

2011–present

Christian Traditions

Protestant Experiences

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Annotated by Carlos R. Fernandez, annotations adopted from Amazon.com

Addington Hall, Caroline J. *A Thorn in the Flesh: How Gay Sexuality Is Changing the Episcopal Church*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2013.

A Thorn in the Flesh: How Gay Sexuality is Changing the Episcopal Church tells the story of how homosexuality has been used to further conservative political agendas, both here and abroad. It describes how African and Asian churches have been drawn into a conflict that began in the United States in the Episcopal Church, and raises vital questions of whether people with different understandings of authority and truth can live in harmony. This provocative book is not a history of the movement for gay inclusion, nor a history of the movement for a new, conservative Anglican church in the Americas. Instead, it is a comparison of the conservative and the liberal parts of the church. There are those, such as the Church of England, who have conservative theological orientation and are most likely to oppose fully including gays and lesbians in the church. Hall, also, explores the rapid changes that have happened in Western society in the past fifty years that have led to the acceptance of same-sex marriage and homosexuality. This change has not come easily and even after nearly four decades, gay marriage remains a politically divisive issue in the United States and England.

Gerber, Lynne. *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 2011.

Losing weight and changing your sexual orientation are both notoriously difficult to do successfully. Yet many faithful evangelical Christians believe that thinness and heterosexuality are godly ideals—and that God will provide reliable paths toward them for those who fall short. *Seeking the Straight and Narrow* is a fascinating account of the world of evangelical efforts to alter our strongest bodily desires. Drawing on fieldwork at First Place, a popular Christian weight-loss program, and Exodus International, a network of ex-gay ministries, Lynne Gerber explores why some Christians feel that being fat or gay offends God, what exactly they do to lose weight or go straight, and how they make sense of the program's results—or, frequently, their lack. Gerber notes the differences and striking parallels between the two programs, and, more broadly, she traces the ways that other social institutions have attempted to contain the excesses associated with fatness and homosexuality. Challenging narratives that place evangelicals in constant opposition to dominant American values, Gerber shows that these programs reflect the often-overlooked connection between American cultural obsessions and Christian ones.

Harline, Craig. *Conversions: Two Family Stories from the Reformation and Modern America*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2011.

This powerful and innovative work by a gifted cultural historian explores the effects of religious conversion on family relationships, showing how the challenges of the Reformation can offer insight to families facing similarly divisive situations today. Craig Harline begins with the story of young Jacob Rolandus, the son of a Dutch Reformed preacher, who converted to Catholicism in 1654 and ran away from home, causing his family to disown him. In the companion story, Michael Sunbloom, a young American, leaves his family's religion in 1973 to convert to Mormonism, similarly upsetting his distraught parents. The modern twist to Michael's story is his realization that he is gay, causing him to leave his new church, and upsetting his parents again—but this time the family reconciles. Recounting these stories in short, alternating chapters, Harline underscores the parallel aspects of the two far-flung families. Despite different outcomes and forms, their situations involve nearly identical dynamics and heart-wrenching choices. Through the author's deeply informed imagination, the experiences of a seventeenth-century European family are transformed into immediately recognizable terms.

Holmen, R. W. *Queer Clergy: A History of Gay and Lesbian Ministry in American Protestantism*. Pilgrim, 2013.

Contrary to the popular image of Christian churches as gay-bashing homophobes--an image fostered by self-appointed spokesmen and microphone-grabbing evangelicals--progressive Protestant denominations ordain gays and lesbians and celebrate LGBT weddings, but it hasn't always been so. In the last decade, the principal ecumenical denominations--the Lutherans, the Presbyterians, the Episcopalians, and earlier the United Church of Christ--have adopted inclusive policies that have reversed long-standing exclusions that barred gays and lesbians from the pulpit and restricted clergy and congregations from celebrating covenant services of blessing and now marriage ceremonies. Though the Methodists lag behind, prophetic voices rally the faithful and countless clergy are openly defying the Book of Discipline and facing ecclesiastical charges.

James, Rob. *Faith, Belief, and Scripture: Anglicanism and Homosexuality*. Champaign, Ill.: Common Ground Pub., 2012.

The Anglican Communion has been tearing itself apart over the issue of homosexuality since the Lambeth Conference in 1998 and rumblings of discontent stretch back years before that. Most Anglican debate on homosexuality focuses the argument on the Bible. Does the Bible allow homosexuality or not? This book begins by taking one step back from the argument. It looks at what it means to approach a text as scripture, from the standpoint of faith. It then examines why the Bible is used to claim such radically different positions and why those who argue for either position can legitimately claim to find their argument supported by reading the Bible. Anglicans (and others) who disagree about what their scriptures claim need to understand why there is a disagreement. It is

only by stepping back from the argument and trying to understand why it exists that any sort of resolution can ever be found.

Kessler, Amanda. *Queer Inclusion in the United Methodist Church*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

The United Methodist Church has been in conflict over lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender inclusion issues since 1972. That year, in response to the gay liberation and gay rights movements, wording was added to the UMC Book of Discipline characterizing homosexuality as "incompatible with Christian teaching". Since then, United Methodist ministers have been forbidden to perform same-sex commitment, a rule has been passed that non-heterosexual United Methodist ministers must be celibate, and the UMC has forbidden the funding of any program or organization "supporting" homosexuality. Those fighting for GLBT inclusion have met these policies with significant resistance. In this groundbreaking book, Udis-Kessler examines this struggle, analyzing both sides of this divisive debate among one of the most prominent religious organizations in the United States.

McLaren, Brian D. *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith*. New York: HarperOne, 2011.

McLaren's fans and detractors have eagerly awaited this book, which promises to codify the beliefs he introduced in his bestselling *A New Kind of Christian* and other titles. McLaren, one of the most visible faces of the emergent movement, examines 10 questions the church must answer as it heads toward a new way of believing. McLaren deconstructs the Greco-Roman narrative of the Bible and addresses how the Bible should be understood as an inspired library, not a constitution. He moves into questions regarding God, Jesus, and the Gospel, urging us to trade up our image of God and realize that Jesus came to launch a new Genesis. The Church, sexuality, the future, and pluralism merit chapters, as does McLaren's final call for a robust spiritual life. Followers will rejoice as McLaren articulates his thoughts with logic and eloquence; detractors will point out his artful avoidance of firm answers on salvation, hell, and a final judgment. All sides will flock to this with glee.

Maxwell, Sarah. *Transcendent Vocation: Why Gay Clergy Tolerate Hypocrisy*. Lanham: John Hunt, 2013.

Based on detailed analysis of interviews with gay clergymen, and with retired heterosexual clergymen whose ministries span the period since the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, *Transcendent Vocation* provides specific examples to back up the contention that the approach of the Church of England to homosexuals has increasingly been characterized by hypocrisy. It considers why gay men wish to work within an organization that treats them with such negativity, especially now that such discrimination is illegal in secular society. The prime conclusion is that they do so because of their "Transcendent Vocation" – a conviction of having been called to the ministry by God that is so strong that it enables them to transcend all the hypocrisy and negativity that they encounter.

Njagi, Catherine Wambui. *Homosexuality Debate in Africa Today: Impacting on Ecumenical Relationships Among Kenyan Churches*. Lambert Academic, 2011.

Homosexuality Debate in Africa Today: Impacting on Ecumenical Relationships among Kenyan Churches, investigates the manner in which homosexuality debate in the Anglican Communion has affected ecumenical relationships in the Kenyan Churches. However, Kenyans, like other members of the Anglican Communion, have divergent views on the issues of homosexuality, their views range from ultra conservative and conservative to liberal and radical. The book further establishes that cutting links with the Episcopal Church of the United States of America for the Anglican Church of Kenya is not the panacea for the problem; rather dialogue is.

Sachs, William L. *Homosexuality and the Crisis of Anglicanism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2014.

The Anglican conflict over homosexuality has drawn worldwide interest and divided the church. However, conflict within Christianity is not new. This book traces the steps by which the crisis emerged, and reveals the deeper debates within the church, which underlie both the current controversy and much earlier splits. William L. Sachs contends that the present debate did not begin with opposition to homosexuality or in advocacy of it. He argues that, like past tensions, it originates in the diverging local contexts in which the faith is practiced, and their differing interpretations of authority and communion. In the aftermath of colonialism, activists and reformers have taken on prominent roles for and against the status quo. The crisis reveals a Church in search of a new, global consensus about the appropriate forms of belief and mission.

Udis-Kessler, Amanda. *Queer Inclusion in the United Methodist Church*. New York: Routledge, 2014.

The United Methodist Church has been in conflict over lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender inclusion issues since 1972. That year, in response to the gay liberation and gay rights movements, wording was added to the UMC Book of Discipline (the compilation of denominational policies and doctrines) characterizing homosexuality as "incompatible with Christian teaching". Since then, United Methodist ministers have been forbidden to perform same-sex commitment ceremonies (and United Methodist churches forbidden to host them), a rule has been passed that non-heterosexual United Methodist ministers must be celibate, and the UMC has forbidden the funding of any program or organization "supporting" homosexuality. Those fighting for GLBT inclusion have met these policies with significant resistance. In this groundbreaking book, Udis-Kessler examines this struggle, analyzing both sides of this divisive debate among one of the most prominent religious organizations in the United States.

Wilson, Nancy L. *Outing the Church: 40 Years in the Queer Christian Movement*. LifeJourney, 2013.

This book explores the important work of the Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) to minister to lesbians, gays, trans-people, prostitutes (both male and female), prisoners, HIV/AIDS patients, and more, told primarily from the point of view of the denomination's Moderator, Rev. Dr. Nancy Wilson. Wilson's message shines with wit, insight, irony, righteous indignation, and empathy. Her stories will inspire you, break your heart, and fill you with hope. *Outing the Church* tells the story the MCC's efforts over more than 40 years to gain recognition and acceptance from other denominations. In conferences, meeting rooms, and occasional gay and lesbian bars, MCC leaders, including Wilson, fought a series of battles for respect from other denominations that called themselves "progressive".