

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Struggling in Good Faith: LGBTQI Inclusion from 13 American Religious Perspectives

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Introduction

Where do you see LGBTQI issues and religion clash? In the news? In families you know or in your own family?

If you are connected with a particular spiritual tradition or denomination, what do you think people assume about you when they hear of this affiliation? Is it true?

If you are not connected to a spiritual community, why do you think some people find religious and spiritual life so compelling, even at the risk of rejection?

How might gender or sexual identity affect the way a person conceptualizes the divine?

Are there arenas in your life where you bring partial versions of yourself or downplay particular parts of yourself? Why does it feel necessary to do so? What is the impact on yourself? On others?

As you begin your discussion, please reflect upon each community's struggle with this issue and consider these questions: Does resistance come from traditional, textual or societal sources? If so, how are those supporting LGBTQI inclusion responding to these barriers? Why are some community members worried about removing these barriers?

The Black Church

What connections does the author make between black churches' ostracism of LGBTQI people and racial discrimination?

How would you explain Rev Coates' quote that his support of gay and lesbian Christians is due to his belief in the authority of the Scripture, rather than being in spite of it?

Buddhism

How has this chapter affected your understanding of personal identity? Do you find this unsettling or liberating? Why?

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon)

What similarities and differences do you see in how the LDS church leadership responded to prior civil rights movement-influenced issues such as entry into the priesthood for African Americans and the leadership response to LGBTQI issues? Why do you think they are similar or different?

The Episcopal Church

What does it mean to accept the "givenness" of your body if you do not accept your body?

First Nations (Native American)

In what ways are these communities coming to terms with their history around LGBTQI issues and returning to traditional narratives, as well as creating new ones?

Hinduism

How might traditional Hindu stories about sex change be used to support LGBTQI people? How did it feel to read about sex change in sacred texts, if this was a new concept for you?

How has colonialism impacted Hindu religious attitudes about LGBTQI people?

Islam

Since traditionally Muslim prayer space is separated by sex—male and female—what do you imagine the impact might be upon one’s spiritual experience to sit in mixed-gender spaces, including those who identify as gender-fluid?

Judaism

How is the idea that “all of Judaism exists within an interpretive practice” significant to this tradition’s approach to LGBTQI issues?

The Lutheran Church

Can you think of a familiar text and explore the approaches of exegesis and eisegesis? In what ways do you read your own, personal context into scripture? In what ways do you leave your own, contemporary lens aside when reading sacred text and attempt to only draw the meaning out of the text itself? Now, try this with a text about an LGBTQI related text and ask the same questions.

How does the concept of God’s grace as a free gift influence how we treat the LGBTQI community or any outsiders? How should or could it further our welcoming of the disenfranchised?

The Presbyterian Church

Presbyterian theologian Jack Rogers states that the majority within the church—typically white men—have taken the authority to interpret the bible and to claim their own perspectives on social issues as normative. Rogers continues that the community therefore reads social prejudice back into the text. What do you think about this statement? Can you identify places in your own scriptural or ritual tradition where current social beliefs are held as truths?

Protestant Evangelical Traditions

The author highlights the selectivity practiced by Evangelicals. The Church says that Jesus fulfilled all the commandments found in the Hebrew Bible via his death, yet they point specifically to Hebrew Bible commandments prohibiting male-male sexual activity. What, then, might be the primary issue of concern? Do you think it is possible that Church leadership has selected the issue of homosexuality for a reason other than religious doctrine? If so, how might Church members approach addressing the underlying concerns?

The Roman Catholic Church

If a religion has some members who follow a literal interpretative tradition and others who only follow an historical-critical interpretation tradition, do you think it is possible for adherents to these two distinct approaches to find a common meeting ground? What might it be?

Unitarian Universalism

The author makes reference to Church members who want to bring their “whole selves” to their religious lives. What does it mean to have multiple identities? Is it possible to leave aside some aspects of yourself in one setting, and other aspects in another? What might the impact be on your emotional and spiritual health to leave aside parts of your identity in church, at school, at work or at the doctor’s office?

Conclusion:

In reading about different religious and spiritual traditions and their wrestling with this particular issue, has anything shifted in how you think about your own religious or spiritual beliefs and practices?

What recurring themes did you notice throughout the chapters? Why do you think these reappear?

Throughout the course of the book, the same texts were often quoted by different religious perspectives. What differences or similarities did you see in how that scripture was interpreted or applied to LGBTQI engagement? Did you find any specific religious texts or statements in the book you would like to use when speaking with others about LGBTQI community members, coworkers, students or patients? Why do these passages or ideas appeal to you?

Since many writers emphasized that their traditions are not just anti-LGBTQI, but are also anti-sexual activity, how might traditions be affected by a more positive stance on non-harmful sexual activity?

If you were able to join the perfect community, what would it look like? Why would this be your ideal?