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The Bible and The Transgender Christian: 
Mapping Transgender Hermeneutics in the 21st Century

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Abstract: In this article, I present a meta-analysis of reception history as a discipline, followed by a study in the interpretative methods used by transgender Christians. Following Helen Savage’s work on transgender Christians’ spirituality, I concede her three observed hermeneutical methods: 1) establishing a hierarchy of texts, 2) resolution through historical criticism, and 3) changing the subject. I also add to her observations two additional observed methods: 4) self-insertion and 5) Scripture as precedent. These observations noted, the landscape of transgender Christians’ theologies is revealed as more diverse than others have previously anticipated, and increasingly so. This research also opens up space for theologians, scholars, and clergy to understand transgender hermeneutics and theology with a greater deal of nuance and care.

Keywords: transgender; hermeneutics; LGBTQ; theology.

1 Introduction

While the social and political visibility of transgender people has increased dramatically in recent years, scholars, clergy, and lay Christians remain largely in the dark about the theological reflections of transgender Christians. This may,

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1 Transgender people are people who do not exclusively identify themselves as the gender they were assigned at birth. At times, “transgender” may be shortened to “trans.” I do not include an extensive discussion of this definition because my preferred definition has virtually zero import for this subject matter, as self-identification is prioritized. This approach, admittedly, restricts me to the modern Anglophonic world. This is fine for my present purposes, but it would prove to be a problem (albeit, not an insurmountable one) in cross-linguistic studies or Anglophonic studies that precede the term’s coinage [John F. Oliven, Sexual Hygiene and Pathology (Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott Co., 1965)].

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in part, be explained by the very small percentage of the US population that is both transgender and Christian. It has been estimated that 0.58% of the US population is transgender; however, only 21% of transgender people identify as Christian (compared to the 71% of the US population that identifies as Christian). By my own calculations based on this, approximately 0.12% of the US population, around 390,000 people, are both transgender and Christian. This is about the same population as Oakland, California – the 45th largest city in the United States. By these estimates, transgender Christians then make up 0.17% of the total Christian population in the United States. But what does this mean for researchers? It means that transgender Christians constitute a small, but not insignificant, portion of the population.

The outline of this article begins with a brief meta-analysis of reception history as a fundamentally Deleuzian discipline. I then provide a detailed exploration and expansion of Helen Savage’s groundbreaking work in the area of transgender Christian hermeneutics. Thereafter, I use Savage’s work and my augmentations as a lens through which to understand the variety of ways that transgender Christians – lay, clergy, or scholars – interpret the Bible.

2 Reception History and the Rhizome

For Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, the images of map and rhizome are intertwined with one another. While conducting this research, I found it helpful to imagine reception history as a rhizomatic discipline. Appropriating the term ‘rhizome’ from the discipline of botany, Deleuze and Guattari write that:

A rhizome […] is characterized by ‘ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.’ […] Rather than narrativize history and culture, the rhizome presents history

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4 Raw estimate based on a general population estimate from the US Census Bureau of 318,900,000.

5 According to data from the US Census Bureau in 2010, Sacramento’s population was 390,724.
and culture as a map or wide array of attractions and influences with no specific origin or
genesis, for a ‘rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things,
interbeing, intermezzo.’

In the same vein, reception history is not a discipline that seeks to establish
Truth-once-and-for-all, but rather to make the process of travelling theological
or biblical paths easier and more practical. Reception history can be seen as the
fashioning of a map to navigate the landscape of biblical interpretation. This is
always within certain parameters and with certain traits of cartography in mind.
One could simply map roads, or could also include topography; one could reflect
the vegetation of the area, or could map the weather forecast on a certain day
and hour. Likewise, the reception historian can map climate, political bounda-
ries, and economic activity, among endless other aspects of a social reality that
partakes in the conditioning of any particular hermeneutic.

In fact, all of these things might theoretically be combined on one map, but
that may create an unsightly map. One so ugly that it may be indecipherable. The
point is that maps can serve many purposes and are never comprehensive, just
as reception history cannot be comprehensive. For this reason, reception histo-
rians may need to compile and consult many maps for the same area. Also dif-
ferent map-makers may highlight different landmarks. A quasi-comprehensive
map would not look like “a bouquet of flowers” as Arthur Koestler describes the
arrangement and presentation of data; it’s not pretty. Moreover, because it is not
pretty, it is not intelligible for navigation.

Furthermore, some maps that apparently attempt to map the same things
may look completely different. This is evidenced in world maps throughout the
centuries. Maps from the minds of Ptolemy or Pomponius Mela, for instance, look
quite different from each other, and would look utterly foreign to modern map-
readers. If historical criticism is indeed like map-reading, navigation, and asking
for directions, then perhaps we can understand how modern readers have, at
times, looked upon ancient interpreters of Scripture with a great deal of perplex-
ity. One familiar example is the Apostle Paul’s usage of Scripture in his letters.
Insofar as historical criticism is map-reading and navigating, reception history is
akin to map-making. In this regard, it is indeed unfortunate that some reception
historians would rather not ask for directions.

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3 Hermeneutics and Helen Savage

Helen Savage’s 2006 doctoral dissertation from Durham University, “Changing Sex?: Transsexuality and Christian Theology” is the most immediately helpful in our subject matter here. Savage is a former clergy member, a student of theology and a transgender woman who studied, in part, transgender people’s interpretations of the Bible. In her dissertation, Savage conducts interviews with seven British transgender people and surveys available literature on hermeneutics written by transgender people. Although I would have liked to include interviews and conduct both quantitative and qualitative surveys in this study, time constraints and lack of institutional clearance precluded me from doing so. One significant drawback to this limitation is that my study does not engage with transgender people who are fully in the closet, as well as individuals who do not have access to academic publishing, or do not have internet access. Additionally, my subjects tend to be white Americans; if I had more time, academic clearance, and sufficient resources, my first goal would have been to establish a more representative sample of transgender Christians, particularly along racial lines.

Likewise, Savage notes in retrospect that, “it might have been good to have had a bigger sample” for her dissertation. Mindful of these limitations and shortcomings, Savage’s work is still the most useful for my purposes, owing to a wealth of similarities in addressing the topic. We both are interested in the ways that transgender Christians interpret the Bible and especially in lay perspectives, as well as scholarly perspectives. Indeed, hers is the only study of this particular kind that I have found, her contribution is clearly indispensable.

The reader may notice some differences between lay hermeneutics and scholarly hermeneutics. The difference in rhetoric is likely to be the most apparent

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9 An article from the Pew Internet & American Life Project shows that, for instance, “38% of disabled Americans go online, compared to 58% of all Americans. Of the disabled who do go online, a fifth say their disability makes using the Internet difficult.” Internet access is also particularly problematic for low-income people, people older than 50, and people of color, see Lee Rainie, Mary Madden, Angie Boyce, Amanda Lenhart, John B. Horrigan and Katherine Allen, “The Ever-Shifting Internet Population: A New Look at Internet Access and the Digital Divide,” Pew Internet & American Life Project (2003): http://www.pewinternet.org/2003/04/16/the-ever-shifting-internet-population-a-new-look-at-internet-access-and-the-digital-divide/.
10 International representation is nearly impossible. Certain obstacles (both linguistic and cultural) would prevent a reliable international sample from being remotely possible, especially for a single person.
11 Helen Savage, personal email to author, March 6, 2016.
departure; this may simply arise because scholars acquire a certain vernacular in the academy, with which laypeople have little interaction. This vernacular disparity is then exacerbated by the social barrier that scholars and laypeople seem to have erected between each other. Lay people and scholars are not known for having many robust interactions; Rev. Dr. Andrew Village notes as much: “The reason why I embarked on the study of ordinary Bible readers is that the academy, for all its sophisticated developments in biblical scholarship in the last fifty years, remains largely ignorant of what other people do with the Bible.”

This ignorance can be mitigated, in part, by amplifying the voices of laypeople in scholarly formats and the voices of scholars in lay formats, I attempt to do the former here. Engaging scholars in conversation with laypeople is vital in order to establish a better scholarship and more informed polis.

There is a sense in which Savage’s work and the present article both demonstrate the necessary hermeneutical elements of social science. While we lack statistically significant data (and therefore cannot generalize our conclusions), reception history moves forward, as Isaac Ariail Reed put it, “with questions about the meanings swirling through the experiences of social actors.” We cannot expect reception history “to provide the kind of direct intellectual leverage that is needed to do the work of the social analysis of evidence. Rather, these questions have to be approached indirectly, mediated through the interpretation of social meaning.” Instead, as Reed argues, we must direct our “efforts [...] to reconstructing the textures of human subjectivity, and to the meaningful worlds of social life in which subjects act in a certain place and a certain time.”

The primary motivation for “the way in which transsexual and transgendered Christians use the Bible,” Savage writes, “is characterised by the degree of cognitive dissonance experienced between each person’s awareness of gender dysphoria and their faith tradition.” Savage identifies three major hermeneutical methods employed by transgender Christians to alleviate this cognitive dissonance:

1. Establishing a hierarchy of texts,
2. resolution through historical/redaction criticism,
3. changing the subject.

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14 Reed, Interpretation and Social Knowledge, 90.
15 Reed, Interpretation and Social Knowledge, 91.
16 Savage, “Changing sex?”, 133.
Establishing a hierarchy of texts, as Savage maintains, “presents no challenge to the literal meaning of the offending text, but its message or meaning is qualified or even cancelled by a test of prior significance.” Savage points out that this approach “may involve […] the sidelining of major sections of biblical material. The significance of the Old Testament, in particular, may be downgraded.” Lee Frances Heller, for instance, writes:

When I discovered the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy were laws designed to keep Israel in check and to prevent them from going after pagan gods, and then discovered in Colossians 2:14 that Christ nailed all of these laws and ordinances to His cross, taking them out of the way by cancelling them, I was released from that load of guilt and was born-again a second time! There is no need to carry all of that guilt brought on because of cross-dressing.

While there is a degree of anti-Semitism in some interpretations such as this, insofar as interpreters may characterize (ancient) Judaism as wholly archaic (or, even worse, “Christ-killers”), the hermeneutical method itself is not inherently so. One might also establish a hierarchy of texts by curating a specific set of texts (from the Old and New Testament) that pay homage to, or prove, a particular theological vision.

Resolution through historical/redaction criticism appeals to “a form of broad historical or redaction criticism” and makes “an acknowledgement […] of the situatedness and constructedness of the Bible.” Interpreters using this approach, as Savage notes, tend to “move away from literalism” and adopt “a hermeneutic that allows for a much greater degree of critical openness.” Sometimes this move is accompanied by a physical migration from conservative congregations to more progressive congregations. Although Savage means by this method a “broad” and, at times, vague appeal to historical or redaction criticism, I will use this category to also refer to specific, scholarly uses of historical criticism by transgender biblical scholars where relevant.

21 Savage, “Changing sex?”, 137.
Changing the subject is common to those transgender Christians who want to maintain a more conservative faith and hermeneutic. This approach can be characterized by clever rhetorical moves regarding the “real” meaning of texts in question, to avoid addressing the passage directly (what I will call abstracting). For example, when transgender people are sometimes confronted with Deuteronomy 22:5 – “A woman shall not wear a man’s apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the Lord your God” – they may respond by saying, quite cleverly, that the verse does not apply to transgender people because trans women are women and are not (typically) wearing “male” clothes. Or the approach can be characterized as casting doubt on a text as scientifically, ethically, or culturally archaic (what I will call delegitimizing). For example, an interpreter might say that there have been scientific advances such that we understand transgender people much better than the authors of the Old Testament did. This is also the method most closely associated with the notion that the Old Testament was “superseded by the grace of the new covenant in Christ.”

It might be more helpful to think of this method as “changing focus” because the phrase “changing the subject” seems to have slightly negative connotations in some contexts. “Changing the subject” might suggest to some that these readers are just avoiding the issue at hand in a text altogether. While this is nevertheless a possibility here, this method is, more often than not, a way of engaging a text by taking a step back first, by zooming out to get a view of the bigger picture, rather than disengaging a text. The specific issue of the text is usually at least implicitly addressed by focusing on what the reader takes to be a more fundamental problem.

For my study, I adopt Savage’s three categories of hermeneutics and expand on them by adding two further categories that I observe in transgender hermeneutics:

4. self-insertion,
5. the use of Scripture as a precedent.

The former, self-insertion, is constituted by inserting oneself in the biblical narrative either by a midrashic retelling (like writing a new play about Jesus as a

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24 I don’t mean “conservative” to be synonymous with “anti-transgender.” I mean it in a rather etymological sense of “conserving” the authority and integrity of Scripture.

25 Johnson, ed., By the Grace of God, 277.
transgender woman\textsuperscript{26} or through reconstruction (like arguing that Jesus, as presented in the biblical text, is transgender.\textsuperscript{27}) These two forms of self-insertion are often difficult to demarcate in practice. Simply put, midrashic self-insertion is about filling in the gaps of a narrative, whereas reconstructive self-insertion is about filling in the gaps of one’s life with “headcanons”\textsuperscript{28} of specific biblical characters in their texts as transgender. Megan B. Abrahamson points out that “in fandom communities, as opposed to purely critical ones, interpretation and fanfiction often go hand in hand – in ideology as much as in practice.”\textsuperscript{29} While these two can be difficult to differentiate, the most distinctive difference between the two forms is their proximity to the text in question and, less so, their feelings about orthodox interpretations of Scripture. Midrashic self-insertion recognizes itself as an addition or extension of the text; it acknowledges its own extra-biblical nature. Reconstructive self-insertion typically posits that their interpretation of the text is the original or intended meaning.

The latter method, Scripture as precedent, has two major types among many others: Scripture as a precedent for lament, and as a precedent for virtue. Usually when people use Scripture as precedent, they are not presently concerned with finding transgender/gender variant people in the Bible as characters. These readers are often expressly disinterested in identitarian hermeneutics. Instead they seem to be concerned with the ethico-affective themes and commissions of Scripture that usually have nothing explicit or direct to do with transgender people. This could be an embrace of, for instance, the raw emotion of the lament Psalms (precedent for lament) or the command to “not bear false witness” (precedent for virtue).


\textsuperscript{28} This is a term drawn from fanfiction culture. Using this term in an academic sense is, admittedly, rather unconventional. However, in line with Megan B. Abrahamson’s use of the term, “headcanon (as opposed to ‘canon,’ the concrete facts given in a text) is a term for one’s personal interpretation of something not explicitly stated.” [Megan B. Abrahamson, “J.R.R. Tolkien, Fanfiction, and ‘The Freedom of The Reader,’” Mythlore 32 (2013), 55–75.] Although, I do not intend to naively insinuate that Christians are merely “fans” of Jesus; instead, I intend to draw a connection between canons and headcanons, orthodox interpretations and heterodox interpretations.

\textsuperscript{29} Abrahamson, “J.R.R. Tolkien.”
As a relatively minor observation, transgender interpreters may attempt, like many cisgender readers of the Bible, to substantiate their interpretations by insisting that their interpretations are “clearly stated in Scripture.” This is a rhetorical method I call an *argument from clarity*. Anyone can likely find this theme in every methodology, and the argument from clarity is not exclusive to any single religious persuasion. For instance, Pat Mosley (a transgender neo-Pagan and former Christian) writes, “[m]y personal experience has been that even where Christians are accepting of gay folks, they are uninformed about trans people, despite the fact that we are more clearly spoken about in the Bible [than gay people].”30 The author of *The Brick Bible*, Elbe Spurling31 (an atheist), commented on the Bible’s ability to speak for itself in a Reddit thread when she was asked whether her rendition of the Bible is meant to be “satire and make fun of the Bible or just a really cool brutally honest retelling.”32 She replied:

So I studied ancient Christianity and Judaism in college, and that’s when I first read through the entire Bible on my own. I was surprised by it left and right, especially the enormous mind-numbing amounts of violence throughout. I came away thinking ‘I don’t think anyone actually reads this book’. And that didn’t seem right since so many people were claiming it was the very word of God and our best moral guide. So that’s the motivation behind *The Brick Bible*. People should know what’s in the Bible, whether they believe in it or not, but especially if they claim to believe it to be the word of God.33

30 Personally, I don’t think that any pericopes about eunuchs are all that clear to most lay readers. If anything is clear here, it is that Mosley has done some research (however minimal) on the topic of eunuchs. I don’t take ‘eunuch’ to be a part of common vernacular nor is it a category in active use in modern Western culture. Pat Mosley, “Responding to Deuteronomy 23:1,” *Reclaiming Theylogy*, 19 Aug. 2014, https://reclaimingtheylogy.wordpress.com/2014/08/19/responding-to-deuteronomy-231/. (italics author’s own).


Spurling suggests that the Bible speaks for itself when it comes to violence. Elsewhere, Vanessa Sheridan (a Christian) points out that “there were clearly disciples of Christ who were women.”34 An argument from clarity is no more evidence of a proposition’s falsity than it is evidence of its truth; arguments from clarity can be any degree of true or false. Accordingly, the argument from clarity qualifies as a logical fallacy, as it is also posited as a logical step in an argument rather than a conclusion or a beginning concession.35

In some cases, the Bible is apparently so clear about transgender people that it hardly even has to be read:

Rather than trying to engage the scriptures without precondition or bias, many people begin with a culturally derived sense that such ‘perversity’ or ‘deviance’ [...] is plainly wrong and sinful in the eyes of God. (They usually can’t tell you exactly why that should be so, but they’re certain that it is. After all, the Bible must condemn such behavior [being transgender] somewhere!)36

Some early and medieval Christians may respond to the argument from clarity by saying that the “clear meaning” is not the “true” or most important meaning of Scripture (for example, Origen). Nonetheless, arguments from clarity are used by lay people and scholars alike.

Similarly, Savage notes a slight trend in her subjects’ interpretations, her sample was largely British and she associates this with British culture: privatized faith. While I do not see this same trend of privatized faith in my subjects’ interpretations, it seems that the argument from clarity is an American alternative to the appeal to privatized faith. The argument from clarity is distinctive of American culture. While the argument from clarity is not exclusive to American Christianity because there are non-Christians who employ this rhetorical tool – either to disparage Christians for not following the affirming disposition of the Bible or to justify renouncing or denying Christianity – it does seem to be driven by the American impulse for control over even the smallest aspects of life.

It would be foolish to maintain that any of these categories have strict boundaries. More often than not, they overlap, and are used in neighboring sentences.

34 Vanessa Sheridan, Crossing Over: Liberating the Transgendered Christian (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 88.
35 The philosophical and theological implications of this logical fallacy are important and interesting, but tangential to my purposes here. In terms of its prevalence in Christian theological discourse, a critique of this fallacy is long overdue.
36 Sheridan, Crossing Over, 62–63.
or are even simultaneously. Some interpreters may tend to use one method over others or may avoid using another at all. Moreover, it would be unwise to generalize these methods for all transgender Christians. While transgender hermeneutics is the study of transgender people interpreting the Bible, it is does not exclusively mean these interpreters are attempting to find “pro-trans” passages. The search for pro-trans Bible passages is certainly included in transgender hermeneutics, but we should not reduce transgender interpreters to a naïve homogeneity. Transgender interpreters frequently, though not unanimously, point out the importance of transgender experience to inform hermeneutics (cf. Sheridan, Conover). Transgender readers of the Bible may also be interested in salvation, righteousness, wisdom, consolation, or even eschatology, rather than simply seeing themselves explicitly affirmed in Scripture. In this way, transgender Christians really are not unlike cisgender Christians.

4 Transgender Hermeneutics

From this point on, the reader should assume that virtually every subject in this study is a transgender person, usually Christian but, at the very least, formerly Christian. It is worth briefly distinguishing ‘transsexual’ as a subset of ‘transgender.’ ‘Transsexual’ generally refers to a transgender person who desires to undergo a medical transition to some degree in relation to their transgender identity. This distinction is important because the struggle of being accepted as a different gender (or no gender at all) changes depending on one’s affinity for undergoing medical transition (for example, hormone replacement therapy, genital reassignment surgery). In some communities, it is easier to be accepted as transgender if one does not desire medical transition, whereas in others it is easier to be accepted if one does desire medical transition. In other communities, both are equally condemned or embraced.

Additionally, transgender men, transgender women, and non-binary people all have different experiences as well. These differences (between ‘transsexual’ and ‘transgender;’ and between trans men, trans women, and non-binary people) and their communities are important to investigate but, as far as I can see, they do not have a clear or significant impact on the hermeneutical methods used by transgender Christians. While there are many studies on the experiences of transgender people, there are nigh few that examine how these experiences may influence theologies or biblical hermeneutics. Even if I did see a potential impact, I would be unable to approximate the degree of that impact in this study.
In line with the hermeneutical methods used to diminish cognitive dissonance, discussed above, I will analyze my various readers in this order: those who establish a hierarchy of texts; those who appeal to historical criticism; those who change the subject; those who self-insert, and those who see Scripture as a precedent. Space does not permit me to discuss my personal views about these hermeneutical methods at any length, even though they are technically relevant given that I am also transgender and Christian.

4.1 Establishing a Hierarchy of Texts

Pat Mosley, a professional aromatherapist and self-described “serial blogger,”37 who is agender,38 writes in response to the weaponization of Deuteronomy 23:1, “this verse is largely irrelevant to Christians today since Jesus established a trans-affirming tradition.”39 Mosley cites Isaiah 56:5, Matthew 19:12, and Acts 8:26–40 to support this, arguing that they portray eunuchs (especially as presented in Matt 19:12) as “people who would likely be interpreted today as transsexuals, intersex people, and non-binary/genderqueer people.”40 It should be noted that Mosley is no longer Christian, but was when this blog was written. Although now neo-Pagan/Wiccan, Mosley still stands by these interpretations of Scripture. It is interesting that affirming such interpretations of Scripture proved insufficient in itself for Mosley to remain a Christian, even though Mosley insists that there is “clearly” biblical evidence in favor of transgender people.41

Lois Simmons approaches Scripture with the general axiom that “God defines the very meaning of love, ‘for God is love.’ (1 John 4:8) God is also a compassionate, merciful and gracious God.”42 For her, passages like 1 John 4:8 provide a lens through which one must interpret other passages that might prove

37 Pat Mosley, “About,” you found me. https://patmosley.wordpress.com/about/.
38 “Agender” refers to someone who does not experience any gender in themselves whatsoever. A controversial self-identification, certainly, it is also important that any researcher take their subjects at their word when it comes to self-identification. At different times, and sometimes under various pen names (Rev. Blue Tansy, Oceane Aghony Louder, and Sea Lowder), Mosley has referred to themselves with he, she, they, and xe pronouns. The most recent and common pronouns I can find them using are they/them.
39 Mosley, “Responding to Deuteronomy 23:1.”
40 Mosley, “Responding to Deuteronomy 23:1.”
41 Mosley, “Responding to Deuteronomy 23:1.”
to be difficult or advocate potentially unethical acts (like Canaanite genocide or the death penalty for “practicing” homosexuality). This is not, I take it, terribly unlike the cruciform hermeneutic. While this may also fit the category of changing the subject, especially insofar as she begins theologizing, Simmons’ remarks here reflect establishing a hierarchy of texts because she quotes a specific passage.

Since 1965, Pat Conover has been an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. In her book, Transgender Good News, she points out that Scripture must be interpreted through other Scripture passages. In a discussion on Deut 22:5, Conover insists that the verse must be taken in the context of its surrounding verses. In this particular instance, reading the surrounding context serves to relativize the applicability of the text. Arguing against passages like Deut. 22:5, Conover writes “Jesus […] challenged the cultural laws of Judaism that had no saving power […]. Following Jesus, I suggest that the core ethical standard for assessing transgender experience and expression is whether it expresses Christian virtues.” From this point on, there is a very fuzzy distinction between Conover establishing a hierarchy of texts, appealing to historical criticism, changing the subject, and using Scripture as a precedent. So much so that I could potentially use interchange the same quotes when using her interpretations to exemplify any of the other methods. Conover thus stands as a bastion of complex, sophisticated interpretation.

Naturally, Conover shifts her argument to Matthew 19:12, where Jesus speaks of eunuchs. A proper understanding of this verse, she argues, leads us to understand that Jesus “praised some of them, which included rejecting some of the traditional gender expectations of that day.” She connects this embrace of eunuchs, who were condemned by Deuteronomic law, to Isaiah 56:3–5. Deuteronomy 22:5 thus is superseded by Matthew 19:12 and Isaiah 56:3–5. Conover repeats this very same method for Romans 1:13–32 and 1 Corinthians 11:13–15 which are placed in submission to Galatians 3:28.

### 4.2 Resolution through Historical and Redaction Criticism

Lewis Reay is an independent scholar of gender who attends the Metropolitan Community Church in Edinburgh. He argues in Trans/Formations, following

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44 Conover is bigender, and as far as I can ascertain, prefers she/her pronouns.
45 Pat Conover, Transgender Good News (Silver Spring, Maryland: New Wineskins, 2002), 219–21.
46 Conover, Transgender Good News, 222.
47 Conover, Transgender Good News, 222.
Halvor Moxnes, that “the term ‘eunuch’ was used to slander Jesus and his disciples, and Jesus used this in his response [to the questions of the Pharisees in Matthew 19].”\(^4^9\) This appeal to historical critical methodologies culminates in Reay’s conclusion that “in entering queer space, we find normative boundaries blurred, dualistic definitions refuted and the creation of permissive identities…. [Jesus’] response was to challenge prevailing social norms and gender roles.”\(^5^0\)

Here, “critical openness” manifests as cultural subversion.

Additionally, Reay does not think that this reading of Matthew 19:12 is the only valid one; he explicitly does “not wish to suggest that [readings of Matt 19:12 as an argument for celibacy] are invalid, rather that the text also supports another equally valid reading.”\(^5^1\) Reay argues, using Foucauldian terminology, that such readings as his own and Moxnes’ have been marginalized throughout history, as “the (dis)appearance of intersex and transgender people throughout history is indicative of the ‘subjugated knowledge’ (Foucault 1980) that our very existence represents.”\(^5^2\) This is an argument closely related to the idea of symbolic annihilation.\(^5^3\) The point for Reay is, thus, not “getting the Bible right once and for all” but rather opposing symbolic annihilation and advocating for the visibility and vitality of transgender people. To this end, historical criticism for Reay is at the mercy of a larger agenda: self-insertion (this will be discussed later).\(^5^4\)

A considerably vaguer appeal to historical criticism comes from Vanessa Sheridan, a business professional based in Minnesota. She writes that “the


\(^5^0\) Reay, “Towards a Transgender Theology,” 157.

\(^5^1\) Reay, “Towards a Transgender Theology,” 159.

\(^5^2\) Reay, “Towards a Transgender Theology,” 152.


\(^5^4\) I find myself quite vexed by some details of Reay’s approach here. His apparent persona of being a transgender Derrida is concerning enough to me philosophically (Reay, “Towards a Transgender Theology,” 164–5). He also uncritically agrees with Bohache that “activists and others have reclaimed the word and used it proudly” (Reay, “Towards a Transgender Theology,” 158). Reay defines ‘queer,’ via Moxnes, as “outside the norms of society” (Lewis Reay, “Towards a Transgender Theology: Que(e)rying the Eunuchs,” in Trans/Formations, eds. Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood (London: SCM, 2009), 155). Such a definition is demeaning and reductivistic, and neglects the positive ways in which LGBTQ people are normalized or desire to be normalized, and constitutes an absurd degree of inclusivity, in that it includes things that, in common parlance, would not be called “queer,” even pejoratively. I would strongly urge other researchers to resist Reay’s sort of definition of “queer.”
prohibition against crossdressing in Deuteronomy 22:5 is contextually explained by many respected biblical scholars as a warning against various Canaanite orgiastic cult practices that were in vogue during the particular historical period and geographic location in which the injunction was written.”

She continues with critical openness, “there are other interpretations and explanations of this particular Deuteronomic scriptural passage” and the existence of other interpretations “serves only to demonstrate that no one knows precisely what the verse truly meant at that time, in that place, for the people to whom it was addressed, and what its relevance (if any) might be for us today.”

Allie McDougall makes a rather vague reference to historical criticism when saying “the Bible was recorded by at least forty authors, across two millennia, containing errors, inconsistencies, and incongruous cultural concepts. This doesn't detract from the holiness or authority of the message of Scripture, but rather bolsters the idea that God is deeply involved with the messy and disjointed human experience.” This is different from changing the subject by establishing a cultural hierarchy because McDougall is not arguing that our modern culture has been elevated above ancient cultures; rather, McDougall simply means to point out that the Bible has a diversity of cultures and doesn’t present us with one single culture to then adopt.

On the other hand, Father Shannon T. L. Kearns, a priest in the Apostolic Catholic Church, appealed to historical criticism rather differently on his eponymous blog, saying that, for him, “it was in seminary that I was given actual help in reading the Bible and introduced to scholars and preachers who were able to give me the information I needed to understand the text. The key to really enjoying and getting something out of the study of the Bible is to have some good background information.” He continues, “[w]hen you’re well-informed about the context you can appreciate how radical it all is even more.” Historical criticism is an avenue through which readers of the Bible can see its support of transgender people. Many people are plagued by the monopoly that conservatives seem

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55 Vanessa Sheridan, Crossing Over: Liberating the Transgendered Christian (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 75.
56 Sheridan, Crossing Over, 76.
59 Kearns, “Don’t Read the Bible.”
to have on biblical interpretation and its modern applications. Kearns addresses this point:

It’s not just people who were raised fundamentalist or evangelical that have trouble with the text. In some traditions lay folks aren’t encouraged to read the Bible at all. In other traditions, even liberal traditions, people tend to react to conservative readings of the Bible. For instance, even liberal folks who would never read the Bible literally get caught up in discussions about the so-called “clobber passages” used against gay people. They interpret Scripture in opposition to conservatives (while still letting the conservatives set the rules for reading).60

Kearns also positions himself against a certain form of establishing a hierarchy of texts, noting that he’s “heard liberal folks tell others to simply ignore the Hebrew Scriptures because Jesus came to abolish all of that! (Nope. He didn’t. Not at all.)”61

4.3 Changing the Subject

Changing the subject manifests in two major ways: delegitimization and abstraction. Delegitimating the biblical text does not necessarily involve a disavowal of the Christian narrative. Rather, it involves casting doubt on the text’s ability to speak to our modern context, either for its scientific obsolescence or for its cultural archaisms. This method is sometimes coupled with a vague appeal to historical criticism or creating a hierarchy of texts. To some, this approach to the text may seem disingenuous, as if the readers are avoiding actually reading the text. While this may be true for a few, it will be seen that it can also be a way of establishing a rightly ordered focus (i.e. subject) of the text.

To wit, Anna Magdalena Patti, who describes herself as, “a philosopher by training, an artist at heart, a future mother by daydream, and an amateur theologian by strange necessity,”62 writes that “as a Catholic I believe Holy Scripture must be read in light of reason. According to both Thomas Aquinas and Augustine, Scripture must be interpreted in a way that makes sense in the context of the rest of Scripture as well as with our knowledge of the natural

60 Kearns, “Don’t Read the Bible.”
61 Kearns, “Don’t Read the Bible.”
world.” She ratiocinates that “we must look to what science has discovered about sex and gender to understand how to interpret these passages.” Thus, “Genesis is not a scientific text,” she concludes, “[m]ale and female represent the great romantic reality of the universe, but not necessarily the full diversity of humankind. They are the rule, but they do not speak for the exceptions.”

Genesis 1 “doesn’t include things that were unknown to the Hebrews like bacteria. That doesn’t mean bacteria doesn’t exist or isn’t created by God.”

It is clear with Magdalena, more than anyone else, that denominational affiliation influences the techniques one uses. Her interpretations of the Catholic Catechism are also important, but I will not cover them at length here. As a summary, she holds that the Catholic Church does not have a formal or strict stance on transgender people: “The one thing we know for sure,” she says in an interview, “is that the only way to treat trans people is as being made in the image and likeness of God.”

Similarly, Pat Conover urges the reader of her book, Transgender Good News, “we need to ground ourselves in the most accurate scientific picture of transgender experience and expression, while remembering with humility, just as good scientists do, that our picture is inadequate and incomplete; and then do the best we can to live well.” This picture is imperative to understanding a transgender person’s belonging in the Gospel: “Theology needs the sciences for grounding its pictures of reality as accurately as possible, while remembering that the sciences have grown and changed.”

Even if Scripture were to say something specific about transgender people (for example, conventional interpretations of Deut 22:5), Magdalena and Conover agree that Scripture must be filtered through what we know about the world around us. Of particular importance for the inclusion of transgender people is recognizing the health benefits of supporting medical transitions and providing transgender people access to gender-appropriate spaces (such as allowing trans women to live in female housing, allowing trans men to

64 Patti, “Male & Female He Created Them.”
65 Patti, “Male & Female He Created Them.”
66 Patti, “Male & Female He Created Them.”
70 Conover, Transgender Good News, 203.
use a male bathroom, or establishing gender-neutral/unisex options where possible). Conover notes, however, that “we do not all need to be scientists, but we do need elementary honesty about the groundings of our opinions and beliefs to sustain more constructive conversations.”

Changing the subject through abstraction manifests in Allie McDougall’s writing as a type of theologizing. As a non-binary person who previously espoused all things evangelical, McDougall has added complications with the symbolic annihilation of non-binary people in biblical interpretation. When faced with the conundrum of binary genders in Genesis 1:27, McDougall responds by looking first to theology, following the axiom that humanity is made in the image of God:

When I look at the Trinity, I don’t see a gender binary that is evident or must be adhered to. Only truth, goodness, grace, and love. The only dichotomy is that of the realm of the divine colliding with the realm of the human. In fact, the more I try to understand God, the less I feel that gender has any relevance in His kingdom.

It is only through this theologizing that we come to Galatians 3:28 as a proof text. Though this could be construed as establishing a hierarchy of texts, the citation of Galatians 3:28 seems to be quite peripheral in McDougall’s construction.

For Vanessa Sheridan, taking a verse out of context and “using it as a weapon” against transgender people is, “at best, spiritually arrogant and unfeeling,” and at worst, becomes idolatry as it contradicts “Jesus’ message of love and inclusion.” While Sheridan’s thoughts here may also fit into the category of establishing a hierarchy of texts, I think her lack of any specific citation of Scripture places it more firmly in the changing the subject category. In other words, biblical interpretation, according to Sheridan, must be filtered through a christocentric lens or, to use Greg Boyd’s term, a ‘cruciform hermeneutic.’

4.4 Self-Insertion

From the beginning of his chapter, “Towards a Transgender Theology: Que(e)rying the Eunuchs,” Lewis Reay proudly proclaims,

73 Vanessa Sheridan, Crossing Over: Liberating the Transgendered Christian (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 76.
a diasporic, self-disclosing autobiographical narrative is what you will find here. The story of how eunuchs came to find each other in the pages of Scripture [...] This is the story of eunuchs, long dead, and the story of transgender people, alive and kicking, and finding our God-given gender identity.74

Here, Reay seems to embody both forms of self-insertion: midrashic and reconstructive. It is both that transgender people are, in some way, literally represented in Scripture and that modern transgender narratives can be rewritten alongside the retelling of the biblical narrative. There is, apparently, a sort of genealogical relationship between trans men today (such as himself) and “our Ethiopian cousin, in Acts, who opens up the possibility of full inclusion into Jesus’ new realm to all, not simply the Jewish world.”75 Reay argues that eunuchs in the biblical worlds were comparable to “those born intersex, those who are transgender in the broadest sense of this word and, third, those who are gender different, or gender queer, that is, not conforming to normative definitions of gender roles and identities.”76 He argues that Jesus’ words “For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 19:12) “includes all those marginalized by virtue of their gender expression.”77

Simyona Deanova, a gender-fluid, self-described Christian mystic, addresses an objection to LGBTQ people using the rainbow as a symbol for the LGBTQ community:78 “‘It was meant as a promise from God,’ they complain, pointing to the story of Noah and the Flood in Genesis. And they’re right. That was the original symbolic meaning of the rainbow.”79 She argues that “if God is truly all-knowing then he would’ve already known in that day all the different meanings that would be attributed to this rainbow of His, perhaps even a few that have yet to turn up.”80 Shannon T. L. Kearns insists that:

those of us who consistently find ourselves on the outside of the Biblical narrative, who stand expelled from the gathering, who long for just a taste of the community; we have to

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75 Reay, “Towards a Transgender Theology,” 151.
76 Reay, “Towards a Transgender Theology,” 150.
77 Reay, “Towards a Transgender Theology,” 150.
80 Simyona Deanova, “God and The Rainbow.”
give ourselves permission to make this story our own. It belongs to us, too. We must be able to put ourselves in to this story, to find ourselves in the text, in order for it to have meaning to us.\textsuperscript{81}

It seems like, for Kearns, this could mean something like midrashic or reconstructive self-insertion. The influence of symbolic annihilation on the psyche of transgender readers almost mandates, it seems Kearns says, such readings. If transgender people are not located in the salvation of Christ, it seems spurious to continue being a Christian. This hermeneutical conundrum is not a unique historical event either. Feminist Christians have often struggled with various Bible verses which suggest God’s salvation is for men (for example, Rom 2:25–29) or with theological expositions that suggest the same (for example, Thomas Aquinas’ soteriology).\textsuperscript{82}

Jo Clifford’s play, “God’s New Frock,” is probably the best example of midrashic self-insertion. The play depicts a transgender Jesus pondering gender, self, love, and God. It fills in perceived gaps in the biblical text and even suggests that Eve and Lillith were “best friends.”\textsuperscript{83} Clifford presents the play not as a replacement to or succession of the biblical canon, but rather as a non-compulsory supplement to it. It is one way in which she allows us to “give ourselves permission to make this story our own.”\textsuperscript{84}

### 4.5 Scripture as Precedent

The use of Scripture as a precedent for lament among transgender Christians is likely most easily seen (at least in public formats) in liturgies written for the Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR). The TDOR is an annual day dedicated to commemorating those transgender people who have died due to hate or discrimination in the preceding year. Liturgies are read, testimonies given, and lists of deceased trans people recited. The most common causes of death among these lists are suicide and murders. Malcolm Himschoot has written at least one of these


\textsuperscript{84} Kearns, “Put Yourself in the Story.”
liturgies, in which the “core hopes and dilemmas of the community find expression, and in recognition of their challenges the community embraces sacred tasks of creative memory and courageous determination.” He continues:

The spiritual work facing transgender people is nothing more and nothing less than the task of faith in every generation. It was first the task of the Israelites upon being led forth into the Promised Land (Josh 4.1–8) [...] The need for their names and stories to be retold could not be denied, and so it became ritualized in the annual Passover tradition. Neither could the anger at such long subjugation be neglected, and so it was liturgized in psalms that became part of the canon of both Jews and Christians. Neither could the fear be buried.

The fury and grief felt in the face of countless suicides and murders is, in a very deep way, like Job’s anger at God and the Psalmist’s and Jeremiah’s lamentations: “We feel it; God can handle it. Frustration, entreaty, longing, rage, are all human emotions found present in the psalms, and found unresolved there.”

Kearns, ever the dynamic reader, gave a sermon at a 2014 service on the TDOR. After reading the vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezek 37:1–14), Kearns preached:

These are the bones of people who died in exile from their homes. These are the bones of a people killed by countries who were bigger and stronger than them. These were the bones of Ezekiel’s people and yet Ezekiel was spared. I imagine that as he looked over this field of bones he felt despair. He felt heartbreak. He felt overwhelmed. And it seems, almost, as if God is taunting him; “Ezekiel, can these bones live?”

In that moment I’m sure Ezekiel wanted to say a few choice words. Maybe he wanted to lash out. “I don’t know God, maybe if you had been there they wouldn’t have died! Maybe if you had protected your people! Maybe if the world wasn’t so messed up.” Instead he offers a kind of sarcastic retort, and in that retort sums up all of his anger and despair, “I don’t know, God, can they?” You tell me. You saw all this happen. You tell me.

Intimately tied into lament are doubt and questioning, as shown in the above quote. While the two can certainly be done separately from one another, it is not at all uncommon for them to convene. Lament and doubt are both common

86 Himschoot, “Action and Reflection,” 140.
87 Himschoot, “Action and Reflection,” 141.
experiences in Scripture and, some argue, necessary components to Christian faith, like “la noche oscura del alma.”\textsuperscript{89}

The precedent of virtue in Scripture is, in one sense, the other side of the coin, when it comes to lament. Justin Tanis, in his commentary on Philippians, writes that faithfulness and justice are instructive virtues that benefit LGBTQ people through theological avenues: “Paul’s writings have not been the most liberating for queer people. And yet, there are themes of great faithfulness in Philippians which can inspire us, teach us and even liberate us. His emphasis on companionship, community, justice and an aware and thoughtful faith are things which would serve us well as queer people of faith.”\textsuperscript{90} In Tanis’ commentary, virtue serves to benefit queer people of faith. This seems to include transgender people of faith. The benefits of virtue, however, are not exclusively for queer people of faith; rather they benefit heterosexual and cisgender people of faith, as well as non-believers.

The virtue that Anna Magdalena Patti focuses on in one of her posts is radical honesty. She details an interpretation of the book of Esther as an allegory for coming out as queer.\textsuperscript{91} Patti makes eleven observations that connect Esther’s story to the lives of queer people:

1. Esther “is locked in a system of rigid gender roles,”
2. “she gains social favor by acting out a role,”
3. “fear of persecution sends her into the closet,”
4. “her inner life remains unchanged,”
5. “her people are scapegoated,”
6. “the time comes when Esther must come out,”
7. “she trusts in God,”
8. “she finds allies,”
9. “she doesn’t get it right the first time,”
10. “it takes enormous courage, but she comes out” to her husband as Jewish, and finally,
11. “with God’s help, she changes the world.”\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{89} To echo Saint John of the Cross’ 16th-century poem of the same name, Spanish for “The Dark Night of the Soul.” For more on the suggestion that doubt or a “faith crisis” is instrumental to a healthy and mature faith, see for instance: Peter Enns, \textit{The Sin of Certainty: Why God Desires Our Trust More Than Our “Correct” Beliefs} (New York: HarperOne, 2016).


\textsuperscript{92} Patti, “Queen Esther’s Coming Out.”
However, elsewhere, Patti cites a number of other reasons why coming out as LGBTQ is a virtuous and Christian thing to do, in addition to coming out being an act of honesty. According to Patti, coming out is communal, liberating, healing, evangelistic, and inspiring.93 Citing Ecclesiastes 4:9–12, Patti points to that the isolation LGBTQ people suffer while in the closet. Scripture itself attests to “how horrifying it is to live a life in which you think you are the only person of your kind; in which you are cut off from anyone who might possibly share your lived experience.”94 Coming out is a step toward establishing community with the body of Christ, for Qoheleth says, “woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help […] how can one keep warm alone?” (Eccl 4:10–11).95 Patti confirms the wisdom of Qoheleth through her lived experience, for “it’s only after coming out that I found real support for my real anxieties.”96

Because of this and the honesty associated with coming out, coming out is liberating, for “you will know the truth, and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32). “Being in the closet,” Patti writes, “was […] like being a prisoner of war, secret agent, and bomb squad all at once.”97 This liberating aspect of coming out, for Patti, is deeply tied to honesty and communion. She alludes to Genesis 2:18, saying that “it’s not good for man to be alone, and I can say from personal experience it’s wonderful to finally walk among other people rather than watching them from behind prison bars.”98

“Secrecy has a way of corrupting things,” she goes on to write. In her experience, staying in the closet had adverse mental health effects but “nearly all such internal problems dissipated. All compulsive behavior ended full stop,” when she came out. In this way, her gender became visible because it was “exposed by the light” and in turn her gender also became light, as she quotes Eph. 5:13–14. In this same way, Helen Belcher writes that:

I don’t have a choice about being trans, but I did have a choice about what to do with it. But that choice wasn’t between transition and the status quo as most people understood it to be. Instead it was between transition and suicide. I felt I owed it to my children to try to be the best parent I could be – me alive and female would be better than me dead and male. One

94 Patti, “Out of the Closet for Jesus?”
95 Patti, “Out of the Closet for Jesus?”
96 Patti, “Out of the Closet for Jesus?”
97 Patti, “Out of the Closet for Jesus?”
98 Patti, “Out of the Closet for Jesus?”
verse that kept me going throughout 2004 was “I lay before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction [...] Now choose life” (Deut 30:19).  

Coming out does not only affect the person coming out, though. According to Patti, coming out is a form of evangelism. In one sense, after coming out, Patti became “the light of the world” and she lets her “light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matt 5:14–16). “Coming out gives queer Christians the chance to witness to the real power of Christ in our lives, not the fake ‘ex-gay’ sort of forced testimony.” She continues, “we can talk about God’s love for us [...]. In short, we can actually preach the Good News, not the Socially Acceptable News. [sic]” Coming out, likewise, “can inspire others to be more fully alive, to be honest, to face themselves as God made them.” In a society that “thinks that our queerness or transness [sic] is our shame and downfall,” God’s grace is sufficient for us, “for power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). As a final comment, alluding to Luke 6:44 and Matthew 7:16, Patti exhorts readers to “judge a tree by its fruits. I know the good fruit of my own coming out, so I think I have a pretty good inkling about the quality of this tree.”

Hannah Buchanan also uses Scripture as a precedent for virtue. The virtue she focuses on in one text is the virtue of inclusivity, as opposed to the vice of condemnation. She writes: “I think that to understand the predicament of the transsexual we look no further than Jesus.” While her words may be construed, however erroneously, as reconstructive self-insertion, from that sentence alone, her remarks fit more appropriately into the category of Scripture as precedent because Buchanan makes no claim to have established transgender people as represented in Scripture; rather, it is the experience of condemnation she appeals to: “[Jesus] was ridiculed, and marginalized [...]. Jesus commanded us to love our neighbours as ourselves, with no discriminatory opt-outs.” Here, Buchanan makes her appeal to the virtues of Scripture very clear as she speaks of Jesus’

100 Patti, “Out of the Closet for Jesus?”
101 Patti, “Out of the Closet for Jesus?”
102 Patti, “Out of the Closet for Jesus?”
103 Patti, “Out of the Closet for Jesus?”
104 Patti, “Out of the Closet for Jesus?”
106 Buchanan, “Christian Experience,” 44.
commandments. The precedent for virtue in Scripture is found in ethical commands, exhortations, or themes that guide the believer in how to live a good life in relationship with God, with others, and with oneself.

Buchanan continues, “Romans tells us that there is ‘no condemnation in Christ Jesus’ (Rom 8:1). If this is so, why then am I condemned for my decision to honour myself as a woman in Christ? Clearly, I am not. The only right answer to this question is that humankind condemned me instead.” There is clear distinction, for Buchanan, between apparent condemnation from God (which doesn’t actually exist) and tangible condemnation from other humans. “My Christian experience as a transsexual,” Buchanan reflects, “has been less disappointing overall than my experience of Christians as a transsexual. I know that God is still there, and God is with me always. However, in a fallen world the same cannot be said of my supposed Christian friends.”

Therefore, the precedent of lament in Scripture stands in contrast to the precedent of virtue. Whereas lament is frequently coupled with spells of doubt, virtue is often associated with a conspicuous fidelity to Christ that isn’t as easily seen in the face of doubt. In other words, doubt is to faith as lament is to virtue. None of these are mutually exclusive, but work together to achieve a higher purpose – perhaps communion with God and the church.

### 5 Conclusions and Questions

While transgender Christians occasionally push for a clearer, more universalistic understanding of the role of eunuchs in Scripture and in the Gospel (which has been neglected hitherto), overall it doesn’t seem that transgender Christians interpret the Bible in particularly innovative ways. More often than not, transgender Christians, like any other Christians, draw from their tradition and their surrounding culture when interpreting the Bible.

Helen Savage’s pioneering research has proven to be indispensable to an evaluation of the hermeneutics of transgender Christians. While her three major observations – establishing a hierarchy of texts, resolution through historical and redaction criticism, and changing the subject – are worth conceding, I have determined that the breadth of transgender hermeneutics is even more diverse than Savage initially thought. So diverse, in fact, that I felt it necessary to augment

107 Buchanan, “Christian Experience,” 44.
her work with two additional hermeneutical methods that I have identified: self-insertion, and Scripture as precedent. The cultural traits of her British subjects (“privatized faith”) and my mostly American subjects (argument from clarity) is also noteworthy.

Furthermore, reception history is a method that deserves more attention and development. The hermeneutical task of reception history cannot be replaced by statistical analysis, but reception historians of the contemporary period would do well to take methodological notes from the social sciences so conclusions are more comprehensive and can be generalized.

Questions, nevertheless, remain. The majority of these questions can be answered, at least in part, through quantitative analyses. These questions point the way forward to further research and further introspection by Christians. There are a number of questions that should be kept in mind for future research, map-making, conversation, or ‘bouquets’. Which sorts of hermeneutical methods are most common among transgender Christians and transgender people in general? Are those trends any different from those of cisgender Christians and the general cisgender population? What role does the Bible have in the theologies of transgender Christians? Do certain denominations have a higher frequency of transgender congregants than others? What interpretations, circumstances, or experiences push transgender people out of the Church or keep them in?

All these questions and more merit exploration in future studies. Parallel studies on the hermeneutics of LGB people, women, the poor, and people of color may also benefit from asking similar questions. I can only hope that a more nuanced understanding of the breadth of transgender hermeneutics will encourage Christians to establish a culture of love and grace towards transgender people.

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training and experience in social scientific research, as well as our shared love of practical philosophy and theology, helped me conceptualize reception history in a way I hadn't previously seen. It was only through our conversations together that I was able to integrate social scientific theory and the continental philosophy of Deleuze & Guattari with reception history. Her critical realist sensibilities challenged me to fine-tune my augmentations to Savage's work and understand the relationship between data, content, and interpretation in a more nuanced manner. Like Rhonda, Mary's friendship has proven irreplaceable in my life, and this article would not exist if I did not have her love reinvigorating me throughout the process.

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