

**11 TALKING POINTS FROM  
JESUS, THE BIBLE, AND HOMOSEXUALITY:  
EXPLODE THE MYTHS, HEAL THE CHURCH**

*And how Robert Gagnon gets them wrong in his review*

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Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church was published in March of this year by Westminster John Knox Press. The book has gotten rave reviews and been enthusiastically received by a broad cross section of churches. I've been on a book tour that has included appearances in California, Louisiana, Texas, Washington, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina. I've been met by large audiences eager to hear what I discovered in researching and writing this book.

But alas, not everyone is pleased by the book. Robert Gagnon, Associate Professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, recently posted a scathing review on his website.<sup>1</sup> The review is over 42 pages long and was posted in 4 parts in the days immediately prior to the start of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Gagnon's critique is written in a tone which is wholly inappropriate and is filled with personal attacks on me which are simply untrue.

Gagnon has referred to a 5<sup>th</sup> installment of his review which will appear later—but I've heard enough. So I decided I'd take a moment to highlight some of the principle themes in my book and the ways in which Gagnon gets them wrong in his review. Far from rebutting the central themes of my book, Gagnon's manner, methods, and arguments actually confirm the points I make in my book.

Themes from Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality and how Gagnon gets them wrong:

**1. For 200 years leading theologians taught that the Bible supported slavery, segregation, and the subordination of women.** The reason they got it wrong is that they were relying on Scottish Common Sense Philosophy (including appeals to “natural law,” selective literalism, and proof-texting) and the scholastic theology of Francis Turretin instead of the teachings of Jesus Christ. Many of those who oppose equal rights for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) rely on these same discredited approaches to scripture. *Gagnon simply ignores this section of my book and the ways that leading theologians today might be once again repeating the mistakes of the past.*

**2. In the 1930s the church began to move towards a Christ-centered approach to Scripture.** Theologians rejected Scottish Common Sense Philosophy and the

scholastic theology of Francis Turretin and began to read the Bible through the lens of Jesus' redemptive life and ministry. This Christ-centered approach to Scripture has improved our understanding of the Biblical texts and brought us into a closer relationship with God. This new understanding also enabled the church to be a leader in fighting segregation and supporting the ordination of women. *Gagnon offers no commentary on this breakthrough in understanding the word of God.*

**3. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has an official orthodox position on Biblical interpretation.** It includes 7 guidelines—the first and most important is:

Guideline #1: Recognize that Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, is the center of Scripture. The redemptive activity of God is central to the entire Scripture. The Old Testament themes of the covenant and the messiah testify to this activity. In the center of the New Testament is Jesus Christ: the Word made flesh, the fulfillment of Israel's messianic hope, and the promise of the Kingdom. It is to Christ that the church witnesses. When interpreting Scripture, keeping Christ in the center aids in evaluating the significance of the problems and the controversies that always persist in the vigorous, historical life of the church."<sup>2</sup>

*Gagnon in his review of my book ignores this guideline entirely! Gagnon's review also ignores Guideline #3: "Depend on the guidance of the Holy Spirit in interpreting and applying God's message."<sup>3</sup> and Guideline #5: "Let all interpretations be in accord with the rule of love, the two-fold commandment to love God and to love our neighbor."<sup>4</sup>*

**4. The central story of the Bible is that "A good God created a good world. A tragic fall into sin by the world's people alienated them from God. But God would not leave these people alone. God came into the world in the person of Jesus Christ, whose life and teaching, whose death and resurrection, overcame alienation and renewed the relationship between God and God's people."<sup>5</sup>** When we see Christ as the center of scripture, it enables us to focus on the heart of the gospel message: love God and love your neighbor. In Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality I point out how, too often, those who oppose equal rights for people who are LGBT simply ignore the central themes of the Bible. *Yet, in his review of my book, Gagnon skips over these central Biblical themes entirely.*

**5. Paul's point in Romans 1-3 is that we are all sinners and that the free grace of salvation in Jesus Christ is available to everyone.** *By contrast, Gagnon writes, "The story presented in Romans 1:18-32 is not about the origination of sin... but rather about how it is that sinful practices are qualitatively and quantitatively greater in the Gentile world than in the Jewish world."<sup>6</sup> Gagnon in his zeal to try to condemn people who are LGBT once again misses Paul's point in Romans 1.*

**6. Appeals to "natural law" are unbiblical and usually just an attempt to give legitimacy to cultural prejudice.** Those who supported slavery, segregation, and the subordination of women often appealed to "natural law." *Yet in his review of my book*

*Gagnon appeals to “natural law” again and again and again.<sup>7</sup> For Gagnon to continue to condemn people who are LGBT based on “natural law” is simply unconscionable.*

**7. The broad consensus from medical and mental health professionals is that “homosexuality is not a mental disorder and there is no need for a ‘cure.’”<sup>8</sup>** In Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality I cite the official consensus of the American Psychiatric Association, American Psychoanalytic Association, American Psychological Association, American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Anthropological Association, American Counseling Association, American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, and the National Association of Social Workers.<sup>9</sup> *Gagnon quotes from a research paper or academic journal when it suits his interests but tries to dismiss the broad consensus from hundreds of thousands of medical and mental health professionals.<sup>10</sup>*

**8. In the debate over the role of people who are LGBT in the church it is important to deal with actual Christians who are LGBT rather than straw men, caricatures, or extreme examples from secular society.** As Moderator and also as a frequent speaker and guest preacher around the country, I meet gay and lesbian families, and same-sex couples who have been together 20, 30, 40 years or longer—earnest Christians who love the Bible and pray in Jesus’ name every day. To call these faithful Christians “idolaters” is simply bearing false witness. *Gagnon in his review simply never talks about actual contemporary Christians who are LGBT.*

**9. Acts 10-15 provides a helpful model for our current debate.** In Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas give testimony that the Holy Spirit had touched the lives of Gentiles—people who were previously considered “by nature” unclean and “by practice” polluted by idolatry.<sup>11</sup> James gave an authoritative interpretation that this was in accord with the Scriptures and what God had intended and that Gentiles were to be allowed into the church without having to meet the requirements of Jewish law. If the early church, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, could change its mind about something of which it was once so sure, then so can we. *Gagnon in his review makes no comment on this passage.*

**10. The 1963 translation of the Heidelberg Catechism—which is the translation that appears in the Presbyterian Book of Order, contains a condemnation against homosexuality that was not in the original text.** As I show in my book, in the early 1960s a translator(s), imbued with the general American bias against people who are LGBT took the liberty of inserting the phrase “homosexual perversion” into the list of sins in Question and Answer 87 of the Catechism—when in fact in the original text there is not even a word on which one could hang this prejudice. Except for this inaccurate insertion, there is no mention of homosexuality at all in the Book of Confessions.<sup>12</sup> *Gagnon has no comment on this egregious mistranslation.*

**11. The best methods of interpretation from the Reformation on down through today, call upon us to interpret the Scripture through the lens of Jesus Christ’s**

**life and ministry.** Using this method we see clearly that Jesus and the Bible, properly understood, do not condemn people who are homosexual. In church governance, our Confessions and Book of Order embody a trajectory of ever-greater inclusiveness. To bar gay and lesbian people from ordination and marriage is a violation of these fundamental principles of our faith.<sup>13</sup> *Gagnon, who never specifies his method of interpretation, finds a Bible filled with “intertextual echoes” full of condemnation for people who are LGBT.*<sup>14</sup>

I, along with the majority of Presbyterian scholars, contend that reading the Bible through the lens of Jesus’ redemptive life and ministry brings us into a deeper understanding of the Biblical texts and a closer relationship with God.

For more information please visit: <http://www.drjackrogers.com>

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Robert Gagnon, “Does Jack Rogers’s Book ‘Explode the Myths’ about the Bible and Homosexuality and ‘Heal the Church’?” Installments 1-4, June 8-12, 2006. [www.robgagnon.net](http://www.robgagnon.net).

<sup>2</sup> Jack Rogers, Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 69.

<sup>6</sup> Gagnon, Installment 2, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Gagnon, Installment 2, p. 7, Installment 3, pp. 4, 5, 14, 15.

<sup>8</sup> “Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation & Youth: A Primer for Principals, Educators and School Personnel,” APA ONLINE (American Psychological Association, Public Interest Directorate), <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbc/publications/justthefacts.html>. In Rogers, p. 100.

<sup>9</sup> Rogers, pp. 98-100.

<sup>10</sup> Gagnon, Installment 4, p. 2, “Rogers contents himself with uncritically quoting the politically motivated assertions of organizations such as the two APAs (psychological and psychiatric) whose committees on sexual orientation are led by self-identifying homosexual persons and their supporters.” In point of fact, Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality includes research from 9 different professional organizations representing over 477,000 medical and mental health professionals. Rogers, pp. 98-100.

<sup>11</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church (Nashville: Abington Press, 1996) p. 90. In Rogers, p. 90.

<sup>12</sup> Rogers, p. 118.

<sup>13</sup> Rogers, p. 126.

<sup>14</sup> Gagnon, Installment 3, p. 3.