applying the old message to a new situation. We are back to application. The problem in Bexell, I find, is the emphasis on the intended meaning, which dowplays the room for more than one specific meaning in the text, and limits us to our ability and possibility to understand the author. By admitting that more than one meaning exists within an interpretive community, and by turning towards also the first recipients, we might allow for a more dynamic understanding, and application, of the text. The language agreement does not necessarily supply one meaning, but it supplies us with a framework that can help decide if a reading is acceptable or not, just as it supplies rules for understanding all forms of communication of today.

Further, we are not as helpless when it comes to biblical texts in which we do not know who the author was as we would be given a complete focus on intention, since we can be guided at least in part by our knowledge of the context and the first recipients. However, the great strength highlighted by Bexell’s “nytolkning” I hold to be the recognition of both the value of original context and the value of the present situation to which the text is to speak – the meaning in the text should not only be read, but appropriated into this new situation.

There is of course always the problem of limiting “first recipients”. Who are they? And where do we draw the line between first and second recipient? There is no exact answer to these questions, but I find that there are a few ways to keep the reasoning on a scientifically acceptable level. First, the discussion must be transparent, clearly stating what facts there are and what assumptions are made. Second, when possible I find it valuable to refrain from imaginative conclusions which are more far-reaching than the material allows. It might be more advisable to simply leave it, than to make something up. Finally, in some cases we do have information about the author and addressees, of some sort. In those cases, I find it reasonable to assume a shared linguistic agreement between them, since the author found a point in writing to/for these specific recipients, and the recipients found a point in preserving the text – there seems to have been some form of understanding between them, enabled by a shared basic understanding of the language.

One further advantage of ascribing importance to the recipients in this way, is that it might

52 Bexell Etiken, Bibeln och samlevnaden, 43-45.
53 Bexell Etiken, Bibeln och samlevnaden, 47-48, 52.
54 Gadamer et. al. Truth and method, 413 makes this important point.
supply a framework which enables us to (in some cases at least) limit and specify the contextual description of the language, thereby narrowing the possible meanings of the text. If, as an example, we read Paul's First letter to the Corinthians, a congregation Paul knew and had met, it will not necessarily be relevant to include how the people of Rome understood sacrificial meat, but it will be relevant to consider the specific differences of perspective on the matter in Corinth, if one is to understand the ideas that probably affected Paul in writing specifically to the Corinthians.

Revelation and other sources of ethical insight

Does revelation add anything to ethics that cannot be understood through non-revelatory sources of insight? Is perhaps the Bible enough in itself? The Bible is not clear on this issue, as it implies universal knowledge of good and evil, but also shows serious disregard for the wisdom of the “world”. There is no scholarly consensus either, shown by the clear differences between the scholars discussed in this paper. The positions mentioned earlier of revelatory or non-revelatory insights as self-sufficient sources of ethics, and the position demanding both of these, gives us three basic possible positions on this matter. I find that the most convincing position, given the biblical account of the Creation but also based on human experience, where non-Christians as well as Christians have been capable of acting morally good and bad, would be one that heavily draws on Birch and Rasmussen, while incorporating Bexell, and also Nigel Biggar, professor of moral and pastoral theology at the University of Oxford.

Turning first to Biggar, I should start by stating that I do not agree with his opinion that people who do not believe in the Christian God lack “the power to behave as they know they should”. I find that neither human experience nor the biblical witness support such an inference as universally applicable. However, I do agree with him in stating that “the presence or absence of theological faith and hope can determine what seems morally “reasonable””, and that such a theological faith can have motivational force (as in Bexell). These inferences seem reasonable, admittedly in part because of personal experience. I here also presume that a Christian theological faith will render a person open to what ethical message the Bible might contain, and to be open to being changed by it, as well as motivated by finding out what God has in mind for him/her to do.

These inferences might imply that I find revelation to supply knowledge that is not accessible without it. However, that depends on how “knowledge” is defined. I would say that knowledge in the secular scientific (understood widely) realm is not affected by revelation, since for

55 Compare for example the narrative of Genesis 3 with the words of Paul in 1 Cor. 1:18-31.
57 Also in Bexell & Grenholm Teologisk etik, 174, the motivational force of a Christian belief is highlighted.
example Scripture does not rest on the same epistemological assumptions as do secular science. Neither is Scripture the only source of ethical insight, which is evident in the fact that people without it still have been able to reach similar conclusions concerning ethical issues (murder has, as an example, been forbidden in cultures not affected by the Christian Bible). Yet, if knowledge is understood as a contextual phenomenon, with the possibility of adding adjectives to it, I would argue that the Bible does supply a source for Christian ethical knowledge not found anywhere else. That conclusion does not mean that the knowledge it supplies is an all-encompassing normative or objective knowledge, but that it is a normative knowledge for what is Christian. Such an assumption is based on the fact that a lot of information about the Christian God is only found in the Bible, and such strands of information might entail ethical consequences that will not be found outside of biblical ethics. This form of knowledge, then, is a special form of knowledge, which assumes a divine, objective, reality, but it does not assume that there is a way to reach perfect knowledge about the world nor about the divine reality given our inability to reach perfect, objective, understanding. Since this form of knowledge is not the sort of knowledge that is usually intended by the word “knowledge”, with its connotations to an idea of objectivity and science, I shall instead discuss it as a unique perspective on the world, on God, and on ethical insights based on experience, tradition, and secular reason. I shall also discuss it as a distinct form of ethical insight, along with the three just mentioned. Thereby I hold that Scripture plays a role both on a meta-level (perspective), as well as on the level of other sources of ethical insight.

I find, then, that biblical ethics is able to supply a critical corrective against other sources of ethical insight by supplying such a perspective, which is only found through revelation. Yet, biblical ethics is not separated from, but instead part of, a dialog with other sources of ethical insight. I am here following in the footsteps of Birch and Rasmussen in their previously mentioned position that the Bible, even when not expressing an opinion on a specific matter, might supply a framework of acceptable moral standings and actions, as well as in the dialogical relation they find revelation and other sources of ethical insight to be in. I am also following Grenholm and Bexell in finding that Christian faith supplies a new perspective on ethics, as well as in finding that the Bible can function as a critical corrective towards contemporary values.58

This position seems to me to be the one best motivated from the point of human experience. People of faith, of no faith, or of different faith, seem to intentionally have acted good and bad throughout history, and it seems unfounded to ascribe the good actions of non-Christians to mere

58 Bexell & Grenholm Teologisk etik, 174, 178, 208. See also Bexell Etiken, Bibeln och samlevnaden, 13 and Nordin Bibeln i kristen etik, 83, offering critique against Bexell’s perspective that the Bible can be a corrective while not supplying any new form of knowledge. In Teologisk etik, I find that the authors, as I, place the corrective function in the new perspective – see p. 174.
coincidence. To hold that the biblical witness in itself supplies the ethical insight needed to do right is, I find, also to overestimate the capacity of humans for perfect understanding.\(^59\) Throughout history we have seen how readings of the Bible, and the way people understand God, has shifted in different contexts and/or times. We are also, through the work of hermeneutists, aware of the fact that interpretation is intrinsically tied to context and interpreting subject. To then base Christian ethics solely on the Bible is in itself impossible if the ethics should be applicable to more than one person, given that the reading might well differ from person to person. It would also render the Bible at risk of becoming a mere support for contextual ideas, losing the role of critical corrective.\(^60\)

The opposite position, stating that secular reason alone is sufficient in supplying all the ethical insight we need, might be correct if we are not discussing the special kind of ethics that is Christian ethics. By that inference an attempt to take into account the importance of how we view the ethical insight that we have is made. Even if I know it to be right to love, how do I decide the “how”, “who”, or “why”? These issues will only be answered by a specific perspective on ethical insight (a perspective that, for example, promotes ethical insight from the Bible), and one such perspective can be attained through revelation in the Bible (and perhaps other sources of revelation – I will soon discuss this issue). By another perspective, with other forms of ethical insights, other answers might be attained.\(^61\) As the reader might have noted, the aspects of perspective and ethical insight are not clearly separated; surely it would be impossible to practically separate them since they create each other in a movement similar to that of the hermeneutical spiral. However, in order to facilitate a discussion on them, I find the need to separate them on a theoretical level.

Through the described perspective, one might also find motivational force, since it is seen as originating with God. Should something fall outside of the acceptable framework of the perspective, one might be motivated to act purely out of this theological belief. It can also be said that the Bible's ethical insight is only ascribed importance and status as “insight” if one holds the Bible to be of importance in the first place (agreeing with Ogletree). It is, then, not an objective fact that the Bible contains ethical insight, but I argue that within a Christian realm it is an eligible inference.

Revelation, I hold, exists primarily within the Bible, which in different forms contains the revealed will and work of God. Yet, revelation is also found in the religious experiences of people,

\(^{59}\) An understanding circumscribed, for example, by Paul in 1 Cor 13:12.

\(^{60}\) Bexell has an interesting discussion on the issue of lacking biblical support for a position that holds the Bible in itself as sufficient for ethical knowledge. He concludes that such a position is unbiblical(!) since it would negate the fact that humans are created by God with moral reason and moral responsibility. That creational fact renders that the human should actively use the gift of moral reason, something Bexell holds to be, from a Christian perspective, to be considered a continuation of God's activities in history (Bexell *Etiken, Bibeln och samlevnaden*, 17). I am however not convinced that his his arguments support such a radical inference, since moral reason might well be seen as resulting from disobedience towards God (Gen 3). To then use that ability to incorporate ethical ideas from outside of Scripture into Christian ethics could be said to simply be a continuation of that original disobedience.

\(^{61}\) An inference close to Biggar *Behaving in public*, 34-35.
experiences of which tradition can be a witness. The important difference to be noted is that the Bible is a certain source of revelation, while the individual experience of people can only be a source of revelation if one trusts that individual. The authenticity of the later revelation will hinge on the trustworthiness ascribed to that person. Of course one could argue that since the Bible itself is part of, and created by, tradition, the qualitative difference made here between inside and outside of Scripture is artificial. In theory, such a statement might be correct. However, since Christian faith as well as tradition is arguably based on the presupposition that God and God's actions are in some way revealed in the Bible, and since the earliest testimonies about Christ, who can be said to be at least an important center of Christian faith, is found in the Bible, I find that it is warranted to ascribe a special position to the Bible over against later tradition within a Christian tradition. This position, while admittedly containing a certain degree of paradoxicality, is not completely foreign even to Jesus himself, as He also related to an idea of a Scripture that was, as it seems, qualitatively different from other strands of traditions and texts within his own contemporary Jewish milieu.

What is revealed in and through revelation, then, is a special kind of ethical insight which states what kind of acts and positions that are morally reasonable in Christian ethics (the framework of control of Birch and Rasmussen). That ethical insight cannot be attained without revelation. The idea of a perspective, I find, is also applicable upon principles and rules found in Scripture itself; when understood in their context, they render a perspective on the world and everything in it. As language reflects ideas and symbols, so does rules and principles. They express and reflect a certain outlook, a perspective, on matters as those matters are conceived in their own context. When the world changes, the perspective is the essence of what has been revealed, and therefore it should be retained. Particular principles and rules on the other hand might run against that perspective as the world and what is in it change. This inference would mean that we can extract a form of measuring rod for tradition, by investigating if it is applying the perspective of the Bible to a new

62 I here agree with, among others, Cahill who finds tradition to be open to flaws (see Lisa Sowle Cahill, Between the sexes: foundations for a Christian ethics of sexuality, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, 50).


64 An argument which, as previously mentioned, Birch and Rasmussen are using to motivate the authority of the Bible in ethical matters.

65 Bexell & Grenholm Teologisk etik, 208, where Jesus is called the center.

66 See for example Jesus' reaction and reply in Mark 7:1-13.

67 An example of this could be Acts 10:9-16, where Peter is told by God to slaughter and eat all sorts of animals. The idea conveyed seems to have been that no matter one's diet, one could be part of the chosen people. It is a perspective of inclusion. However, if we simply focus on the rule, we might in the text find a justification for industrial slaughter which we know is highly detrimental to the environment, creating environmental problems that primarily affects the poor parts of the world. The rule would then contradict the idea conveyed in the original setting, since the inclusive perspective becomes exclusive by motivating acts that serve to exclude the poor from a life of basic dignity and possibilities.

68 A role ascribed to Scripture by, amongst others, Nordin Bibeln i kristen etik, 228.
context, and thereby is in line with the essential notion of Scripture, or if it is trying to present a new perspective which is foreign to Scripture, even when the rule or principle is seemingly retained.  

While the biblical witness is not univocal concerning the relation between natural law and revelation, it should still be noted that the presented position does have support within Scripture. I cannot give a thorough exposé, but I can briefly mention, as an example, the Creation narrative, where the fruit of knowledge renders all of humanity in a position of knowing good and bad. Further, Paul in Romans 1:20-22 claims that humanity has had knowledge about God, through nature. In these passages, the possibility of universal ethical knowledge is emphasized. However, the special perspective still supplied by a Christian faith can be seen in, for example, John 13:34, where Jesus tells the disciples to love each other as (kathôs) he has loved them. The love is a special kind of love, one that Jesus has showed them. There might be many ways to love, but Jesus has shown the love, and thereby also the perspective on love, that is to be imitated by the disciples. Knowledge of love, then, does not render or motivate actions according to the specific kind of love of Jesus. For that, one has to have the perspective of a faith in Christ.  

The focus, then, should not be on specific questions, since they might be all too situational and thereby reading them as universals would violate the meaning of the text itself. However, against Farley, I do not find that what might falsify the specific rules should be based on contemporary experience. I find that Farley, and also for example Nordin and Bexell, places too much trust in other sources of insight as correctives or as on their own good sources of Christian ethics, instead of partners in dialog with Scripture. The very essence of an ethics that is Christian, in my view (as in Birch and Rasmussen), is that it ascribes a high degree of importance to the witness of Scripture to moral questions. If this witness is to be relevant only in supporting other sources of ethical insight, then I find that it has all but become superfluous.  

Yet, in considering the relation of the Bible to other sources of ethics, I find there to be a tension between ideal and reality. Correctly understood, the Bible (if considered as a revelation from or inspired by an almighty, all-knowing, and all-loving God, a perspective assumed here) contains a better perspective on ethics and ethical insight than any other perspective available. It indeed contains perfect ethical insight. However, since perfect understanding is not possible to reach  

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69 Something that would not be in line with the role of tradition, which I, in agreement with Coleman, holds to be to "clarify and preserve God's revelation, not to replace it" (Coleman Gay Christians, 11).
70 This inference might find support in the quite fascinating episode in Mt. 4/ Lk. 4, where Satan tries to argue with Jesus, both of them (!) using Scripture. Satan is referring to Ps. 91:11, a poetic rendition of life with God. There is however nothing saying that the text is a universal imperative. Jesus on the other hand is referring to what might be considered such, in Deut 6:16.
71 Birch & Rasmussen Bible and ethics (A), 158.
72 A position that I seem to share with Biggar (Behaving in public, 7), and also, if I understand his (previously mentioned) emphasis on distance to the surrounding culture correctly, Ogletree.
(no matter if we ascribe the reason for that to sin or to the fact that we can never leave our own interpretive principles and traditions behind, within which there are always prejudices that will enable misunderstandings73),74 one has to be open to the possibility if revising ones ethical ideas if other sources of ethics seem to suggest that such a path is necessary to take. This inference is the result of the dialogical nature of the relation between the sources of Christian ethics, and it is an inference that resists the notion of Christian ethics completely based on revelation, while still admitting revelation to have an essential role.

3. Lisa Sowle Cahill
Lisa Sowle Cahill is a North American catholic feminist ethicist, and Nordin holds her to be one of the feminist ethicists who most clearly have discussed the role of the Bible in Christian ethics.75 She places herself within an Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition which holds that the natural law and the possibility for everyone, Christian or not, to attain moral insight is part of Creation. She further understands the foundations of morality “as broad areas of agreement about human needs, goods, and fulfillments which can be reached inductively and dialogically through human experience.”76 However, this position does not mean that she holds that what is also is what ought to be – there is no necessary correlation of that sort.77 It can further be noted that Cahill places more emphasis on the Bible and exegetics than is common within her tradition, which normally emphasizes the role of the natural law more. In that respect Cahill offers quite an independent and original position.

Concerning the exegetical basis of biblical ethics, it is important to note that Cahill places a lot of emphasis on the author and the context in which the author lived. However, she also includes the broader “life situation” of the whole community of which the author was part as important in shaping the text and the meaning it had, a meaning that then affects what the text can mean to us. There is also a strong belief in the ability of a shared tradition to serve as a corrective which maintains the meaning(s) that might be found by new interpreters as being in line with the core faith of the original community, even if that meaning was not necessarily intended or even in agreement with the original meaning of the text. Note however that this corrective is not infallible – tradition might be at fault. Perhaps we can see in this still quite strong confidence in tradition a strand of her Roman-Catholic tradition, which holds tradition to be of greater importance than for example does my own evangelical-Lutheran tradition. Further, Cahill states a clear ethical center of the Bible, which is discipleship practiced through solidarity and compassion, drawn from the central image of

73 Bexell & Grenholm Teologisk etik: en introduktion, 174-175, attributing it to the flawed nature of humans.
74 Perhaps 1 Cor 13:9-12 could be taken in support of this limitation of the possibilities of perfect knowledge.
75 Nordin Bibeln i kristen etik, 25, 93.
77 Cahill Sex, gender, and Christian ethics, 47.
Jesus' life and teachings. There is also a connection between this ethical center and the “pattern” of redemptiveness that she finds in the biblical texts.

On the methodological level, Cahill utilizes historical criticism in order to understand the authors and texts. In the case of same-sex sexuality, it becomes clear that knowledge of the social situation in which the texts arose is of great importance. Further, Cahill holds that in order to understand the message concerning a specific question, one has to read all the relevant texts as well as the surrounding texts, and then place them in relation to larger patterns, such as redemptiveness, of the Bible. Although not stated clearly, there also seems to be more emphasis on the NT than the HB, at least as a corrective.

When it comes to the Bible and the foundations of Christian ethics, Cahill readily admits to not bringing any news to the table in finding four essential sources to draw from; Scripture, tradition, “philosophical accounts of essential or ideal humanity (“normative” accounts of the human); and descriptions of what actually is and has been the case in human lives and societies (“descriptive” accounts of the human). There is a careful statement that the Bible is of fundamental importance, but Cahill is eager to not assign any of the sources a clear form of primacy over the others; as mentioned, this is noteworthy given her tradition. She also quite correctly notes the sometimes overlooked fact that the Bible in itself is part of tradition, in that older texts are received and used as tradition in younger texts of the Bible. Tradition is also, she holds, part of a continued revelation, and revelation continually occurs as the horizon of the reader and the text are fused. She goes on to state that a constant theme of the NT is “transformation or reversal of ordinary human relationships”, which is to serve as an example for us “so that they [our human

78 Nordin Bibeln i kristen etik, 100, 103. It is worth noting that Nordin does not note the role of the community that Cahill discusses, which leads his presentation of her opinion to be more narrow than called for. I would argue that Cahill does not emphasize only the author in reconstructing the meaning of a text, a reading which Nordin seems to have done - see Cahill, Between the sexes, 49-53).
79 Cahill Between the sexes, 23, 36.
80 Nordin Bibeln i kristen etik, 100. It should be noted that the term “Hebrew Bible” is mine, both Nordin and Cahill use “OT” or “Old Testament” (Swedish “GT”). I will in this paper not use that term, since I find it to be a term that is not motivated in the Bible (where the HB were “Scripture”, and later also the books of the modern NT became “Scripture”), and since it has caused a lot misunderstandings throughout history. It has been polemically used to distance the Christian from the Jewish, and it carries connotations that I find it unnecessary to bring to this paper. For a discussion on this, see John F. A. Sawyer, The fifth gospel: Isaiah in the history of Christianity, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 6. I also want to note that I realize the discrepancy between the use of the term “Hebrew Bible” while including, as stated earlier, the books agreed upon by the large Christian denominations. However, since we are dealing with Christian ethics, it is relevant to use the books defined by Christian churches as Scripture. Yet, that does not warrant the use of an anachronistic word laden with possible negative connotations. Perhaps even better would be to use “Hebrew Bible” and “Greek Bible”, to clarify that they are equal parts of the same book, but in different languages. The problem with such a solution would be that the Septuagint (LXX) version of the HB is in Greek, and it was the version that sometimes seems to have been referred to as “Scripture” by the first Christ-believers. In lack of a better word then, “Hebrew Bible” and “New Testament” will have to do, even though there is a paradox in having a New but not an Old testament.
81 Cahill, Between the sexes, 5.
82 Cahill Between the sexes, 5, Nordin Bibeln i kristen etik, 102.
relationships] better reflect God's presence and power, as disclosed in Jesus Christ.” The aim of Christian ethics is indeed, to Cahill, to encourage behaviors that does not necessarily replicate the NT, but that serve an “analogous function” by taking serious the ethos of discipleship.\(^{83}\) Finally, Cahill holds that the Bible does not contain timeless and morally authoritative statements, but instead the moral imperatives are to be evaluated in light of the central images of compassion and solidarity, as well as some externally created criteria based on other sources of knowledge.\(^{84}\)

When we turn to Cahill's discussion on same-sex sexuality, she starts off by stating that Scripture in itself without a doubt condemns “same-sex genital activity”, referring to, with regards to the subject, quite common Scriptural passages.\(^{85}\) However, she also notes that the huge difference in context between us and the writers of the texts “makes this a particularly vexing issue on which to derive a “biblical” position for our own time.” She goes on to contextualize the comments made by Paul in 1 Cor 6:9 and Rom 1:26-27,\(^{86}\) holding that the exploitative nature of same-sex sexual activities in the time of Paul certainly influenced his and the recipients' understanding of the phenomenon. Given that background, and the focus on imitating function and not behavior, Cahill is able to state that the “primary kinds of sexual conduct that are excluded by NT teaching are status-marking, boundary-erecting, other-dominating, and self-promoting actions and practices, especially when they deprive others of what they require to survive and to “flourish” as human beings.”\(^{87}\) Every community must by themselves evaluate what sorts of (sexual) behaviors that are, and are not, encouraging to the flourishing of its members. They should also remember the redemptive nature of all of Scripture.\(^{88}\) Cahill, then, does not draw the conclusion that all sorts of same-sex sexual conducts are permissible, since they might well be against the flourishing of people, but she does not seem to hold same-sex sexual acts as such to be inherently flawed. Instead, she proposes two criteria (not final but “dialogic”) for an acceptable relationship within which sexual activities can occur: Commitment in a partnership and “procreative responsibility”\(^{89}\) She claims that these criteria might render responsible sexuality possible for “homosexual couples”. However, I do not quite see how she reaches that conclusion, given that “procreative responsibility” is defined as “the willingness of the couple to welcome and nurture as a couple any children that result from their union.”\(^{90}\) I imagine that the argument could be made that this applies to adoption, but I am not sure

\(83\) Cahill, *Sex, gender, and Christian ethics*, 121-122.

\(84\) Nordin, *Bibeln i kristen etik*, 105.

\(85\) Cahill, *Sex, gender, and Christian ethics*, 156, referring to Lev 18:22, 20:13; Gen 19:5-7; Deut 23:18; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10; Rom 1:26-27.

\(86\) She does not seem to consider 1 Tim as written by Paul, which seems to me to be a correct inference.


\(88\) Cahill, *Between the sexes*, 36.

\(89\) Cahill, *Between the sexes*, 148, 151-152.

\(90\) Cahill, *Between the sexes*, 149.
that an adoption is the same as a child's existence being a result of the union of a same-sex couple, unless the child is conceived through surrogacy; which in turn might evoke new ethical questions. However, the criteria are, as mentioned, not final, and we have to leave the question open-ended.

As we can see, Cahill reaches a conclusion that is later partially mirrored by Farley, but in a different way and with a different motivation. Farley finds that contemporary experience shows that what goes for “straight” sex should also go for same-sex sex, while Cahill finds that same-sex sex is not the problem in itself, but the exploitative nature of that form of sex prevalent in biblical times.

In order to evaluate Cahill's positions, we first turn to her discussion on the hermeneutical issue. Her idea of how to construe the meaning of a text is after all quite similar to mine in that she appreciates the importance of the contextual shaping of a text as well as the role of the first recipients. Thereby she avoids getting caught in ascribing the basis of meaning to the sole mind of the author, while still not allowing the text to become completely independent of its original context. However, Cahill takes the discussion one step further and discusses the surplus of meaning within a text, the possible meanings that were not seen by the author nor the readers (as does, as mentioned, Ogletree). Such meanings might be found by, for example, a literary analysis that reveals chiasms or other literary structures (I guess even if not intended). I find myself to disagree with stating that this surplus is a meaning within the text, a meaning that stays within the same core belief by virtue of a shared tradition. I disagree since I find that the method in itself might be a way of reading something into the text, or of applying something to it in order to extract new meanings; I am not convinced that the process is one of extraction and not addition. Neither am I as confident in the ability of tradition to serve as a corrective to new meanings, since tradition in itself, as Cahill also notes, is fallible. It might then serve as a culturally based corrective rather than a faith-based corrective. As Cahill also notes, the Bible itself is a tradition, which makes inner-biblical interpretation a form of tradition-corrective reading. Given the special status of the Bible (mentioned earlier), this form of corrective is however not to be equated with the corrective function of extra-biblical tradition, but it should still not be undertaken without a clear discussion and an awareness that one is applying something to a text that might be foreign to it, and thereby affecting its possible meanings. Such inner-biblical interpretation must not be wrong, and indeed it has been quite common within Christian tradition, but it should be clearly noted and discussed.

I find the center of the Bible, construed as the life and teaching of Jesus, hard to consider a center of the whole Bible, and not just the NT, by picking up on Cahill's point that the Bible itself embodies tradition; there was a time when the life and teachings of Jesus was not mentioned in Scripture, and still those Scriptures had a normative force for Jesus' life and teachings. So, then,

91 Cahill Between the sexes 49-50
would it be to follow the teachings of Jesus to posit a center of Scripture that Jesus himself did not? I would argue that one problem with such a reading is the risk of imposing meanings on the HB that might silence the texts. That problem surfaces as Cahill states that some texts in Scripture are not compatible with the ascribed center, and that those shall be evaluated and some not considered possible to constructively use today. I hold that there is a better way to construe biblical ethics, by positing a center that is not as foreign to the HB or the NT, using the imitatio Christi/Dei motif – a motif that is not that foreign to Cahill's ideas of discipleship and imitation of function.  

Concerning the sources of Christian ethics, the role ascribed to the Bible is an important one, but still one out of many. I find myself to be partially in agreement with Cahill, but I would like to emphasize more clearly the fundamental role of the Bible as a judge of what moral positions that are reasonable to hold within Christian ethics, while downplaying the role of tradition in finding meaning in the Bible. By emphasizing such a position for the Bible and biblical ethics, Christian ethics will not be as open to becoming something else than Christian. Depending on how one reads the Bible, the ethics will of course differ, but then there is also a clear way to challenge the construed ethics – one can challenge the way in which the Bible is read. That emphasis would also highlight Cahill's position that tradition can be at fault. This partial nature of the agreement between us should be seen against the background of my position on the role of revelation as a supplier of a Christian perspective on ethical insights of different sorts. That perspective is unique and can therefore not be attained through other sources, which places the Bible in a supreme role within Christian ethics – a role that must be emphasized, while not forgetting the possible flaws given the flawed nature of human understanding.

When it comes to the discussion on same-sex sexuality, we should note in relation to the passages that she discusses, that the verses from Genesis 19 by many scholars today, studying the reception of these verses and what they actually say in themselves, are found to focus on excess and greed as the problem of Sodom. Same-sex sexual behavior in the form of rape is then the fruits of such mindsets. Philo, living more or less in the time of Jesus and Paul, seems to be the first person to actually consider same-sex practices as one of the sins of Sodom. Therefore, I find it hard to motivate the presence of that story here, given an emphasis on the original context and author. Further, one should note that the verses from Leviticus do not mention women, only men; a fact not pointed out by Cahill. Cahill, then, fails to note the important difference made here between male

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92 This motif will be shortly discussed in the concluding chapter.
93 I will return to this in chapter 7.
95 There is actually no clear statement against female same-sex sexuality in the HB at all, a fact that is mirrored in
and female same-sex sexual acts, which is problematic if one wishes to ascribe a corrective role to the intent of the author and the understanding of the contemporary community. It can here be noted that there in fact is only one passage that mentions what can be interpreted as female same-sex sexual acts in the Bible as a whole, and that is Rom 1:26-27.96

In the discussion on those verses from Romans, and the other verses from Paul, Cahill is right in holding that there is an enormous difference between the context of the author and the context of us. She is also right in noting the “other-dominating” nature of male same-sex sexual acts. However, all sexual conduct was “other-dominating”, including that between man and woman,97 so to state that the NT condemns such forms of sex is not quite correct. More correct is the “status-marking” and “self-promoting” aspects that are forbidden, since sex with a woman would not really help ones status in the same way.98 It is also, in my view, right to state that the exploitative nature of same-sex sexual acts (at least between men) did have an impact on the perspective of Paul. However, Cahill also states that the recipients probably would have agreed with him in that inference, and that they too would have found such behavior to be worth condemning.99

While the exploitative nature probably was known to all, I do not find the argument that all would have condemned it to be beyond doubt, since Paul in 1 Cor 6:9-10 seems to be mentioning vices that are connected to the rest of the letter, and seem to reflect problems that he knew to have occurred in Corinth. Given the social make-up of the congregation,100 I find it more likely that Paul is condemning a behavior that exists, or is at risk of coming into existence, within the congregation.101 If that inference is correct, there would have been some dissatisfaction among some of the recipients with being labeled as unable to inherit the kingdom of God.102

Finally, in the search for an original meaning, it would have been interesting to note that Paul in 1 Cor 6:9 (and the anonymous author of First Timothy 1:10) used a Greek word rabbinical discussions on the matter in the first centuries C.E., where such acts are by no means treated as harshly as the male version - See BT (Babylonian Talmud) Yebamoth 76a and BT Shabbat 65a/b.

101 In agreement with for example Anthony C. Thiselton, The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000, 447-448.
102 I have argued this point more extensively in Simon Hedlund, ““The Kingdom of God cannot be inherited by arsenokoitai! (1 Cor 6:9)” Who are they, and why is Paul condemning them?” One year master thesis, University of Uppsala, Uppsala, 2015.
arsenokoítai) that had, as far as we know, never been used before. It seems to have been invented by Paul, inspired by Lev 18:22 and 20:13. That connection is of great interest, since the death penalty in Lev 20:13 is more severe than legal codes of the surrounding cultures.\(^{103}\) I also want to note that the inclusion of Deut 23:18 in the discussion is highly questionable, and I do not find it relevant.\(^{104}\)

4. Samuel W. Kunhiyop

Next, we will look at quite a different perspective compared to that of Cahill, coming from Samuel W. Kunhiyop. In his book, he sets out to offer “an evangelical and biblical framework that African Christians can use to help them when dealing with ethical problems.”\(^{105}\) The emphasis in his book is on African Christian ethics, as he holds that if one does not understand African ethics, it will be impossible to construe a Christian ethic that works within an African context.\(^{106}\) Two of the most important aspects, it seems to me, to be noted as specifically African in the ethics of Kunhiyop, is the communal perspective, and that there is no difference between practical conduct and ethical reflection within African Christian ethics; one learns what is ethically right primarily by doing, not by (only) reflecting. Therefore, he chooses to not differentiate between “ethics” and “morals”.\(^{107}\)

Concerning the exegetical foundation of biblical ethics, Kunhiyop emphasizes the importance of “proper interpretation”, qualified as reading the whole Bible and avoiding proof-reading, acknowledging standard rules of grammar and interpretation, avoiding to immediately look for a “mystical” meaning and instead taking the “surface-meaning” seriously, taking note of the historical and literary context, and reading “reverently with a desire for obedience”. The last criterion includes seeking to apply what is read to one's own situation.\(^{108}\) Further, although Jesus is, to Kunhiyop, the complete revelation of God, there is no difference between the HB and the NT when it comes to normative force in ethics. Neither is there a clearly stated “center” in the Bible, but there is a biblical guideline – Jesus as founder and keeper of the community, based on Hebrews 12:2. In addressing a moral problem, then, the whole Bible is taken into account. From this background, Kunhiyop then constructs his ethical approach, “graded absolutism”, which “takes a

\(^{103}\)Crompton Homosexuality & civilization, 32-35, 112.


\(^{105}\)Kunhiyop African Christian ethics, XV.

\(^{106}\)Kunhiyop African Christian ethics, 3.

\(^{107}\)Kunhiyop African Christian ethics, 2, 4-5, 66; “ethics is not based on abstract principles but on behaviour in specific situations.” That is an interesting perspective in light of Birch and Rasmussen's view of the interrelation between being and doing.

hierarchical view of ethics. When real moral conflicts occur, one should try to determine which moral obligation has the greater weight and will do the greatest good.”

Turning to the role of the Bible in Christian ethics, in relation to other sources of ethical insight, it is exciting to note how Kunhiyop does not discuss the traditions of “Western” churches, and instead incorporates African ethical tradition. By doing so, he comes to an understanding of African Christian ethics as firmly grounded in Scripture, while incorporating the elements of African ethics which he finds can be supported by Scripture. He further holds that there is a mutual understanding in traditional African ethics and Christian ethics of the fact that all ethical norms comes from God and His self-revelation. This revelation has two forms – general and special. The general revelation is revealed through “nature, history and the human conscience”, and it contains information about who God is. However, it does not say what God wants us to be, or what aim there is for Creation. For that, one has to turn to the special revelation in Scripture. By this affirmation, Kunhiyop assigns Scripture the most important role in Christian ethics. He goes on to state that the “trustworthiness of any Christian discussion of ethical issues thus hinges on whether or not Scripture, properly interpreted, justifies the conclusions”. We can attain a clarifying image of the dichotomy between Scripture and other sources of ethical insight from Kunhiyop's view of some arguments concerning same-sex sexuality, which he considers more a symptom of how the “god of individualism” has taken the place of Scripture, along with “psychological, social and empirical data” and “secular, humanistic thinking”. In this clear dichotomy, then, Kunhiyop holds that Scripture should be the one with the last say. However, as the community carries a lot of weight to him, he also holds that “the entire redeemed community must talk and deliberate” on important issues; the community then does have a say in ethical matters by virtue of being, as Kunhiyop holds, guided by Scripture. In that community, there are “key members” who will live exemplary lives that help others to live right as well. Since the authority of the community, to Kunhiyop, stems from them being guided by Scripture, I understand his position to be one where ethics is more or less solely based on revelation, a position that is in some contrast to that of Cahill.

Finally, the matter of same-sex sexual acts. We start by noting that Kunhiyop includes “sexual attraction to those of the same sex” in the term “homosexuality”, which he utilizes in his discussion. Drawing on African traditional culture, he goes on to state that all forms of sexual practices that were not intended for procreation were “abhorrent”, but “homosexuality and lesbianism, same-sex intercourse and same-sex marriage” were even worse, and not to be

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Kunhiyop holds, as Cahill, that what is is not necessarily what ought to be. Therefore he finds that the argument often made by “homosexual advocates” about accepting what is innate as being flawed and not acknowledging Scripture as superior to contemporary scientific data or individualism. And what does Scripture say? First of all, it does not discuss the either innate or situational nature of “homosexuality”. Instead, it legislates against “homosexual” acts, which Kunhiyop holds to have been prevalent in the surrounding nations of Israel; they are mentioned in the HB for a reason. Further, it states “heterosexual sex” as the norm (Gen 2, 4), and by implication “homosexuality” must then be a deviation from that norm — a norm given by God. The norm is reimbursed in Gen 19:1-11; Lev 18:22, 20:13; Judg 19; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9-10; and 1 Tim 1:10. Arguing from the position of the importance of norms, Kunhiyop concludes that “any attempt to justify homosexuality and homosexual acts is foreign to the Scripture”, and the church must not turn away from the position of Scripture. In practice, this inference means that the church cannot condone same-sex sex, but should welcome “homosexual people” and treat them with respect.

Now, a short evaluation of the presented position. Kunhiyop, as mentioned, holds that the historical context is of importance in a “proper interpretation”. He does not clearly discuss why, nor where he finds the meaning(s) of a text, which makes it harder to evaluate the interplay between context and text, but the overall rules are still valuable and quite concrete. As he also includes an element of application, in combination with the African perspective on ethics as a practical rather than theoretical enterprise, we can see how the hermeneutical goal of understanding is taken to the level of actual understanding by doing. However, there is some tension between this theoretical ideal of application, and the reality in which it should be performed. What should we do if Scripture seems to contradict itself? One might answer that the redeemed community then should be the judge (using the graded absolutism, I presume), since they live by the guidance of Scripture, but the problem still lingers if there is no clear consensus within that community. Further, this problem highlights the tension between the authority of Scripture, and the problems of interpreting it even within a redeemed community. One way of at least addressing that issue would be to more clearly discuss and exemplify the hermeneutical process — where do we find the meaning of Scripture, and how? What context is relevant, and why?

Concerning the relation between revelation and other sources of ethical insight, it should be clear from the presentation that Kunhiyop favors revelation. In his discussion on revelation, he mentions two kinds — general and special. It is interesting to note that he connects both of these
kinds to knowledge about God – either general knowledge of who God is, or special knowledge which is concerned with the will of God. It is actually not clear, in my reading, if any real ethical insight can be reached apart from revelation, in the mind of Kunhiyop. As I am inclined towards ascribing the Bible a special role in Christian ethics, even a corrective role, there are some points of contact between his and my position. However, the differences are also existent. I hold ethical insight to be possible to attain without revelation, and merely the special Christian ethical insight, and the Christian perspective, to not be found without Scripture. I thereby place more potential in other grounds for ethics than Kunhiyop. I also find him to be too optimistic about the possibility of reaching perfect knowledge about Scripture. He does not state that such can be reached, but his overwhelming emphasis on Scripture as the final judge, and the redeemed community as able to interpret Scripture in the necessary ways, points towards the position of too much belief in human understanding and a Biblicist ethics that might be blind to cultural influences, which in turn is at risk of silencing the witness of the Bible.

An area in which I more or less do agree with Kunhiyop is that revelation has the potential to disclose the will of God, which, in my perspective, might be able to evoke motivational force – if one believes in an almighty and all-benevolent God, and that God wants someone to do something, that someone might find it more relevant to do so than without that motivational background.

There are some problems to be noted in Kunhiyop's discussion on the verses concerning same-sex sexual acts, since Kunhiyop seems to diverge from his own rules of proper interpretation. The rule of minding the historical context seems to get almost no attention, with hardly any form of discussion concerning the historical context of the verses. Neither is there any discussion on the fact that Paul, in writing 1 Cor, more probable than not is an example of the reception of Lev 18:22 and 20:13, which might affect how we understand the passage. It is, then, hard to see that Kunhiyop does not end up focusing too much on the “surface-meaning” not simply of the text in his context, but of a specific translation – arsenokoitai in 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10 are often not translated “homosexuals” at all. That focus might contribute to why he does not differentiate between male and female same-sex sexual acts, a differentiation that, as mentioned, is made throughout Scripture.

To say that Kunhiyop focuses on the surface-meaning is however also problematic, since it recreates an important issue overlooked by him – that there might be more than one surface-meaning, as language is more often than not multi-faceted and carries the potential for more than one exact meaning. Again, the problem of what constitutes the meaning of a text springs to the surface, as well as the problem of holding a community to be able to reach an agreement concerning one correct meaning. Further, the surface-meaning might be heavily influenced by the readers own

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116See Hedlund The Kingdom of God, 2015, 52-54 for examples of different translations.
context, not least when the historical context, as in this case, does not receive enough attention. It then becomes hard to see if the reading is not rather eisegetical than exegetical.\footnote{That is, reading meaning \textit{into} rather than \textit{out} of the text.}

Another principle of Kunhiyop, a principle I find valuable, is the principle of including all the relevant passages. However, I would argue that Kunhiyop fails to do so, and that he also includes passages that are not relevant at all, unless read with the assumption that they are going to be relevant; that is, more or less, proof-reading. I have already mentioned Gen 19 and the problems of including it. Kunhiyop adds Judg 19, a chapter which in many respects mirrors Gen 19. However, in this case, it is even clearer that same-sex sexual acts are not in focus, since the men of the town ends up raping, and possibly killing, a woman. Obviously, then, the aim was to rape, and to choose males as primary targets might have come from a whole range of motivations. The text is in many ways problematic, but it is hard to consider it a text focusing on same-sex sexual acts.

When it comes to texts not included, I want to emphasize a criticism against not only Kunhiyop but also Cahill and the two other scholars (not yet discussed) who are the main focus of this paper. I shall later in this paper argue that Matthew 8:5-13 should be included in the discussion, but that is admittedly an unusual argument. However, other scholars have, in my mind rightly, noted the importance of at least shotly discussing Ruth and her relationship to Naomi, as well as the story of David and Jonathan, in a discussion on same-sex sexuality and acts in the Bible. I will not be able to discuss these verses in depth within the short span of this paper, but they will still be included, and indeed have an impact on my conclusions.

5. Richard B. Hays

Turning to Richard B. Hays, the moderately conservative NT scholar, we find the most thorough investigation of NT ethics examined here. However, the study is still restricted to NT ethics, and the “Old Testament” (OT)\footnote{Hays finds it better to use the term “Old Testament” since he is discussing in a clearly Christian milieu (see Richard B. Hays, \textit{The moral vision of the New Testament}: \textit{community, cross, new creation}: \textit{a contemporary introduction to New Testament ethics}, 1. ed., San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996, note 34 on page 312). I disagree with this assumption, since it is still an application of a later perspective that separates the two testaments in a way that was foreign during the time of the early church, and it implies a lot of theology that is not necessarily based in the Bible itself but on later, sometimes quite polemic, understandings. See further note 80 in this paper.} is given a task as a form of grounding and backdrop against which the NT is to be read and understood, while the NT will serve as a lens through which the OT is to be read. The place of the OT in NT ethics is exegetically motivated, since “it is impossible to read the New Testament rightly without hearing the voice of Israel's Scriptures \textit{within} these early Christian documents”, and the treatment of sexual issues in the NT presumes the authority of the OT. In fact, the NT should, Hays holds, be considered a “hermeneutical appropriation of Israel's Scriptures.”\footnote{Hays \textit{The moral vision of the New Testament}, 9, 306-308.}
Hays has structured his work in four categories, or “tasks”, where each one is considered an important part of the construction of NT ethics. These are “the descriptive, the synthetic, the hermeneutical, and the pragmatic task”. The first two are, to summarize them, the exegetical part. First, the descriptive task orders that the text should be thoroughly read and understood in its own right and context. Attention should be given to sources, development, social setting, and the symbolic world of author and recipients. Then, in the synthetic task, the text is placed in its larger canonical context, while listening to “the full range of canonical witnesses”, differing opinions, and textual genre. It is, then, an inductive task. This order of conduct means that one should first hear the individual text, and avoid premature harmonization. The hermeneutical task is to relate the text to the situation of the reader, to “translate” it, and the pragmatic task is to live the text. These two are naturally connected by both being part of the process of application. All four of these tasks are also, to Hays, intertwined and needed in order to create NT ethics. By applying the text, and living it, one will be able to see if the “fruit” of our “theological labor” is good – this is what Hays refers to a “the fruits test”, going back to Mt 7:18, 20.120

Hays grants reconstructive historical investigation a limited viability for NT ethics, for “does it matter for the church's normative ethical reflection whether Jesus of Nazareth really told the parable of the unforgiving servant (Mt 18:23-35) or whether it is an imaginative creation of Matthew's community?” The text is in any case canonical and thereby normative.121 Still, historical criticism is of great importance in the descriptive as well as the hermeneutical task;122 if we, as an example, were to realize that a commandment in Paul was solely based on culture and not theology, it would be feasible to argue that that commandment should change with the surrounding culture. However, to distinguish timeless truth from what is simply culturally conditioned is, Hays later clarifies, not possible in the NT.123 Further, it is important to Hays to have a sort of key to create a synthesis with texts that are sometimes quite different from each other. Hays postulates three images that will serve such a function, images that he finds to be, when put together, able to quite well encapsulate “the unity of the New Testament texts” and thereby be able to serve as guidelines in the synthetic task. These images are “community, cross, and new creation.” The community is the primary recipients of “God's imperatives”, and all hermeneutical tasks must be undertaken within a community (agreeing with Kunhiyop). Further, the “coherence of the New Testament's ethical mandate will come into focus only when we understand that mandate in ecclesial terms.” The cross represents how Jesus' death is a paradigm for the Christian, and how s/he should imitate his

120Hays The moral vision of the New Testament, 3-7, 9, 310.
121Hays The moral vision of the New Testament, 14.
122Hays The moral vision of the New Testament, 6, 9, 190.
123Hays The moral vision of the New Testament, 18, 299, 310.
obedience (*imitatio Christi*). The image of the *new creation* keeps the eschatological focus at hand, and also reminds the church that it “*embodies the power of the resurrection*” in a world that has not yet been redeemed. These images should represent a “narrative coherence”, and while not mandatory in reading the NT, they will “fruitfully discover a coherent moral vision in the texts”.

By these images, a “canon within canon” is created, and all texts are understood in light of it. It is not unusual for Christian ethicists to posit “love” as this canon, but Hays argues against such an inference, stating that it is not “a central thematic emphasis” for a number of writers (never even mentioned in Acts). Further, he finds that “love” is not an image, but an interpretation of the image of the cross, and that the term “love” has “lost its power of discrimination, having become a cover for all manner of vapid self-indulgence”.

There is no real discussion on the role of the Bible and revelation in construing Christian ethics in Hays, and he states that he is aware of this fact. He simply says that he holds the NT to have authority over for example scientific investigations and tradition (Scripture has a voice both “through and apart from” tradition), and that he is writing with his aim set on people who holds the same opinion. He settles for stating that extra-biblical sources (including experience) are in a hermeneutical relationship to Scripture, and do not function as authorities of their own. To investigate the issue further would, in his mind, take too much room in his already quite lengthy work. Instead, Hays aims at exemplifying (using, among other subjects, same-sex sexuality) how the four tasks might be thoroughly undertaken and what such an investigation might produce with regards to moral imperatives for today. This does however not mean that Hays excludes a discussion on science; with regards to same-sex sexual acts, he has quite a lengthy discussion on it, but concludes that the results of science in that case does not make any difference to the result. Hays is then positioned quite close to Kunhiyop in arguing that revelation carries most weight, and also in stating that the interpretation should be conducted within a community. However, the focus on the NT in Hays sets the two somewhat apart.

In the discussion on same-sex sexuality, Hays starts off by rightly noting that it “in terms of emphasis, it is a minor concern – in contrast, for example, to economic injustice.” He goes on to say that an ethics that wants to be biblical should not overemphasize such ”peripheral issues” but still heed carefully what is said. He deals with the same texts, more or less, as the aforementioned scholars (not including Judg 19 nor Deut 23:18, but tentatively adding Acts 15:28-29, which is quite unusual – Hays does however not include it in his conclusions, given some uncertainty of its

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125 *Hays The moral vision of the New Testament*, 200-202. See also Bexell *Etiken, Bibeln, och samlevnadens*, 80, who notes a large unity between ethicists in claiming the command to love God and neighbor as the central ethical norm.
usability), but he places a larger focus on the texts from the NT – something he motivates by the fact that more than one law from the HB has been regarded, by the church, as obsolete or simply disregarded ever since the first century. It is, then, more important to look at the NT. After having gone through the first two tasks (the synthetical is clear, according to Hays, since the testimony is univocal), Hays reaches the conclusion that to Paul, “homosexual behavior” was evidence of a rebellion against God, a consequence of the wrath of God incurred by that rebellion (primarily based on Rom 1:26-27). Hays then adds that the negative judgments of “homosexuality” must be read against the backdrop of “God's creative intention for human sexuality” in Gen 1 and onward. Man and woman were created for one another, for fulfillment within “heterosexual” marriage.\footnote{Hays \textit{The moral vision of the New Testament}, 381-382, 388-390.}

Turning to the hermeneutical task, there is an emphasis placed on the mode of a text – and there is no text in the NT that clearly has the mode of a \textit{rule} in condemning same-sex sexual practices. Therefore, no rules can be drawn from the texts, but “\textit{principles} governing sexual conduct.” What can be found is a “normative evaluation” of the phenomenon, and that evaluation is univocally negative. This negative judgment is not affected if homosexuality is seen as innate (that is, an argument from secular knowledge is not possible) – the gene for alcoholism is also innate, but that does not make it good. He therefore tentatively suggests that homosexual people who are unable to change their sexual ways should be treated with respect, love, and care, but still with an awareness of the problem, much like people suffering from alcoholism. He also holds that the argument from “advocates of homosexuality in the church”, that what is condemned in Paul is condemned because of its exploitative nature, falls since nothing in Rom. 1 mentions exploitation. Only if one could prove that God's intention with human sexuality as revealed in Scripture will be fulfilled by people performing same-sex sexual acts, might one say that such acts are legitimate. However, Hays has a hard time seeing how that would be possible. Until then, people who are homosexual should live as heterosexual people who have a hard time finding a partner – in “disciplined abstinence” – but still be welcomed to church and legitimate for ordination.\footnote{Hays \textit{The moral vision of the New Testament}, 394-403.}

Now, we turn to an evaluation of the propositions made by Hays. He conducts quite a thorough discussion on hermeneutics and exegetics, which is a strength. There are also some similarities between his idea of the need to understand the symbolic world of author as well as recipients, and my idea of understanding the language agreement. I would say that the symbolic universe is understood and expressed \textit{in} and \textit{through} the language agreement, so by understanding that agreement, one will also (have to) see the symbolic world behind it. His position on reconstructive history is also interesting, and I agree that the text at hand is normative. That
inference might seem to render source criticism less important than other forms of historical
criticisms; however, I find source criticism to indeed be able to supply us with valuable information,
but the text as it stands (sometimes simply reconstructed to the best ability of the exegetes) has to be
the starting point for Christian ethics, lest we should be unable to have a discussion on anything but
sources. This inference does not, however, rule out the importance of noting difficulties in sources,
and possible interpretational consequences.

The major problem that I find with Hays' construction of the exegetical foundation is the
relationship that he posits between the NT and the HB. Even though he holds that each text is to be
read and interpreted on its own before one tries to harmonize it with other texts, and even though
tensions should not be overlooked, it is not without its problems to read the HB through a NT lens,
least not when the synthetic task is at hand. As is seen when Hays discusses same-sex sexual acts,
the result of the stated relation is that Hays can completely disregard the rules that, he admits, exists
in the HB against same-sex sexual acts, and hold that the hermeneutical task should focus on
principles regarding sexual conduct, since that is what is to be found in the NT. One has to ask
why the HB's rules were read in their own right at all in the first place, if they in any case are not
legitimate if not reiterated in the NT. However, I do agree with the importance of recognizing the
mode of the text, and I will try to adopt it in my later discussion.

One also has to wonder about the inner-biblical exegesis that Hays performs; quite correctly
he notes that 1 Cor 6:9-10, and the Greek word arsenokoitai, is probably based directly on Lev
18:22 and 20:13. However, just a few pages later, he says that there “might be an allusion” to Lev
20:13 in Rom 1:32, but nothing more that would justify considering Paul as repeating or issuing a
new prohibition. The conclusion might be correct, but I cannot see why the connection between 1
Cor 6:9 (and perhaps 1 Tim 1:10) and Lev 20:13 was not discussed in light of this question, since it
would be an equally clear, if not clearer, connection than the possible allusion in Rom 1:32. In
essence, then, the problem is that the HB attains too much of a secondary position, a position that I
do not find warranted within Scripture. Perhaps one can find a warrant in tradition, as Hays seem to
do when arguing that laws from the HB were sometimes disregarded in the early church. Yet, that
argument stands in tension with Hays' own position in finding Scripture to be of greater weight, and
the support in the NT for disregarding laws from the HB concerning sexuality is by no means clear.

Further, I do not agree with the images postulated by Hays, partly because they are grounded
more in the NT than in the HB, which reiterates the problem just mentioned (most obvious with the
image of the cross). However, I do find his criticism of “love” as a central image valuable, and I

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agree that love indeed is not enough as an ethical center. I however find that the images suggested by Hays might be encapsulated in a more cross-testamental way, thereby escaping the issue of placing the HB in too much of a secondary position, if they are considered as interpretations of the imitatio Christi/Dei motif, just as “love” to Hays is an interpretation of the “cross”-image.

The role of the Bible in Christian ethics is, as implied, quite central to Hays, which becomes obvious even without a lengthy discussion on the matter. Experience, secular knowledge, and tradition are hermeneutical perspectives, but they are not able to correct the Bible. I find, as mentioned in relation to Kunhiyop, that the Bible should have a special status, but I also find that since humans are not perfect in reading and understanding, it is impossible to exclude the possibility of other sources of ethical insight functioning as a corrective in ethical matters. Were we to find that a person could be born with a homosexual inclination, and also with such a physical construction that s/he was not able to live in celibacy, it would (since such a person was probably unknown in antiquity) be problematic to not allow such new information to function as a possible corrective to the principles of Scripture. The Scriptural perspective on knowledge, principles, and rules would however still influence in what way that new information was to be processed.

The importance of the perspective of the interpreter and the role it plays in understanding a text must not be overlooked, and I find that Hays runs the risk of doing just that when ascribing quite a supreme role in ethics to the Bible since it over-emphasizes the possibility of reaching perfect knowledge of Scripture. Hays, then, places himself too much in a Biblicist position. He also, in discussing Rom 1, fails to notice that even though exploitation is not mentioned, the context might still have suggested it in such a clear way that it was not needed to be mentioned in order to get the point across. Interestingly however, by placing other sources than the Bible as grounds for ethical insight in a “hermeneutical relationship” with Scripture, I find that Hays might ascribe more weight to these other sources as a lens than he intends, and more than I would like. I understand the hermeneutical relationship to mean that other sources of ethical insight are used as interpretive prejudices, utilized to come to a new understanding of the Bible. Thereby those sources are placed as perspectives on the Bible; that is, in the role that I wish to ascribe to the perspective on ethics coming from revelation in relation to other sources. If I understand Hays correctly, then, there is an unresolved tension between the postulation of Scripture as final authority in ethical matters, and the utilization of other sources of ethical insight as interpretive perspectives that might affect how the Bible is understood.

Before turning to the construction of an ethics of same-sex sexual acts, I shortly wish to highlight a hermeneutical problem in Hays, closely connected to the relation between Scripture and tradition as sources of ethical insight (hence that I discuss it here and not with the other
Hermeneutical topics). Hays holds that Scripture “has its own voice both through and apart from the community's interpretive traditions.”\textsuperscript{132} He does admit that tradition has great impact on the interpretation, but still Scripture has its own voice. It seems to me that beneath that assumption lies the idea that one can read a text apart from one’s own interpretive traditions. If that is the case, I cannot but disagree with him. We can try to give Scripture as much of an own voice as is possible, through a sound hermeneutical approach, but we can never read Scripture completely apart from our own traditions and interpretive principles – as I stated in my theoretical framework, perfect understanding is impossible, and this is one of the reasons. One could argue that the Spirit would grant Scripture an own voice, a possibility that cannot be ruled out. However, it cannot be ruled out that the Spirit works through the interpretive principles either, or that the Devil does for that matter, so that argument will not really get us anywhere, especially not within a scholarly framework.

Concerning the construction of a Christian ethic with regards to same-sex sexual acts, there are some problems to be noted. First of all, there is no clear distinction made between male and female “homosexual acts”. Further, we have the issue of using Gen 19, even though it only serves as a background. In the NT, Paul receives a lot of attention, which is understandable. However, I find that Hays places too much emphasis on Paul's Jewish legacy, and overlooks the influence of the Greco-Roman culture. The exploitative nature of same-sex sexual acts, as noted by Cahill, cannot be disregarded simply because it is not clearly mentioned in Rom 1, since it still might supply a background to why Paul found “all homosexual activity as prima facie evidence of humanity’s tragic confusion and alienation from God the Creator.”\textsuperscript{133} I find the why-question to be an integral part of understanding the language agreement and symbolic universe of Paul and his recipients, and thereby in rendering the hermeneutical task more intelligible. It is further important to pay attention to the “why”, even when it is not noted in the text itself, since the underlying perspective might have influenced the language, and symbolic universe, of the text. Such a question might also help make the distinction Hays finds impossible to do, between culturally conditioned and timeless truth. In focusing on the mindset and perspective, as I argue should be done, we could say that a timeless mindset and perspective is propagated through a culturally conditioned text.

Another issue appears when Hays discusses the term “nature” (\textit{physis}) in relation to Rom 1:26-27. He rightly situates it in a Stoic context, where what was against nature (\textit{para physin}) was morally wrong. However, he overlooks the extensive use of \textit{physis} as a term almost interchangeable with “culture”. What was against nature was, according to many writers in antiquity, that which was against culture.\textsuperscript{134} These usages are not necessarily opposed to each other, but might supply a wider

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{132}Hays \textit{The moral vision of the New Testament}, 8.
\item \textsuperscript{133}Hays \textit{The moral vision of the New Testament}, 389, stated in discussing Romans 1:26-27.
\item \textsuperscript{134}Martti Nissinen, \textit{Homoeroticism in the biblical world: a historical perspective}, Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press,
\end{itemize}
understanding of the multiple facets of the word *physis*. There is, as mentioned, sometimes more than one possible understanding of a text within a language agreement. In the context of Rom 1:26-27 it should however also be said that Hays is right in stating that the “exchange” does not entail that Paul only condemned those who acted against their inherent sexual orientation - "sexual orientation” as such was not seen in the same way as today, and even though there probably was an awareness of the fact that some people preferred to have sex with men or women, that preference is more comparable to a modern preference of hair color – one is not necessarily bound to one or the other.  

Finally, the possible rhetorical importance of including women in the discussion (not noted by Hays) might be of great importance given the context of the recipients of the letter – most recipients seem to have been Gentile-Christians, and thereby inclined to hold female same-sex sexual acts to be worse than male (which were seen as under the right circumstances more or less unproblematic by most), while Jewish-Christians like Paul were of the opposite opinion. So, then, by including women and mentioning them before the men, Paul might be trying to level the two with each other in order to show how they are both at fault. Female same-sex sexual acts, then, are placed on the level of male exploitative same-sex sexual acts.

6. Peter Coleman

In writing for laymen rather than scholars, Peter Coleman rapidly affirms that the Bible is “for Christians the primary source of authority in questions of morality”. Thereby Scripture is granted a supreme position in relation to other sources of ethics. However, Coleman shows Scripture might be read in different ways, as well as the other sources of ethical insight, and he includes more than Scripture in the discussion on ethics. Given these inferences, it seems like Coleman might place more trust in our ability to understand the revelation in the Bible than I do, but in still discussing other sources thoroughly and emphasizing the complex nature of Scripture, Coleman is in this instance perhaps the one of these four scholars to hold the position that is closest to mine. He further emphasizes the historical meaning of words, to understand them in their original historical and literary context. The context of the whole text is important, Coleman holds, but that does not mean that the meaning of the text for us today is necessarily found in what the author thought. Instead, to find the “original” meaning is only one part of what needs to be done; the other being the hermeneutical task of interpretation to our own day and age.  

136Williams *Roman homosexuality*, 172.
Coleman does not explicitly address the issue of the NT’s relation to the HB, probably because in writing exclusively about same-sex sexuality, he sees no need for it – he finds that the witness is univocally condemning. The early believers in Christ, he states, did not “deviate from the Rabbinic teaching about homosexual behaviour.” He then proceeds to utilize different methods of historical criticism, including source criticism, analyzing the social context, linguistic analysis, and analyzing the textual context. He looks at the historical as well as the linguistic and canonical context of the (according to him) relevant passages, and tries to find some form of connection – which in this case seems to be, to him, quite an easy task.\footnote{Coleman Gay Christians, 40. See also for example the analysis of the verses from Leviticus (pp. 49-54).}

In looking at the Sodom-narrative as well as Judg 19, Coleman finds that neither “homosexual acts” nor “homosexuality” is in focus. However, he also grants that the authors did not seem to mind a negative judgment against such acts in assigning them such a negative role, and the stories, according to Coleman, came to serve as a traditional background to the hostility towards same-sex sexual acts. In Lev 18:22 and 20:13, Coleman does find a proscription against “homosexual behaviour”, which he finds to be based on the fear “that confusion in sexual behaviour disturbs the extensive but close-knit family structure which the Holiness Code is commending.”\footnote{Coleman Gay Christians, 46, 49, 54.}

Finally, he concludes that “Old Testament morality concerning sexual relationships is in basic principle committed to the defense of family and married life...” Thereby, “homosexual behaviour” is a threat. Coleman then discusses the inter-testamental period, which is quite unusual (and I will leave that discussion aside since it would add too much within the limits of this paper). The discussion seems to serve the purpose of showing a continuity between the perspectives held by the authors of the HB’s condemnations, and those found in the NT.\footnote{Coleman Gay Christians, 55, 69.}

In the NT, the focus is on Rom 1:26-27, 1 Cor 6:9-10, 1 Tim 1:10, with an added, yet quite careful, statement that Jude and 2 Peter mentions the subject of “homosexual behaviour” in a “diffused way”.\footnote{Since there is no extensive discussion on this ”diffuse mentioning”, and there is no real attention paid to it in the conclusions, I will not further discuss this inference here.}

The three other passages, Coleman holds, make direct references to such behavior, and all five of them are deemed to be in line with the condemning nature of the passages from the HB just mentioned.\footnote{Coleman Gay Christians, 68-69. Note that Coleman writes, on p. 87,”if” Paul wrote 1 Tim. This seems to be an acceptable path to handling the uncertainty of authorship within a book aimed towards people who are not scholars, and with a focus on other matters than authorship.} Coleman concludes that the three Pauline (or pseudo-Pauline) letters in condemning “homosexual behaviour” accepts contemporary rabbinical perspectives, “popular secular moralism”, and the view that sexuality should be restricted to a monogamous, permanent marriage. He also links the Pauline condemnation to the ancient institutionalized form of pederasty that existed in the context of Paul,
but he does not claim that the condemnation is necessarily limited to pederasty today, even though there is a huge difference between the ancient form of institutionalized pederasty and modern, consensual, “homosexual” relationships. He namely finds it unlikely that such relationships could not have existed in antiquity, so that Paul and other Christians would have been unaware of them, and equally unlikely that they would have been differentiated from the condemnation. 144

Coleman goes on to subtly postulate what seems to be an ethical ground principle – love (agápê). He holds that to encourage that principle is “a higher loyalty than to insist on obeying traditional rules concerning homosexual behaviour.” This statement is in line with his principle that Scripture should not be used to find moral codes of practice, but that it should be used to establish “the basic ground rules and then to work from them to particular precepts.” These ground rules, he claims, can then be formulated as natural law, since they come from God's creative will. He is also referring back to one of the foundational perspectives of his book, namely that there is a “clash of loyalties” today for a lot of Christians, between “obeying a long established teaching of the church and the basic Christian moral principle ”love your neighbor in need”. “145

Concerning the hermeneutical task, Coleman makes the case for and against a change of the traditional Christian standpoint on same-sex sexuality, and Scripture is found on both sides of the argument; that fact makes for an interesting discussion, since this fundamental witness to Christian morality then is not found on just one side. The texts do condemn the practice, but the “fundamental witness of scripture to the meaning of human sexuality is positive […] The dominance of the procreative model belongs to early Judaism, and is culturally conditioned by their need to increase population and stabilize family life.” To Coleman, then, there is a conflict here within Scripture between specific principles, that might be culturally conditioned, and the overall witness. There is also a discussion on different arguments stemming from tradition, reason, experience and science, which implies that Coleman finds all of these sources to have an important bearing on the creation of Christian ethics. However, also these are working both ways.146

The conclusion Coleman reaches states that Christians cannot “dismiss the procreational argument altogether. Any serious theological appraisal of the facts of human life and sexuality must include a statement about the opportunity human beings have to pass on their life to the next generation, and affirm that as part of God's creative order.” He finds that any “positive rule” for “homosexual people” has to focus on their potentials for fulfilling other aspects of “the relational criterion”, like a sustaining and developing relationship enabling personal growth, sharing of the generosity of love which enables growth as a Christian, security, friendship, and a sense of

144Coleman Gay Christians, 88.
145Coleman Gay Christians, 1, 189, 197.
146Coleman Gay Christians, 184-185.
complementarity. He also finds that the ideal relationship is between a man and a woman, a relationship that grows into a permanent commitment and might, if wanted, result in children.\footnote{Coleman Gay Christians, 189, 192, 197-200.}

To evaluate Coleman, I have to start with saying that he does a thorough job with the relevant verses, and he has a clear grasp of not only the importance of the historical context but also the tradition both within and outside of Scripture. He does also, in a short note, clarify why the context of the text is important - “a text without a context is a pretext”.\footnote{Coleman Gay Christians, 9.} I find this statement to capture the essence of why it is important to not allow the text to be interpreted free from its original context; it will then run the risk of rather becoming a pretext, or an empty shell to be filled with what the reader finds suitable. There is no closer discussion on the matter, but if I understand him correctly, I find myself agreeing with his foundational hermeneutical assumption concerning the role of historical criticism and context. He also states that not only the author is of importance, but in this case, the lack of discussion makes it hard for me to know what role he ascribes to the recipients in determining the meaning of a text, as well as how to limit the relevant context. This problem becomes visible when Coleman discusses the Greco-Roman background against which the NT verses on same-sex sexual behavior should be understood. Instead of, or together with, such a general note, it would be preferable to have a more specific analysis of the context of the recipients, and how that context might have affected Paul, since he wrote specifically to them.

In spite of the commendable focus on context, I find Coleman to not entirely include the whole context of some of the texts. In holding that the Sodom-narrative, as well as Judg 19, is not primarily concerned with same-sex sexual conduct, I find Coleman to be correct. However, to state that they are evidence of a negative judgment concerning such practices ignores the aspect of rape. The texts are not discussing same-sex sex versus different-sex sex; it is using same-sex rape as an example of something that is worse to allow a guest to live through than “heterosexual” rape of one’s daughter or concubine. I have a hard time reading “homosexual behaviour” into what is being considered appalling any more than I find heterosexual sex to be in focus when the tribes of Israel are going to avenge the death of the anonymous concubine who is raped throughout the night in Judg 19. To find same-sex sexual acts to be in any form of focus, to me, requires that one pre-supposes it to be, and that would make such a reading the result of a proof-reading.

The rationale ascribed by Coleman for the bans in Leviticus is not completely uncommon. However, there are a lot of rationales around, being proscribed to them,\footnote{I have found the issue of procreation, idolatry, the order of creation, Canaanite practice (might be the same as idolatry), the ruining of families, the mixing of opposite powers (might be the same as the order of creation), incest, blurring of boundaries (might be the same as order of creation), wasting of male semen, mixing semen with defiling liquids, unnatural, rebellion against God, rivalry with other Near-Eastern cultures (might be the same as Canaanite} and a discussion on some
of them might have been relevant, for two reasons: First of all, there is a rationale given within the text itself – that the practice of a male sleeping with a male as with a woman is a Canaanite practice and therefore a problem. If that rationale is considered correct, it might affect one's position on the maintainability of the ban in a different context. Second, to find family structures to be in focus is of course possible, but it begs the question of why male same-sex sexual acts would have been considered a threat at all, since other cultures (as the Greek in more or less the same time as the Levitical bans were written) did not reach the same conclusion. The uncertainty of the origin of the verses makes them impossible to understand without an interpretive aid, and since Paul in 1 Cor 6:9 is using them, I find that it might be motivated to interpret them through a Pauline lens (which gives the Hellenistic understanding of same-sex sexuality a prominent place), in order to attain an inner-biblical help for interpretation.

Coleman further mentions that the focus on a stable family and increasing population is an ancient, culturally conditioned, perspective. That fact seems to, to him, make the perspective less eligible in light of the overall witness of Scripture. There is a tension here, since it is hard to see how that overall witness is not also culturally conditioned – it did not come into being in a cultural vacuum. Further, cultural conditioning does not necessarily mean that what is said, or at least the idea behind it, is not eligible. The problem becomes apparent when Coleman gives his own view of how same-sex sexual acts and sexuality should be considered, in saying that one cannot disregard the focus on procreation. That focus might well be said to be culturally conditioned in a time and place when Israel was in dire need of multiplying, and the amount on people on earth was just a fraction of the amount that is here today. In fact, since the passage seems to originate in an exilic, 6th century context, the focus on procreation might have been a counter-colonial and comforting focus, a perspective that might affect our understanding of it. However, one could also argue that procreation is an intrinsic good in being ordered by God in Gen 1:28, which might give the cultural conditioning less bearing. So, then, the relation of cultural conditioning to fundamental witness is not clear, as Coleman seems to attempt a balancing act that is not clearly discussed. I find that even though the imperative to procreate is probably culturally conditioned, it is also a fundamental need for the survival of the human species, and so I agree that it cannot be disregarded. However, it should be noted that there is no ban on not procreating or having non-procreative sex, and Jesus himself did not procreate. This inference should instruct us to be careful in using Gen 1:28 in discussing same-sex sexuality. It is also quite interesting to note that to Coleman, children is optional for “heterosexual” couples – the possibility seems to be what is important.

practice), the denigrating nature of the act, and prima facie disgusting/wrong as proscribed rationales.  
150Crompton *Homosexuality & civilization*, 32.  
151Schotroff *The Creation Narrative*, 36.
Since Coleman is writing not for primarily scholars but for lay people, he does not have an extensive list of references (something he openly admits). This way of writing is understandable, but it also becomes a problem when he states that Paul, in Rom 1:26-27, is simply saying what is obvious to everyone – that (at least male) same-sex sexual acts are against nature and wrong – since that idea according to Coleman also was part of Roman law. He does, sadly enough, not mention what law this would be, but my best guess would be lex Scantinia. This law, of which we know very little and only from secondary sources, seems to have contained rules regarding same-sex sexual acts, and it has been interpreted as prohibiting such acts. However, there is no support for saying that the law concerned all forms of same-sex sexual acts. The law was instead against men having sex with freeborn Roman boys, and also perhaps against a freeborn Roman man willingly assuming the penetrated role with another man.\textsuperscript{152} This, then, does not entail a blanket prohibition against same-sex sexual acts. Instead, the focus is on “protecting” the manliness and honor of the freeborn Roman men, since these men were supposed to be the pillars of the Roman society. To have those pillars “feminized” was thought to potentially jeopardize the stability of the state.\textsuperscript{153} However, as long as there was some moderation, nothing seems to have forbidden these men to engage as the penetrating partner with for example slaves or freed men.\textsuperscript{154} I therefore find it hard to believe that the statement of Paul was as well suited in his contemporary society as Coleman seems to hold.

There is no in-depth discussion on the relation between revelation and other sources of ethical insight, so my description of it is bound to be based on a lot of interpretive work. This interpretation has had to take into consideration that since Coleman is writing in a more pastoral than scholarly way and on one single issue, he might not have found the need to emphasize one of the sources; after all, he finds that they all have internal disagreements, and they all need to be discussed since they have been discussed throughout history. By inferences from what Coleman says, we might however find some information of the matter even though it is not discussed. He holds that developments in science, for example, are important in ethics, but he does not say if it is more or less important than the witness of Scripture. Such a position, of course, suffers from being quite vague, as I would like to see a clear working-out of the relation between revelation and reason; why are they both important? However, that will and aim is perhaps more scholarly than pastoral. Further, Coleman does, implicitly, take a stand against overly Biblicist ethics as well as those based solely on non-revelatory sources, by means of his method for creating different approaches to the issue and ascribing relevance to them. If other sources are needed because

\textsuperscript{153}Cantarella *Bisexuality in the ancient world*, 97-101.  
\textsuperscript{154}Williams *Roman homosexuality*, 19, 38-39.
Scripture itself is not clear, or if they are needed as correctives or valuable inputs anyway, is not stated, but they are in some way to be taken into consideration for a Christian ethic concerning same-sex sexual acts and sexuality. As mentioned earlier, Coleman does also hold a special role for the Bible in Christian ethics, but at the same time he includes other sources. Therefore I still find myself to be closer to him than to the other scholars investigated, although that might be because I read my position into Coleman's silence.

Finally, a short note on Coleman's assessment of the sexuality in the context of Paul. He claims that it is unlikely that no consensual same-sex sexual relationships (most importantly in this case between men) existed, so that it would have been unknown to Paul. I find that he is mixing apples with pears here. There are two facts being stated; 1) it is unlikely that consensual same-sex relations (between men) did not exist, and 2) if these existed, as is highly probable, Paul knew about them and they influenced his perspective. I agree with number one, since same-sex sexuality seems to always have existed in human societies. However, I do not find support for number 2. We know that the more or less contemporary stoic Ovid (43 B.C.E – 17 C.E) held same-sex sexual acts between men to be impossible for men to enjoy if they played the penetrated role.\(^{155}\) I would hardly think that such a statement was true then, nor that it has ever been; so just because something exists (be it same-sex couples based on mutual love or men who enjoy being penetrated), does not mean that everyone knows it or recognize that fact. Paul, living in a time and place where male same-sex sexual acts were firmly connected to exploitation, abuse, and power, might very well have thought a consensual relationship between men impossible. Further, given that all sexual acts were considered to involve a power-relation where someone won and the other lost, it is hard to imagine, without being anachronistic, that Paul could see and accept a sexual relationship between men as more or less egalitarian, as I would say is the at least ideal image of today. Sex is today (hopefully) seen as done with someone, instead of the ancient notion of sex as being done to someone.\(^{156}\)

Now, we shall turn to a brief discussion of my own position regarding the questions of the paper. As there is not room for a thorough exegetical discussion, I will be able only to hint the exegetical investigation performed in order to answer the questions of this paper.

\(^{155}\)Ovid *The Art of Love* 2.683-684

\(^{156}\)Martin *The Corinthian body*, 177.
7. Conclusions and a suggestion

This concluding chapter will be centered on the questions of the paper, so as to supply a clear and comprehensive link between questions and answer.

How could an exegetically sound basis for a biblical ethics concerning same-sex sexual acts be construed? As I have argued in this paper, the first step should be to clarify the hermeneutical assumptions behind the way one reads the biblical texts. I have further argued that the hermeneutical foundation should emphasize the language agreement that existed in the context of the author and his/her recipients as a basis for the text's meaning. The exegetical basis of biblical ethics, then, should be founded upon a thorough historical-critical examination which focuses on that language agreement in order to find the meaning(s) of the texts. Further, the focus should not be on the individual rules or principles (even though the mode of a text is important to note) but on the perspective that is propagated through that rule within a specific context.

From such a hermeneutical foundation, one should move towards investigating all the immediately relevant passages concerning the question at hand. As there might also be other passages that are of importance to understand the perspective or ethical insight than those that in an obvious way concern the subject, the investigation might have to be broadened. In this paper, that inference renders an inclusion of passages concerning homosocial love. These should be included since homosexuality in our time is often thought to include not only sex but also a social aspect. By including narratives that are relevant to that aspect, we might attain a fuller image of the biblical witness also concerning sexual acts. It can also remind us of the social connotations that did exist about same-sex sexual acts in antiquity, including exploiting and damaging behaviors, and emphasize the contrast between them and (the benevolently viewed) homosocial behavior.

Before looking at the construction of a biblical ethics on the matter in focus, one more aspect has to be discussed; the centrality of imitatio Dei/Christi. With Birch and Rasmussen I hold character and decisions as interconnected aspects of humans, constantly forming each other. I also agree with the central place, for a Christian, of the Bible in these aspects, and in not pointing out a central point or notion of Scripture through which other texts should be understood in relation to the decision-making aspect. Such readings might render the biblical witness muted, or highly altered, since the central themes are not always relevant to the issue or reoccurring enough. However, turning to the aspect of character, I find that there is a need of some form of center, because a character needs focus to develop. Further, in relation to character-building, it might be anachronistic to not assign a central theme to Scripture given the ancient notion of mimesis. Translated, this

157Specific rules for what verses are relevant to what issues are hard, if not impossible, to normatively construe, and this paper is certainly not the place for such a discussion.

158Hays The moral vision of the New Testament, 199-203 points this problem out in a commendable way.
means “imitation”, but in a broader sense than mere reproduction. Mimesis was supposed to also render new actions on the part of the imitator, who adopted the nature of the imitated. The object of mimesis was also, through being imitated, admitted as being worth imitating.\footnote{Zimmermann, M, \\& Zimmermann, R \ 2015, 'Mimesis in Bible didactics: an outline in the context of religious education', \emph{Hts}, 71, 1, 1-6, here 2-4, showing that the idea of mimesis is prevalent already in Plato and Aristotle, as well as in Scripture. See also Soon-Gu Kwon, \emph{Christ as example: the imitatio Christi motive in biblical and Christian ethics}, Upsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Diss. Upsala : Univ., 1998, 14, and Jerome Neyrey's study of the Gospel of John, where he looking at the social world presumed by the author of the Gospel argues that Jesus as God's Son was a “chip of the old block” and thereby represented, indeed perfectly imitated, God (Jerome H. Neyrey, \emph{The Gospel of John}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 45). The very foundation of imitatio Dei is found, as far as I can tell, in the Creation account, where God creates human“in His [their] image”. To Schotroff, this entails that God believed humans to be capable of imitating Him (Schotroff \emph{The Creation Narrative}, 34).}

So what models for imitation are supplied in Scripture? I will here argue the most relevant answer to be God and God as incarnated in Christ, and that all other themes can be seen as aspects of \emph{imitatio Dei/Christi}. I find this motif to be central to Scripture, and the imitation of Christ in the NT is inextricably bound to the imitation of God in the HB, since the aim of imitatio Christi is to “embody the imitatio Dei.”\footnote{Roberts, N \ 2012, 'Imitatio Christi, imitatio Muhammadi, imitatio Dei', \emph{Journal Of Ecumenical Studies}, 47, 2, 227-248, here 242.} To hold the imitatio Dei as a central notion of the HB is of course not without problems,\footnote{As aptly noted by Walter J. Houston, “The character of YHWH and the ethics of the Old Testament: is imitatio Dei appropriate?”, \emph{The Journal Of Theological Studies}, 58, 1 (2007), 2007, 1-25, 25, stating that God is sometimes depicted as acting in ways that are hard to find worth imitating for humans, ways that actually seem to be directly forbidden by God. It is concluded that the image of imitatio Dei, while important, “is not a key to unlock all doors in the ethics of the Old Testament”.} and I will briefly attempt to motivate why I find the imitatio Dei \emph{central enough} to qualify as a valid backdrop and center for the imitatio Christi motif and biblical ethics.\footnote{I here understand “central enough” to mean that it is a motif that has a wider reach and encapsulates more of the biblical literature than any other motif when both the HB and the NT is included. I will base a lot of the discussion on an article of Jonathan Klawans, a Professor of Religion at the Boston University, specialized in ancient Judaism - see Jonathan Klawans, "Pure violence: sacrifice and defilement in Ancient Israel", \emph{Harvard Theological Review}, 94, 2, 2001, 133-155, here 140-154.}

Professor Jonathan Klawans has showed how the Priestly writings of especially Leviticus, as well as the Holiness Code of Lev. 18-26, can be understood in light of imitatio Dei. He argues that ritual impurity is inflicted by acts foreign to God – God does for example not die nor have sex. In order to be holy, then, the people have to purify themselves after acts related to these things (like caring for the body of a deceased or having sexual intercourse). Such purification is part of life throughout the Israelite history in the HB, and had to be; procreation for example is, as mentioned, ordered by God. To be holy like God is holy further entails a notion of being separated from that which is not holy, which is why the impure should not enter the realm of the holy without first being purified. Klawans also convincingly argues that the sacrificial cult, as well as the building of the temple, can be understood as imitatio as it imitates the behavior of the God who controls life and death, who chose Israel (imitated in choosing the sacrifice), and who constructed the world.\footnote{The temple serves as a figurative micro-cosmos, an inference strengthened by the similarities between the Creation}
However, Klawans finds the imitatio to not explain what is accomplished by the imitatio, nor by the sacrifices; he then argues that the goal of sacrifices was to attract the deity to dwell in the temple. Ritual impurity did not affect if God would do that; however, moral impurity did.

This kind of impurity was considered especially heinous (sexual sins, idolatry, and murder) and resulted in counter-acting the intended result of the sacrifices. Too much moral impurity, then, would leave the people without its God. What is worth noting here, to us, is that the bans against these forms of sins are encapsulated within the framework of “be holy, for I am holy” in Lev 17-26; the idea of imitatio still lingers in the background. What I want to do, then, is to expand this understanding of moral impurity to encapsulate also the works that are found outside of the Priestly writings.164 If all are morally holy, God will be in His temple. What makes this notion so central to us is that in the later Deuteronomistic History, as well as in more or less all of the prophets, the heinous sins of the Israelites are mentioned as an explanation to why God has not helped them in some instance when they needed it. By understanding the imitatio Dei motif to be central, we can see that the failings of Israel were examples of failing to remain morally holy; failing to morally imitate God who is holy, and thereby keep God dwelling in the temple of Jerusalem.165

Even though the imitatio Dei motif might not be clearly stated in every book of the HB, I would suggest that it has the capacity to be encompassing enough since it in being understood in this way is understood as underlying such a large part of the ideas of the HB, also concerning sacrifices and religious rituals, and thereby can be considered a central theme.

In the NT the imitation of Christ is, as many scholars have noted, a familiar theme, not least in the Pauline textual corpus and the Gospels.166 It is interesting that also many of the scholars discussed in this paper in some way emphasize it. However, my position differs by placing imitatio alone on center stage.167 In doing so, I am postulating a clear difference between my own position

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164 Whether or not the Holiness Code is in some state attributed to the Priestly writers is of course a matter of debate, but the interpretive framework where imitatio Dei is important is in any case highly relevant to them. Further, it is important to the Deuteronomistic writers, as shown by the high presence if imitatio Dei-motifs in Deuteronomy (Houston The Character of YHWH,10). More importantly to note here is the potential problem of expanding the Priestly understanding to encapsulate writers who might not have shared such a perspective. If that is the case is hard to know, and I find it reasonable to think that the perspective was not unique for the Priestly writers. However, that is still an assumption that might be validly questioned.

165 See also Houston The Character of YHWH, 14, where it is stated that "There are enough references to penalties in the Torah to make it clear that it expects this to be another aspect in which YHWH's example is followed by his people." - also in punishing wrongdoing there is a sense of imitation.

166 Kwon Christ as example, 18, Birger Gerhardsson, "Med hela ditt hjärta": om Bibelns ethos, new exp. ed., Lund, Novapress, 1996, 137.

167 The debate concerning love or imitation as the more central notion was undertaken already by the early rabbis in the centuries directly following Jesus – rabbi Akiba and rabbi Ben Azzai, for example, seem to have disagreed – see Hermann L. Strack, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch. Bd 2, Das Evangelium nach Markus, Lukas und Johannes und die Apostelgeschichte : erläutert aus Talmud und Midrasch, München: Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1924, 358).
and that of for example Nordin, Ogletree, Hays, Kunhiyop, and Bexell. While all include some form of imitatio-idea, they place focus on some (as I see it) aspect, such as love and/or solidarity, or perhaps community and/or eschatology. I find that such focuses risk narrowing the scope of the imitatio, as well as to expose it to anachronistic readings. Further, even if we postulate, say, love as central, we still have to ask “what is Christian love?”, and the answer is only found by examining the way of God/Christ, since the Christian perspective is found in the ethical insights of Scripture.

A clear strength to positing the imitatio motif as central to the whole of Scripture is that Jesus can be seen as not only explaining and clarifying the law and the will of God, but also as embodying them, giving the disciples the best form of image of God. We are then able to see Jesus as a continuation of the covenant between God and Israel, and not as something completely new; a view that is consonant with that of most, if not all, NT writers, and with retaining the unity of Scripture. This positioning also allows the notion of mimesis to incorporate its free, constructive aspect. By instead placing for example ”community” or “love” as a central theme, that constructive aspect risks being limited, since God/Christ are more than what can be encompassed by such terms. The central positioning of the imitatio Dei/Christi motif should then suggest that we ought to emphasize the focus on what perspective is propagated by the actions, words, or narratives of and about God and Jesus in character-building, which then influences decision-making.

Turning to the biblical witness, where I have discussed most relevant verses in relation to the authors mentioning them, and emphasized the exploitative and detrimental nature of the acts in focus as perceived in their ancient, biblical, contexts, I shall now focus on my additional suggestions: the narratives about Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan, and Mt 8:5-13. In the first two passages, we find that love between people of the same sex can be positively viewed. In Ruth, one of the large reasons for that finding is the use of the Hebrew dabaq (1:14), and the general terminology of 1:16. Dabaq is also used in Gen 2:24 to describe how a man is supposed to “cling to” his wife and become one flesh with her. 1:16 uses even more terms that resonates with the marital language of Gen 2:24, which makes the idea of a marriage or covenant between the two women come to mind, and the relation renders (in the long run) the positive outcome of a child. 170

168Kwon Christ as example, 32 considers the NT a continuation of the HB.
169Gerhardsson “Med hela ditt hjärta”, 141, 145-147 argues that following Christ is to internalize his attitude of agápê. This seems to me to be a form of combination of the focus on love and the focus on imitation. Yet, I find again that ”agápê” is too narrow, and I see no reason to limit the focus. Kwon Christ as example, 35 makes an important point saying that ”The Bible itself is more concerned with practical wisdom than theoretical knowledge”; perhaps imposing a systematization (something that has never reached a consensus with regards to how to live the imitatio Christi – see Kwon Christ as example, 85) on something that is not a system is inherently anachronistic and risks emphasizing certain aspects, instead of having the whole complexity taken into account, and allowing the ”practical wisdom” to form the character of individuals through their practical actions.

David, a descendant of Ruth, expresses love “greater than that of women” (2 Sam 1:26) in relation to Jonathan, and the love Michal has for David is described with the same word as the love Jonathan feels for him. Some have argued that it is a covenantal love between the two men, but the Hebrew ‘âhêb does not reveal if that is the case. A possible homosexual relation has been seen in both of these stories, and given the described behavior of not least Jonathan and David in 1 and 2 Sam that is no surprise, but to read sex into the relationships is unfounded. Love does not have to entail sex, and there is no evidence that the stories implied sex in their original contexts, or that that would have been considered acceptable. Still, what can be inferred is a benevolent perspective held on loving homosocial relationships, relationships that did not include the contemporary power-aspects nor humiliation-theme of a male penetrating a male but instead homosocial relations that benefited both people involved.

Turning to the Gospel of Matthew 8:5-13, written probably in Syria (possibly Antioch) to a primarily Jewish-Christian congregation, we find a Roman centurion and his pais. This word might well be translated “boy” instead of the common “servant” - “boy” in the meaning of the younger, penetrated partner in a same-sex sexual relation between men. The term might to us sound like it denotes a child, but often it was used for “a youth who had attained full height” and who was starting to attain a beard. So, then, the centurion could be understood as asking Jesus to heal his young adult male lover, and as Thomas Bohache notes, it was not unusual for a master and a servant to be in a sexual relation.

It is further worth noting that the parallel story, found in Luke 7:1-10, utilizes the word doulos (slave) for the boy. Although that does not provide us with guidance to our interpretation, and as Ulrich Luz states, the “Johannine recension of our story in John 4:46-53 is secondary” (and thereby not directly useful to our interpretation either), one thing we can infer given the alternative wordings is that the use of pais seems to be more of a conscious choice than a mere accident. The story in Matthew, then, is intriguing to us in that the author possibly with intent chose to use the word pais, with its sexual connotations. It was commonly known that Roman men had sex with not-freeborn boys; indeed, it was a mark of masculinity. For a Roman officer,

172Nissinen argues along these lines about Jonathan and David (Nissinen Homoeroticism in the biblical world, 56).
174Dover, Greek homosexuality, 16, 85.
175Bohache Matthew, 512, Nissinen Homoeroticism in the biblical world, 71-72, Williams Roman homosexuality, 3.
176Note also the possibility of a doulos being the passive partner, since the slave was supposed to serve his/her master's sexual needs if the master so wished.
177Luz Matthew 1-7: a commentary, 9.
178Cantarella Bisexuality in the ancient world, 98, 100. This point has, to my knowledge, not been noted in making the
masculinity was desirable, and it therefore seems implausible that those connotations were lost on
the Matthean community, especially if it lived in or around the Roman provincial capital of Antioch,
a city that hosted Roman garrisons at all times.

Moreover, it is relevant to look at the literary function of the story. Within the Jewish-
Christian community, this story probably was part of a debate about whether Gentiles should be
welcomed into the community.\textsuperscript{179} The centurion might then be seen not only as an example of a
prominent Gentile with great faith, but as a prominent Gentile with the Gentile “vices” that the
community knew existed within the Gentile community. The author could then be seen here as
responding to arguments against his position, based on the sexual practices of Gentiles.\textsuperscript{180}

However, even with these inferences at hand, the evidence is not conclusive, and arguments
that cannot be dealt with here can be made for other readings. Yet, the possibility of the presented
perspective should not be ignored. Matthew 8:5-13 might be a unique example of an instance where
Jesus, while being aware of the sexual status of the centurion, is described as not reprimanding him,
but instead commending him on his great faith (8:10).

If we were to assume this story to be relevant here, we have to ask why Jesus did not
condemn the same-sex sexual acts, given their exploitative nature. Such a question could oppose the
idea of any sexual connotations in the story. However, that is not the only feasible explanation if we
note that the centurion, by publicly asking Jesus to help his 
\textit{pais}, is described as showing a sign of
affection towards him. That sort of affection was not necessarily part of the Roman ideal of
masculinity, which focused on dominating and humiliating the other. If the Roman centurion could
just have traded the 
\textit{pais} for a new one, why go to Jesus asking for help? This sign of affection, of
care, might then be what made Jesus not condemn him for the practice.

When we combine this reading of Mt 8:5-13 with the stories of Ruth, David, and their
respective loved ones, a pattern is formed. Indeed, there are actually two patterns concerning same-
sex sexual acts. The first pattern is easily discovered; same-sex sexual acts of an exploitative and
damaging nature are condemned. Given that those forms of sexual acts were the ones that probably
came into consideration, at least when discussing male same-sex sexual acts, such a reading seems
quite clear. The second pattern seems to relate to love between people of the same sex, love that did


\textsuperscript{180}France \textit{The Gospel of Matthew}, 310 argues that the story, to the author of Matthew, was “a paradigm for the
extension of the gospel of Israel’s Messiah to include also those who had no natural claim on him” - and who would
by a Jewish community in the Diaspora have been seen as less able to have a “natural claim on him” than a Roman
centurion with a male lover? Furnish \textit{The moral teaching of Paul}, 66-67 shows that Jews considered same-sex
sexual acts to be a “Gentile vice”; it was, then, probably present in the mind of the Jewish readers that such “vices”
occurred, or has occurred, amongst those who wished to become part of the Christ-believing community.
not entail *exploitative* sexual acts, but instead intense feelings of commitment. This form of love is not expressively encouraged, but the three narratives suggest a benevolent evaluation.

In summary, then, we are left with two (albeit one a bit tentative) biblical positions; one that condemns exploitative (male) same-sex sexual acts, and one that has a positive view of love between people of the same sex. Further, while the imperative to procreate is important, it is not tied to a rule or ban, and Jesus himself did not live up to it. Therefore, we cannot say that others has to do so. Neither can we say that sex which cannot render children is inherently wrong. The biblical ethics concerning same-sex sexual acts, then, is one that condemns exploitative same-sex sexual acts between men, while benevolently evaluating love between people of the same sex.

*What role should the Bible, tradition, experience, and secular reason play in constructing Christian ethics?* The Bible should supply a perspective on other sources of ethical insight as well as on insight from within Scripture itself (and other possible revelatory sources), supply a unique form of ethical insight, and also lead people of faith towards a life of imitatio Dei/Christi. Its role is decisive in Christian ethics, but since human understanding is not perfect, the Bible must always, in ethics, be placed in dialog with tradition, experience, and secular reason. Among these sources, the Bible is recognized as supplying unique ethical insight, essential for construing Christian ethics.

The knowledge of the Christian God is primarily presented within the Bible, with later revelations (when trusted) supplying people with a continued witness about God. Since I have argued that the imitation of God/Christ is of utmost importance in forming a Christian character, it is natural that the Bible, which describes the object of imitation, acquires a central role within Christian ethics.

These inferences are based on a qualified understanding of knowledge, where I have postulated that there is a divine reality, but it is a reality which we cannot attain objective, scientific, knowledge of. Further, the sort of knowledge I have discussed is a contextual one, which must be

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181 Some might argue that the story about Onan (Gen 38:8-10) implies such a ban (see for example [http://www.catholic.com/tracts/birth-control](http://www.catholic.com/tracts/birth-control) (seen 10/5-2016), a page that “is one of the nation’s largest lay-run apostolates of Catholic apologetics and evangelization.” (see [http://www.catholic.com/about](http://www.catholic.com/about) seen 10/5-2016). However, the focus in that story is not on the fact that Onan “pulls out”, but instead that he is disobeying a law (Deut 25:5-10) and the orders that he has received from his father Judah. The interrupted coitus is simply the means by which he disobeys, the disobedience is what gets him killed.

182 It is worth noting that in the BT *Nedarim* 20b anal intercourse between husband and wife, which cannot lead to children, is allowed – although with some qualms.

183 One argument to be shortly noted, and at the moment disqualified, is that of marriage. One could argue that sex should be within marriage, and that marriage should only be for man with woman, woman with man (which is in itself a question for another paper). Therefore, people of the same sex cannot have sex. However, such a simplistic reading does not respect the fact that Genesis 2:24, which tells why a man “clings” to his woman, is mirrored in Ruth’s clinging to Naomi. Neither does it respect the etiological nature of the text, or the fact that it is a statement, not an imperative. We also know that marriage did not work in that way even in ancient Israel; the simple fact that a man could have more than one woman to “cling to” tells us that the singularity of the woman in 2:24 was not realized. We also have to note that there are strong linguistical reasons to assume that Ruth and Boaz had sex before marriage, as the narrative utilizes euphemisms relating to sex when telling the story of how they spent the night together (Ruth 3). This aspect, then, needs further investigation and qualification before it could be rendered as supplying a legitimate perspective on same-sex sexual acts.
construed with certain adjectives; in this case, Christian ethical knowledge. Since this is not what is
usually understood by the term “knowledge”, I have instead discussed it in terms of ethical insight,
as well as a perspective on other forms of ethical insight. This double role of the Bible means that it,
as a source of ethical insight, is placed in dialog with tradition, experience, and secular reason. As a
perspective, it attains a function on a meta-level, giving the interpreter a perspective from which the
world is understood and interpreted; two roles that are naturally not completely separated. The
insights instead leads to a changed perspective, and the perspective leads to new ethical insights.

Finally, I should stress that the central and double role of the Bible in Christian ethics by no
means renders it infallible or self-sufficient. While it does supply us with ethical insight of a unique
kind, it is in need of interpretation and not the only source of ethical insight. Inspired by Birch and
Rasmussen, as well as Gadamer,\(^{184}\) I find that questions are an essential basis of attaining new
insight, and the questions of ethics posed to the Bible today often comes from secular reason or
experience, and not from the Bible. When we recognize that fact, and also recognize the fallible
nature of our understanding, it is hard to not draw the conclusion that the Bible must be in a
dialogical relation with the other sources of ethical insight in order to create a vivid and dynamic
Christian ethics that renders imitation of God/Christ possible in a modern world.

*What would a Christian ethic founded on the answers to the aforementioned questions say
concerning same-sex sexual acts today?* In order to answer this question, we will take a short look
at the witness of the different sources of ethical insight.\(^{185}\) As earlier mentioned, I cannot go through
the whole of Christian tradition; it would be too long, and even longer when the important question
of “who's tradition?” is asked.\(^{186}\) Christian tradition is however, as far as I know, mostly negative
towards same-sex sexual acts. Yet, we cannot take tradition at face value since that would be to
ignore the hermeneutical circumstances. We have to ask, and try to understand, *why* same-sex
sexuality was condemned when it was, as well as why not. Therefore, I will not draw any clear
inferences from tradition in this construction of Christian ethics. However, I will note the negative
stance against it as important for future investigations. If such investigations find that tradition is
negative towards same-sex sexual acts because it finds them to be in themselves, no matter their
egalitarian or exploitative nature, against God's will, such a finding would call for a re-opening of
the conclusions drawn here; it might or might not change them, but it would be such an important
piece of information that it has to be incorporated in the dialog with Scripture.

Turning to secular reason, there are diverging witnesses as to how same-sex sexual

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185This overview is clearly tentative, and in need of further, more thorough, examination than is possible here.
186A question brought into focus not least by reading Kunhiyop from a Western perspective.
incline should be viewed; as inherent or culturally created (or perhaps a combination). The (admittedly limited) investigation I have conducted into the scientific aspect of same-sex sexuality tells me that it mainly comes from “an interaction between hormonal and genetic embryonic factors with perhaps a minor contribution of postnatal social and sexual experiences.” This view contradicts psychological explanations that have occurred in the wake of Freudian psychoanalysis, and is supported by the fact that same-sex sexual inclination seems to be more or less equally prevalent in all cultures and times, no matter the environmental, postnatal, conditions. Of course, this does not mean that what is should be, as has been pointed out. However, that inference in turn does not mean that one can compare same-sex sexuality to alcoholism (as do Hays), since alcoholism is evidently bad for one’s health; a fact that is not true for same-sex sexual acts. Such acts can be detrimental to health, just as sex between people of different sexes, but it does not have to be.

So then, what do these inferences tell us in dialog with the Scriptural perspective presented earlier? I would suggest that the innate nature of same-sex sexuality does not supply us with any new inferences, since what is innate is not necessarily good or bad simply by virtue of being innate. What we however might infer is further emphasis on the importance of qualification; same-sex sexual acts, stemming from an innate sexuality, are not a homogenous set of acts. Instead, they can be harmful and dangerous, as well as good and fulfilling, in the same way as sex between people of different sexes. It then becomes even more important to bring forth from the biblical witness the mindset of care and the benevolent perspective on love between people of the same sex. We should further underline the univocal condemnation of exploitative sexual acts between people of the same (male) sex. Given the scientific perspective, perhaps we should even widen that condemnation to include the forms of sexual acts that are known to be detrimental to the health of one or both of the people involved. One example of such an act would be to have unprotected sex with a partner of the same sex while carrying HIV and not informing the partner. Such an act would not display care or a love that can be said to resemble the benevolently viewed homosocial love in the Bible.

Last but not least we have experience. As I myself am not homosexual nor have experienced a same-sex sexual relation, I cannot argue from experiences of such things. However, what I can do is to state that there seems to be no experiential argument to be made which says that all forms of same-sex sexual acts are bad, nor that all are good. I also believe that most people would agree with

187 Hays The moral vision of the New Testament, 397-398, however not citing any sources.
189 It could reasonably be argued that this inference should be valid also for people of different sexes. However, as this paper is mainly concerned with same-sex sexual acts, I do not include the question of couples of different sexes. Yet, it should be noted that the power-structure of sex between man and woman is not clearly opposed in, for example, Paul, which might make an inclusion of such couples in this discussion problematic, or at least in need of a deeper discussion than is possible here.
God in stating that it is not good for people to be alone (unless voluntarily chosen). Further, anyone who has a dear friend of the same sex (me included) are probably inclined to recognize the homosocial love between Naomi and Ruth, David and Jonathan. Anyone who has loved someone who was sick could probably relate to the Roman centurion. All this seems to testify to the complexity of same-sex sexual acts, but also to the simple human need and will to care and to love, and to feel loved and cared for. As with same-sex sexuality, these needs are probably innate, but unlike it, we know that it existed also in the Garden of Eden-narrative, stated by God. Perhaps, then, our shared human experience can underline the benevolent perspective on homosocial behavior found in the Bible. People need each other in order to live a good life, for being alone is not good. We cannot by this infer that people need to have sex in order to live a good life, but we cannot protest love between people of the same sex either; rather, we should encourage it.

From these inferences, I would suggest that the experiential insight we can bring to the dialog is one that also differentiates between good and bad same-sex sexual acts. Further, it underlines the fundamental need to love and be loved, to care and feel cared for. In that respect it highlights the benevolent perspective on homosocial relations (where sex is not necessarily a part), while it discriminates between acts that are good and acts that are bad for a person.190

When we combine these aspects with the Scriptural witness, a Christian ethic concerning same-sex sexual acts would state that such acts are both commendable and condemnable, depending on their context.191 If they are part of a loving and caring relationship, with no element of exploitation or denigration, they are seen as good. If they do not live up to these standards, they are bad. Same sex sexual acts are by no source of insight univocally encouraged or condemned. Instead, same-sex sexual acts that are performed within a loving and caring relationship and that are not detrimental to the health of anyone involved are good (considering insight of experience, and keeping the benevolent witness on homosocial love and the problem of human loneliness found in the Scriptural source of ethical insight in mind), while those acts that are not performed under such circumstances or are in some way damaging (I assume exploitative acts to be damaging) to one or both of the partners are condemned (especially within Scripture).192

190With regards to the last aspect, there might be some disagreement. Experience might in some cases say that different forms of temporary sexual encounters are good, while such an inference is hard to support in the Bible, where the positive judgments seem to concern relationships of deeper emotional ties. This is of course also the case with sex between people of different sexes. As I in this paper am not aiming towards resolving the issue of how temporary sexual liaisons should be viewed within Christian ethics, I will settle with stating tentatively that the form of homosocial relations that are benevolently viewed within biblical ethics is that between two people who have a deep emotional connection. In this instance, then, the (possible) witness of experience (while probably not unanimous) is overridden by the witness of Scripture.

191A conclusion close to that of both Cahill and Farley.

192The attentive reader might have noted that I here include women – I do so since experience comes from women as well as men, and because of the inclusion of Ruth and Naomi in the Scriptural witness.
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