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January 20th, 2022

Module Two Essay

Homosexuality is a highly debated subject within Christianity. Throughout history the societal idea of sex, gender, and sexual relations changes and these societal changes will affect religious beliefs and doctrine. There is a lot of discourse on interpretation, translation, and context. There have been lots of translations of the bible and debate on what bible should be accepted and if there is a certain way information must be presented. The bible should be written in a way that people can understand and interpret. Within the discussion of context, early Christians came to their view of homosexuality not as a religious decision but rather as a culture and on the basis of sexual sin as a whole.

Most disputes of biblical translations come from inaccuracies and if there should be emphasis of literalism or meaning. By the year 600 A.D. there were eight translations of the four gospels[[1]](#footnote-1). The Greek Septuagint translation is the oldest translation, thought to have the most fidelity to the original bible and believed to have greatly influenced the Christian church[[2]](#footnote-2). The Septuagint translation was the book of the early Christian church and brought the religious ideas of the Hebrews to the forefront[[3]](#footnote-3). The Syriac translations became the basis for other languages translations[[4]](#footnote-4). The Syriac translations had some transliterations but there was an overall attempt for accuracy[[5]](#footnote-5). The little differences in the Syriac translations will have had impact of practices in the region and other translations. The Latin translations varied extremely and for a time there was no one uniform book, as no single person translated the whole work[[6]](#footnote-6). Augustine commented on the varied Latin translations, “…the Latin translators are out of all number.[[7]](#footnote-7)”. He continued on saying that anyone who thought they had the ability to translate would[[8]](#footnote-8). Finally, a Latin translation known as Saint Jerome’s Vulgate translation was created with varying thoroughness and was less literal than the other Latin translations, but it cut out the large errors in other translations[[9]](#footnote-9). The Latin translations of the bible had extreme religious influence[[10]](#footnote-10) because the Vulgate translation was used for nearly a thousand years in the Christian church across the western world[[11]](#footnote-11). All of these translations had an impact on Christianity and began the debate whether the bible should be written word for word or to allow the reader to comprehend the original meaning and react in the way original readers would have. Despite best attempts, all translations of the Bible are interpretive to some extent[[12]](#footnote-12), there are literal translations that focus on direct meaning and dynamic translations that focus on original intended meaning[[13]](#footnote-13). There are also translations that are gender-traditionalist, in which there is a more literal gendered translation of the original and there is gender-inclusive translations that use gender neutral terms[[14]](#footnote-14). A missionary bible translator, Eugene Nida, debated that the literal translations were misguided, and translations should instead relay the original intended meaning[[15]](#footnote-15). On the other hand, some conservative evangelicals state that every word of the bible was of divine inspiration and should be as close to the original as possible[[16]](#footnote-16). Most readers of the bible use a translations from within 60 years[[17]](#footnote-17). Some newer translations of the bible form from theological disputes within and between communities[[18]](#footnote-18), which is overall to be expected. About 80% of people have a book of the bible translated in their first language[[19]](#footnote-19). This does create some inquiry into how the bible would translate into that many languages well, as grammar differs exceptionally and the change in grammar creates different connotations of words and phrases. In the 2nd century A.D., Rabbi Judah said that “He who translates a biblical verse literally is a liar, but he who elaborates on it is a blasphemer.[[20]](#footnote-20)”. Rabbi Judah and Eugene Nida hold very valid points that emphasize the bible needing to be understood. With literal translations the average person would need thoughts expanded upon but with dynamic readings people can understand the bible closer to the original meanings. It may also be necessary for dynamic translations so that cultural changes and differences can be considered. Throughout history, there have been influences on Christian cultures based on the type of biblical translation they use, and the meaning should create the same reaction in the reader which can only be done with dynamic translations.

Within the first 5 centuries there were changes in the perception of sex, gender, and relationships. There is a belief held among many Christians that only lifelong legal, monogamous, heterosexual marriages are the only licit relationship in Christianity[[21]](#footnote-21). However, some early Christian theologians believed that sexuality and gender were just temporary states of beings in order to produce enough people to populate heaven[[22]](#footnote-22). Within the context of early Christianity, the ancient Greeks did not hold the sex or gender of sexual partners with importance, and the idea of someone being homosexual did not exist[[23]](#footnote-23). The acceptance of homosexuality in the Mediterranean ended with asceticism hostile to all sexuality in late antiquity[[24]](#footnote-24). The Hebrews began to intensely discourage sexuality after the return from Babylonian exile, literature of the time stating sexual desire as humans largest weakness[[25]](#footnote-25). This was different to the Talmudic era in which Jews viewed sex more positively[[26]](#footnote-26). When the Romans came through and conquered Jerusalem the asceticism would have most likely have been cemented due to the Romans sexual promiscuity[[27]](#footnote-27). Early Christian thought about sexuality and homosexuality were guided by Hebrew and late Greek philosophers debates that sexual pleasure decidedly held people back from salvation and distracted the mind[[28]](#footnote-28). The early Christians therefore held hostility not only to homosexuality but sexuality in any form, with church founders praising virginity[[29]](#footnote-29). Virginity was an element of personal purity, thought to be imitating Christ[[30]](#footnote-30). So, with virginity being the best state to be in, a belief formed that an appropriate accommodation would be heterosexual marriage[[31]](#footnote-31). An example of the extent the belief held, the early Syrian church would only baptize unmarried Christians, holding the virginal status high[[32]](#footnote-32). In the late 4th century and 5th century perfectionism in sexual purity was dropped, but they instated that only sexuality in marriage was accepted[[33]](#footnote-33). And with marriages being between a man and a woman in societies of the time, this could lead to the idea that homosexuality was even more hated because they could not be married and have intercourse. In the 4th century, when anti-homosexual legislature was introduced by Christians, it was not just the Christians that were intolerant, but the surrounding society as well[[34]](#footnote-34). There was a switch in the west from a one sex model to a two-sex model, as it went from the common thought that women were defective men to the idea that men and women were separate[[35]](#footnote-35). This change adds context to the idea that in early patriarchal societies homosexuality was normalized, as the idea of “same sex relations” would not have the same connotation. The view of homosexuality in the first few centuries of the church underwent a massive change. It began as something not recognized to something despised due to all sexuality being in some way condemnable with the transition occurring as a culture not through divine intervention or scripture.

Despite all of the translations of the bible available being good in one way or another, a translation should be able to hold the same meaning rather than have literal meaning since there is such a big impact of translation into Christian doctrine and thinking. The context of the church on homosexuality did not begin as direct condemnation but rather a societal shift after surrounding societies formed a belief that sex was not something to be encouraged. There were fundamental societal shifts that created this now well-known belief. Overall, within the debate of homosexuality in the church both translation and context are important. They both show a timeline for the ideals and social construct and provide another aspect of understanding the basis of beliefs. This kind of research continues to be important since the ideas of gender and sex in the church continue to change. There may even be room for discussion if early Christians would also have preferred the dynamic and more gender-neutral bible translation, and if so, what effect would that have on current Christians. With continued research there is room for analyzing the surrounding societies influence on the evolution of the church. There also was a gap in knowledge, such as Jesus having a spiritual, and possible sexual partner, Mary Magdalene. If the idea of virginity being closest to Jesus was a cause for how sexual relations was looked at in the church how could it change with this new possibility? There may not even be a condemnation for sexual relations outside of marriage or homosexuality if the belief about virginity had not taken root. Although “what if’s” are just possibilities, it may be worth looking into with this debate furthers.

Citations

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1. Metzger 1993,35 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Metzger 1993,37 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Metzger 1993,39 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Metzger 1993,44 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Metzger 1993,44 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Metzger 1993,45 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Metzger 1993,46 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Metzger 1993,46 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Metzger 1993,46-47 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Metzger 1993,45 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Metzger 1993,49 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Metzger 1993,42 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Grubbs and Perry 2020, 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Grubbs and Perry 2020, 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Grubbs and Perry 2020, 5-6 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Grubbs and Perry 2020, 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Grubbs and Perry 2020, 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Grubbs and Perry 2020, 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Metzger 1993,36 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Metzger 1993,42 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Tonstad 2018, 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Tonstad 2018, 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Bystryn and Greenberg 1982, 517 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Bystryn and Greenberg 1982, 520 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Bystryn and Greenberg 1982, 521 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Bystryn and Greenberg 1982, 521 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Bystryn and Greenberg 1982, 521 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Bystryn and Greenberg 1982, 522-524 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Bystryn and Greenberg 1982, 524 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Bystryn and Greenberg 1982, 528 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Tonstad 2018, 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Bystryn and Greenberg 1982, 524 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Bystryn and Greenberg 1982, 525 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Bystryn and Greenberg 1982, 527 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Tonstad 2018, 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)