

EVANGELICAL AUTHOR: “HETEROSEXUALITY IS AN ABOMINATION.”

A Review of Jenell Williams Paris, *The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex Is Too Important to Define Who We Are* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011)

I. The Thesis

According to Messiah College professor, Jenell Williams Paris, “Heterosexuality...is an abomination” (43). This statement is doubtless meant for maximum effect, since the Bible declares male on male sex as “an abomination” (Lev 20:13). One is led to ask how an evangelical Christian scholar, published by a Christian publishing house (IVP) justifies such a shocking formulation.

As an "abomination" Paris means the false classification of persons as merely homosexual or heterosexual, a practice she feels gives a person identity only on the basis of sexual choices or desires, rather than on their status as creatures made in God's image and loved by God (97). Paris also argues that, historically, the terms "heterosexuality" and "homosexuality" have never had to do with theology or ethics, but are recent "social constructions...created by people within the last two hundred years" (15). Prior to this modern period, people did not think of themselves as having sexual identities (42).

For Paris contends that the recent term "heterosexuality" has produced a "heterocentrist theology" that "breeds hierarchy, moral superiority and inauthenticity," making the term "not a good enough value to prize, seek after and organize life around" since it has hurt homosexuals (40, 107). When Christians use the term to condemn “homosexuality with such vehemence,...[they] have arguably contributed to the cementing of sexual desire as central to human identity” (70). Christians, having bought into the sexual identity framework, engage in an unhealthy obsession with wanting to change the sexual orientation of homosexuals (99).

So, what would renewed Christian minds look like? According to Paris, we need minds that are “calm...about sexuality,” minds that will, with “maturity,” stop “rooting after moral law and clinging to moral judgments” (78). Such maturity rejects rigid “sexual dimorphism (or binary sex categories)” like male and female, for such categories, though they seem “to simply reflect the binary pattern of creation,...are cultural creations” (31). This non-binary, non-judgmental approach will produce the desirable mature Christian community with no sexual labels, in which we no longer judge people on the basis of their sexuality, for we will never agree on “sexual ethics” and what are “divergent sexual practices” (140, 144).

With the advent of sexually neutral Christian communities and the general abandonment of the terms heterosexual and homosexual (and thus of this false, dehumanizing "sexual identity framework"), we can optimistically hope that the recently created problem of sexual identity will pass as quickly as it came. All in all, the future looks bright.

II. Evaluation

The burden of this book is to "humanize" the homosexual neighbor, a burden shared by the Apostle Paul, who calls not the homosexual but himself "the chief of sinners" (1 Tim 1:15), who ministers to homosexuals, as evidenced by their presence in his churches (1 Cor 6:9), and who adds to his condemnation of homosexuality (Rom 1:26-28) a long list of other sins (Rom 1:29-32). Paul shows us that Christians may never be moralizers!

Paris succeeds as an observant anthropologist in showing the numerous variations and complexities of sexual desire and practice in today's world, and, as an obviously caring Christian woman, focuses on love rather than judgment (8). She rightly shows deep respect for all human beings, whatever their sexual orientation, and wants to avoid the self-justifying moralism that "God-hates-fags Christians" unfortunately exemplify..

III. Critique

In spite of these noble intentions, however, Jenell Williams Paris's analysis is largely unsuccessful, and in my view, pastorally harmful. The present acceptance of homosexuality among young believers threatens the future Christian community with moral and spiritual relativism that will lead it into full-blown religious paganism.

The crucial nature of the moment which we are living is illustrated by the website, OneWheaton.com. Wheaton College, one of the academic pillars of Christian orthodoxy, now faces head-on the issue of homosexual students in its midst. The goal of this unofficial site is to support LGBTQ students at Wheaton College, as do (according to the website), "similar alumni movements ... at other Christian universities." The site states its intent to counter "prevailing ideas about homosexuality in the Wheaton community":

...we have come together as a voice of freedom and hope...we have traversed the contradictions we once thought irreconcilable, and our sexuality has become an integral part of our broader pursuit of justice, compassion, and love.¹

¹ "Who is OneWheaton?" OneWheaton – A Community of LGBTQs and Allies of Wheaton College, <http://www.onewheaton.com/us.html>.

Though the statement of Wheaton College President Ryken, in “affirm[ing] the full humanity and dignity of every human being, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity,”² seems to express the goal of Paris's book, she really wants more. She wants a “post-sexual identity church” that refuses all sexual labels (16). But faced with the kind of thought-through pro-gay Christian morality now appearing at places like Wheaton, the Paris ideal will surely not halt the tsunami of theological legitimization of homosexual practice in the evangelical church; indeed, it may contribute to the tide.

A. *Dubious History*

The author's read of recent history to explain the present conflict over sexuality in the culture and in the church is, at best, confusing and ambiguous and, at worst, plain wrong.

The approach, as she admits, was born from embarrassment. Her lesbian friend, Sarah, took her to a gay bar, and there posed the question, "Does Christianity really condemn homosexuality" (7)? Embarrassed, especially in that context, she eventually sought a more acceptable, non-judgmental answer in anthropology's understanding of “social construction.” Anthropology enabled her to identify not a sinful pattern of homosexual behavior but a sinful pattern of worldly, inauthentic categorization, from which all Christians should be transformed (Romans 12:2). This, she came to believe, was the real problem, and the way forward was to understand the present sexual impasse as an issue of false categories (8).

There are numerous problems with the Paris approach. To begin with, her identification of the historical moment when this crucial change in definition occurred varies widely. She speaks of “a hundred years” (42), of “the last two hundred years” (15), the years before 1930 and, elsewhere, the years before 1960 when the terms were in use (107). Not just her time markers but her categories are vague. During this period, however long it was, she affirms that the concepts of sexuality have been changing (107). How does one measure the changes? Though she is sure that before that (ill-defined) period, people did not think of themselves as having sexual identities tied “almost entirely” to sexual feelings or orientations, how does one evaluate feelings that are “almost entirely” felt, in order to come up with a major reinterpretation of the modern history of sexuality (42, 107)? How does one read people's inner self-perceptions that are constantly changing? In spite of these imprecisions, Paris nevertheless affirms with confidence that thinking in terms of “sexual identity” is the great problem of which we should be healed.

I am skeptical of the thesis that the terms “homosexual” and “heterosexual” could be so uniquely powerful and so confined to a specific moment of history that nothing before them could be like them or have comparable effects. We often grant, however, in other academic areas, that in previous ages the same ideas existed as now exist, though described by different words. For

² Philip Ryken, “Message from President Ryken Regarding OneWheaton,” Media Relations at Wheaton College, http://www.wheaton.edu/news/releases/10-11_releases/04.29.11_OneWheatonResponse.html.

instance, Sir M. Monier-Williams, Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Oxford, commented in 1894 about the new Darwinism:

Indeed the Hindus were Spinosists 2000 years before the birth of Spinoza, Darwinians centuries before Darwin, and evolutionists many centuries before the doctrine of evolution had been accepted...and before any word like evolution existed in any language of the world.³

Can we be sure that terms used prior to the advent of “homosexual,” like “sodomite,” “pederast,” “Sapphic,” “homophile,” “Urianian,” or “Two-Spirit,” were not used in a similar dehumanizing way?

As a matter of fact, Paris actually uses the terms on a number of occasions with no negative implication (see 70, 75, 103). Indeed, on two occasions she grants: 1) “it is sometimes important to be heterosexual...if using that label helps us serve others or pursue justice,” but we must never live by its cultural power (51); (2) following Jesus “may mean rejecting the label of heterosexuality altogether and becoming ‘unlabeled’ in...sexuality,” while “others may wish to use heterosexuality instead of being used by it” (53).

Paris's usage here appears to undermine her whole thesis, for the terms which she claims have done so much damage are in themselves not inherently problematic.

B. Refusal of Moral Categories

The staggering truth about human beings is that we live in a moral universe, and everything has moral implications. This is surely an essential part of human dignity, over against the non-human kingdom. Of course, one should avoid judgmentalism, but we cannot and must not suspend moral judgment. For Paris, “proclaiming that ‘homosexuality is a sin’ is a poor representation of Christian teaching” because the real problem is not morality but the dehumanizing application of social identity categories (9). Homosexuality cannot be judged morally because scientists recognize a genetic cause, which is not freely chosen and thus cannot be changed by a moral decision (34, 104, 62).

So what should Christians do? Paris maintains that we must imitate Jesus, who said to the woman caught in adultery, “You are not condemned. Go on your way, and do not sin again” (123; see John 8). In this biblical text, the sin (adultery) is named and denounced, and forgiveness is granted. Paris misuses Jesus’ words because she refuses to name homosexuality as sin. If the judged homosexual person goes on his way without sin ever having been named, he cannot have been granted forgiveness.

³ Cited in M. L. Burke, *Swami Vivekanda in the West: New Discoveries* (Vedanta, 1984), 2:128.

Paris makes no moral judgment on a same sex couple raising a child because she will not grant that there are objectively sinful, as over-against life-enhancing, structures (122). She argues, quite beside the point, that heterosexual marriage can be an occasion for pride and sin, and cannot thus serve as the norm. One thinks of Paul's argument, however, that people who preach Christ for selfish reasons cannot change the truth of the Gospel, which remains the power of God unto salvation (Phil 1:15-18).

Paris advocates a naïve "leave and let live" approach, refusing to judge, and hoping that sufficient amounts of love and patience will solve all problems. She denounces the "false forbearance" of a church for a pastor involved in heterosexual sexual sin, who was protected by his congregation that "allowed the man's sin to flourish" (120-121). Is she not also guilty of a "false forbearance" toward homosexuals, by allowing their sin to flourish? Should there be no warning of the obsessional, narcissistic, and dehumanizing character of homosexuality? Will this forbearance of moral judgment bring healing, or will it feed the obsessional search for the self (the "same") and become an ingrained selfish (though spiritualized and justified) distortion of reality (see Romans 1:26)?

At a more general level, is it not the very decision to *remove* the terms "homosexuality" and "heterosexuality" from the moral sphere that raises the specter of a mere social construct? If there are no *moral* categories for sexual behavior, then there are *only social* categories. To construe our sexuality in this manner is the clear intention of the current homosexual community, a fact Paris recognizes (60). It is homosexuals who want to be identified by their sex drives; it is they who frequent gay bars, claim gay liberation and gay rights, develop queer theory, and, in California, insist on gay history textbooks for all state schools. It is they who sometimes claim to be a "third sex" or "third gender." A biblical view insists that we were created heterosexual, subject to the same moral law. Some heterosexuals engage in homosexual activity for all kinds of reasons, some tragic, but none of which are ultimately life-promoting or God-exalting.

C. Misuse of Biblical Texts

The author's refusal to apply moral categories results in a consistent failure to search the biblical texts for a satisfying understanding of this burning contemporary problem. She admits, "As an anthropologist, I'm...devoted to understanding the patterns of this world" (15). Alas the pattern of Scripture is largely ignored, even as she claims to have "conservative views" that clearly derive from Scripture (85). She even states that the "progressive" Christian vision, like that held in the gay-affirming Metropolitan Christian Church, "neglects more specific and distinctive elements of the Christian tradition." However her non-judgmentalism will not allow her to say what these distinctive (and apparently extremely important) elements of the Christian tradition are.

Paris uses "pietistic" biblical terms like "holiness," "love," and "Christ," and couples them to her anthropological approach, which is descriptive, not prescriptive. The result is an argument that

never gets to the heart of the matter. At the same time, Paris dismissively characterizes the Scripture's specific teaching, "the five or six passages" on homosexuality, as our own constructs that we read back into Scripture (88).

She does her own "reading back" when she drops the role of anthropologist and tries her hand at exegesis.

1. Paul and Romans 1:26-28

Paris corrects those who believe that Paul is addressing present issues in his teaching on homosexuality in Romans 1:26-28. She states that at the time of Paul's writing, sex "was something a man did to someone else—a way of expressing power and privilege," therefore "a man enjoying a loving, committed relationship with a male of equal status may have been laughable" (65). To this, two objections must be made:

a. *Sex for Power and Privilege*

In Romans 1:27, Paul says, "and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another." There are a number of reasons why this verse does not describe sex for "power and privilege" but something like contemporary practice:

- The relationship is compared to "natural relations with women";
- partners burn for *one another*, similar to what Paul describes for a heterosexual yearning in 1 Corinthians 7:9; and
- Paul uses the term "one another" in 1 Corinthians 7:4 to describe a mutually respectful marriage relationship, and everywhere else (36 times) to describe the relationship of equals. Certainly "consumed with passion for one another" does not describe a passive, sexual victim.⁴

b. *Alexander the Great*

At least one well-known case of a "loving, committed relationship" between two men was not scorned but lauded. Alexander the Great occupied iconic status in Rome, and was held in the highest honor by Pompey the Great, Julius Caesar and Augustus. Julius Caesar reportedly said that Alexander was the only great leader in history, and wept at the sight of his statue. Alexander was known for a number of same sex relationships, but the ancient Roman historian, Plutarch, goes out of his way to praise Alexander for treating all his male lovers humanely. Well-known in the ancient world was Alexander's long relationship with Hephaestion, a Macedonian nobleman, Alexander's closest friend, and second in command of all his forces. This relationship was

⁴ On this general topic, see Peter Jones, *One or Two: Seeing a World of Difference* (Escondido, CA: Main Entry Editions, 2010).

considered the greatest emotional attachment in Alexander's life. At Haephestion's death, Alexander grieved bitterly, did not eat for many days, and, attempting to honor his lost friend, asked (to no avail) that the priests of Ammon declare Haephestion a god. No one was laughing!

2. Holiness

Holiness as a goal for Christian living appears often in the Paris text. For example, holiness "honors the importance of the question ['Is homosexuality a sin?']... , but at the same time it recognizes that people and groups will answer it differently" (90). Again, holiness delivers us from "moralizing" to "really pursuing sexual holiness" (91). For the meaning of this important scriptural term she takes John Wesley's definition: holiness is "love of God and neighbor." She further defines it, not as "a synonym for morality" but as "being more and more in love for God" (83). These are stirring terms of Christian devotion, but they eviscerate the meaning of the biblical term.

Holiness in Scripture is being "set apart" for specific tasks. The Sabbath is a holy day because it is set apart from the other days (Ex 16:23); Mount Sinai is "set apart as holy" from other places (Ex 19:23); "the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils and the basin and its stand" are consecrated as "most holy" (Ex 30:28). Thus when Jesus exhorts us to "make holy" God's name, he means to recognize that the Father who is in heaven has His own place and is different from us as the divine Other (Matt 6:12). When Paul exhorts Christians to present their bodies as a "holy" living sacrifice, he is referring to a specific life style that is pleasing to God (Rom 12:1). Paul is specific: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification (lit. 'holiness'): that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable" (1 Thess 4:3-4). Paul is clear that to please the Lord in honorable living includes using our bodies for God's intended, holy purposes.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God...Flee from sexual immorality....do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body (1 Cor 6:9, 18-20).

I am not sure what Paris means when she says that "holiness is not synonymous with morality," but I would suggest that holiness, referring to the way God constituted the creation by separating things and giving everything its rightful place (see Gen 1), is the very *source* of morality, and thus necessarily has a moral component (9). Holiness is a biblical way of referring to the different Other.

The author affirms that “holiness in sexuality” is “the life of love, centered in Christ” (118). A “life of love centered in Christ” surely means selfless living for the honor of Christ, the Other. But if, as many believe, homosexuality is seeking the “same” in order to love the lost self, then ultimately it can never express the selfless love that is centered in Christ’s love for the other. This deep cosmological meaning of human sexuality is nowhere to be found in *The End of Sexual Identity*, as I will discuss in the next section.

D. Worldview Implications of Sexuality

For an author who claims to “define who we are” (the book’s subtitle) relative to sexuality, her complete silence (ignorance?) concerning the cosmological significance of sexuality is most disturbing. Even the radical Anglican priest, Charles Pickstone, sees the deep connection. In his book, *The Divinity of Sex*, he states that “sex is the spirituality that reveals the sacramental richness of matter.”⁵ This pagan believer, masquerading as a Christian minister, in the words of his reviewer, “forsakes Christianity’s transcendent God for neo-pagan pantheism, with the distinction between Creator and creation collapsed, and sex the religious experience of choice.”⁶ Plato understood that sexuality and theology represent an integrated pair, as does the Bible.⁷ The first thing the Genesis account tells us about the creation of Man is that the human race is made in God’s image (Gen 1:27). The second thing emphasized (of all the things the text *could* have told us) is that Man is divided into male and female in a heterosexual relationship (Gen 2:24). Moreover, the male/female relationship is not abrogated in the accounts of redemption, where it functions as an essential picture of the eternal covenant bond between Jahweh and Israel, between Christ and the Church.⁸ Thus idolatry is often described as spiritual adultery. Manifestly, the relationship of sexuality to spirituality is of utmost importance, both in the theology of the Bible and also in the development of pagan religion.

The “misused” terms, “homosexual” and “heterosexual,” are actually extremely helpful hints in understanding the only two ways of conceiving of existence. The prefix “homo,” which means “same,” evokes a world without ultimate distinctions, where everything is ontologically the same, where all things share the same substance. Pushed to its religious consequences, a world without distinctions is the world of paganism: everything in creation shares the same divine spark or energy and is worshiped as divine. The prefix “hetero,” meaning “other” or “different,”

⁵ Charles Pickstone, *The Divinity of Sex: The Search for Ecstasy in a Secular Age* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), reviewed by John Attarian in *Culture Wars*, March 1998, 46ff.

⁶ On this general topic, see Peter Jones, *One or Two*.

⁷ Plato in his *Symposium*, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 193, believed that the determining of one’s present sexual identity, since it anticipates the “primal state” to which all must return, is “among all the acts...the best to choose” and thus must be pursued as “a reverent duty.” In other words, knowing whether one is homosexual, lesbian or heterosexual [these were the three possibilities deriving from the three original forms, male, female or androgyny, is a moral and theological imperative.

⁸ Isaiah 54:5; 61:10; 62:10, Jeremiah 31:32; Hosea 2:21 Corinthians 11:3-12; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:22-33.

evokes a world of holiness, things rightfully distinguished and set apart from one another. (The unholy mixing of things that should be kept apart is sometimes called “an abomination,” as in Leviticus 20:13.) In biblical faith, the creation is a world of God-created binaries, where laws and norms bear witness to the great binary of the Creator/creature distinction. We can speak of either a “homocosmology” or of a “heterocosmology” as two very different, antithetical worldviews.

Paris is opposed to binary, fixed positions (27). “Sexual dimorphism (or ‘binary sex categories’)” has no place in her thinking (31, 87). As an anthropologist, she finds valuable Alfred Kinsey’s description of sexuality as a continuum, because it does justice to sexual fluidity or “erotic plasticity” (44, 46). Making the descriptive proscriptive, she commits an enormous theological error, claiming that believers could benefit from understanding sexuality as a continuum of five elements: male, male feminized, male/female mixed (androgyny), female masculinized, and female. “Sex as a spectrum,” she says, “could fit a Christian understanding of creation” (34). If such a spectrum were seen as normative, she contends, then it would make sense for some Christ-like believers might well judge heterosexuality as “not desirable,” because the spectrum allows mature choice (87).

Having granted this spectrum model as a Christian option, Paris is fascinated by the very spiritual indigenous Bugis people of Indonesia, who see sex on a continuum, and have transgendered shamans called *bissu*—a perfect combination of female and male elements (26). With no sense of the religious implications of the phenomenon she is observing, she proceeds to state, “As far as I have read, there are no Christian theologies of Bugis sex and gender. But if there were..., believers would benefit from perceiving the socially constructed nature...of man and woman,” which is a “sense of themselves as existing on a (sexual) continuum, not as opposite sexes” (27, 28).

Such thinking not only ignores biblical morals but also denies biblical cosmology. Homosexuality and other forms of sexual blending have deep religious significance within pagan cults. Paris mentions the *berdache*, the he/she that appears in over one hundred tribes as a “two-spirit” man or woman who functions in the opposite gender, but she claims we know little about them, except that they perform spiritual rituals (67). She also mentions ethnic groups in Siberia, Borneo and the Philippines that “grant religious roles for those of ambiguous sexual biology or those of same sex attraction” (67-8). Never once does she inquire as to what those religious roles might be, nor the spirituality there practiced.

The End of Sexuality fails to recognize that homosexuals have functioned consistently, from the mists of time and all over the globe, as occultic shamans in all kinds of pagan religions.⁹ Mircea

⁹ Peter Jones, "Androgyny: The Pagan Sexual Ideal," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 43, no. 3 (September 2000): 443–69.

Eliade, a world-renowned authority on world religions, and one of the architects of the new spirituality, demonstrates that through time and space a commonplace figure in the pagan *cultus* is an emasculated priest.¹⁰ This common religious universal, or archetype, is identified with a particular kind of spirituality.¹¹ We see the myth of a bisexual or androgynous god in ancient Mesopotamian and Indo-European nature religions, as well as in the myths of Australian Aborigines, African tribes, South American Indians and Pacific islanders, all still surviving today. In all these religions, observes Eliade, “ritual androgynisation” is a “symbolic restoration of Chaos, of the undifferentiated unity that preceded the Creation.”¹² Homosexual androgyny, the joining of male and female in the same person, functions in these countless traditional religions as “an archaic and universal formula for the expression of wholeness, the co-existence of the contraries, or *coincidentia oppositorum*...symboliz[ing]...perfection...[and] ultimate being.”¹³

Homosexuality is not limited here to morals or the lack thereof. It is employed as the attempt to define the very nature of the cosmos as inherently divine. It is for this reason that the Old Testament denounces homosexuality in such strong terms, since it is a sign of pagan religion. Paris’s dismissal of Scripture’s teaching on homosexuality as “the five or six passages” fails to see the injunctions as part of a major polemic against anti-creational paganism. The context of the much-cited prohibition against homosexuality states, “You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan” (Lev 18:3; see Lev 20:23). Leviticus presents sexual activity between two men as an example of the pagan religion of the Canaanites, which the people of Yahweh should avoid.¹⁴ In other words, it is the *religion* (implicit in the act, in its rejection of God the Creator), more than the *morals*, which is in view.

Certainly, not all homosexuals see these religious connotations, nor have they come to homosexuality for religious reasons. Nevertheless many contemporary homosexuals see this deep connection. It is what J. Michael Clark, professor at Emory University and Georgian State University, and a gay spokesman, understood about the *berdache*. Clark, once a Christian, could not find an adequate place for his sexuality in biblical faith, and turned to Native American

¹⁰ See David Cave, *Mircea Eliade’s Vision for a New Humanism* (New York: Oxford, 1993), 3, who shows that the visionary impulse behind Eliade’s work was his “hope for a new humanism.” Eliade emphasized “mystical” experience and believed that religion was not a matter of knowledge but experience (8), and just as Goethe wished to go to India, so did Eliade, who spent 1928-31 there and wrote his doctoral dissertation on yoga and Indian spirituality (9). According to Cave, Eliade left India with a “cultural mission...persuaded of the viability of archaic and Oriental spirituality for the Western world.”

¹¹ Mircea Eliade and Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, “Androgynes,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: MacMillan, 1987), 1:276.

¹² Mircea Eliade, *The Two and the One* (New York: Harper, 1969), 112. Eliade and O’Flaherty, “Androgynes,” *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1:277.

¹³ Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 174-5. Eliade, *Patterns of Comparative Religion* (New York: New American Library, 1974), 420-21.

¹⁴ This argument is developed by the homosexual Old Testament scholar, Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 37-44

animism for an acceptable spiritual model. He found in the *berdache*, this androgynous American Indian shaman, born as a male but choosing to live as a female, “a desirable gay spiritual model,” because the *berdache* achieves “the reunion of the cosmic, sexual and moral polarities,” that is, the classic pagan “joining of the opposites.”¹⁵ Clark is happy to live with “sex as a spectrum.”

Other notable contemporary homosexuals understand their sexuality in occultic *religious* terms. Professor Emily Culpepper, an Ex-Southern Baptist and now a lesbian pagan witch, sees gays and lesbians, in her words, as “shamans for a future age.”¹⁶ She reserves a spiritual role for homosexuals, for a shaman is “...a charged, potent, awe-inspiring, and even fear-inspiring person who takes true risks by crossing over into other worlds.”¹⁷

A contemporary gay theorist, Toby Johnson, inspired by the modern-day popularizer of pagan mythology, Joseph Campbell, believes that present-day gay consciousness represents a new religious paradigm, for:

- it undermines the authority and legitimacy of the institutions of traditional religion;
- it helps to see the world with a harmonious, non-dualistic vision;
- in its ecstatic pangs of longing inspired by same-sex beauty, it experiences reverberations and recollections of humanity’s common mystical oneness with Gaia; and
- it helps humanity to get over dualistic, polarized (male-dominant) thinking, and thus save the world in awareness of common planetary identity.¹⁸

With the place of homosexuality firmly established as an essential component of cultic and religious nature worship, it was inevitable that a Jungian, June Singer, would give the ultimate expression of the deeply religious importance of homosexuality. She said already in 1977, “the archetype of androgyny appears in us as an innate sense of...and witness to ...the primordial cosmic unity, that is, it is the *sacrament of monism*, functioning to erase distinction...[this understanding of sexuality was] nearly totally expunged from the Judeo-Christian tradition...and a patriarchal God-image.”¹⁹

¹⁵ J. Michael Clark, "Gay Spirituality," in *Spirituality and the Secular Quest*, ed. Peter H. Van Ness (New York: Crossroads/Herder, 1996), 342.

¹⁶ Emily Culpepper, "The Spiritual, Political Journey of a Feminist Freethinker," *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 164.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Toby Johnson, *The Myth of the Great Secret: An Appreciation of Joseph Campbell* (Celestial Arts, 1992).

¹⁹ June Singer, *Androgyny: Towards a New Theory of Sexuality* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1977), 20, 22.

Clearly, Singer's non-binary definition of sex does *not* fit "a Christian understanding" of creation (34). How powerfully, in its pagan self-understanding, it opposes what Paris also opposes, a "rigid sexual dimorphism" (32). Paris says that "viewing sex on a spectrum...male and female...positioned on the same line, not in two separate categories...makes a credible space for intersex people," but, alas, such a view also makes an enormous space for occultic spirituality—once the connection of sex with spirituality is made (33).

The theological implications of this opposition to sexual binary categories are enormous. Such naiveté plays into the hands of the non-binary, or non-dual spirituality, which, in its Hindu form, is taking over much of the Western mind and soul. Philip Goldberg, author of *American Veda: How Indian Spirituality Changed the West*, calls this a spiritual "revival," based on the Hindu term *Advaita*, meaning "not two." The spiritual synthesis, to which progressives believe we are advancing, will be "non-dual," non-binary. Goldberg declares that *Advaita* and "non-dual...oneness, unity around non-separation" are "the generic term[s] increasingly used to describe the present and coming spirituality in America—meaning that God and the world are *not* two."²⁰

How appropriate, indeed inevitable, that we also move, even in evangelical circles, towards a comparable definition of sexuality.

IV. A Hidden Agenda of Biblical Sex

Reader, please know that I am not suggesting that *The End of Sexual Identity* is a representative of the apostasy found in today's culture and some parts of the church, as mentioned above. I *am* suggesting however that, in ignorance, it is playing with fire in a context of possible future theological conflagration. Perhaps Paris and IVP were determined to publish a book with such a radical thesis, knowing that biblical norms are subtly hidden behind its cloak of progressivism and inclusivism.

Even though Paris gives the impression that homosexuality and heterosexuality are moral equivalents and that numerous sexual choices deserve full acceptance in the Christian community, two-thirds of the way through the book she declares, "My views are conservative—I'm a 'sex only within marriage between a man and a woman' kind of Christian" (85). Wow! Where did that come from? As the Titanic sinks, she timidly raises her voice to sing "Abide with Me."

While Paris never seriously defends why she takes the conservative view she does, when she gives examples of "healing," she gives them in only one direction, from gay to straight. Though she believes it is "not always possible to change orientation," the implied orientation to change is

²⁰ Philip Goldberg, *American Veda: How Indian Spirituality Changed the West* (New York: Harmony, 2010), 344.

the homosexual one (61). When she talks of instantaneous or gradual change, the “change” is never from straight to gay, but from gay to straight (88). Her few strong statements about “sex in marriage...as an opportunity to give and receive love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control,” are *not* applied to “gay marriage” (117). She defends sexual desire as good, but gives only *heterosexual* examples from the Bible (34). She makes the important concession that although it is “important to reduce sex-based inequalities, but also important to highlight the reality of being created male and female” (34). She ends her book with an unexpected chapter on celibacy, which I can only think is a big hint for homosexual Christian believers to find resolution in the single state. In the entire book, in an incredible *tour de force* of “forbearance,” she never once calls homosexuality a sin, except right at the end, when, for the first and only time, she states: “Christians choose celibacy for many reasons...[one being] because they believe it would be sinful to act on their same sex attraction” (133). Even here, non-judgmental “calm” is preserved, since the judgment about sin is only what certain believers might conclude for themselves, not a principal moral conclusion that the writer has openly and clearly developed.

We can nevertheless applaud these timid statements of a biblical view of sexuality. Jenell Paris obviously wishes to respect and maintain communion with the believer grappling with homosexuality, and this is a good and proper Christian motivation. The careful reader may catch glimpses of some elements of biblical teaching, but they can easily be missed. All in all, however, I believe her approach becomes somewhat unfair to the homosexual. First, the lack of clarity that hides the real intentions of this “open” dialogue, which finally goes only one way, could be taken by the homosexual reader as slightly dishonest. Second, her dialogical forbearance and studied ambiguity runs the serious risk of failing to warn those caught in the trap of this behavior that she eventually does not approve.

There is an even greater danger, and that is for the thousands of confused Christian students who buy this book. They are already confused by the multi-cultural context of their lives, and exposed daily to an agenda of tolerance and non-judgmentalism. This book will not show them the deep, historic connection between homosexuality and pagan religion, and, what is worse, it *will* leave them with the impression that there is no clear biblical teaching about sexuality. The future leaders of evangelicalism will thus conclude (as many are now doing) that the wisest course is positive acceptance, general tolerance, or polite silence.

Albert Mohler has observed: “When a church forfeits its doctrinal convictions and then embraces ambiguity and tolerates heresy, it undermines its own credibility and embraces its own

destruction.”²¹ Homosexuality is embodied heresy, a sort of worldview apostasy—as Paul shows in Romans 1:26-28.²² The church must say this, with respect and love, or its demise is certain.

As I complete this review, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has decided to fully accept gays in the ministry, claiming that this is submission to the Lordship of Christ while, at the same time, choosing to ignore the clear teachings of Scripture. Institute on Religion and Democracy Vice President and Presbyterian Action Director Alan Wisdom commented:

Now we belong to a denomination that gives no clear counsel on sexuality. It is a denomination that will not necessarily support its members as they struggle to obey the high standards of Scripture. It will not call them to repentance when they fall short of those standards, and it will not offer God’s forgiveness for what it no longer recognizes as sexual sins. In a society where the abuse of sexuality is devastating millions of lives, this abdication by the PCUSA is tragic.²³

While Paris seems unaware of how her book may well contribute to this tragedy, especially among evangelical Christian students, Mircea Eliade, by no means a Christian or a traditionalist, certainly is, as some forty years ago he offered this sobering admonition about the role of spiritual non-binary sexuality:

Every attempt to transcend the opposites carries with it a certain danger. This is why the ideas of a *coincidentia oppositorum* always arouse ambivalent feelings: on the one side, man is haunted by the desire to escape from his particular situation and regain a transpersonal mode of life; on the other, he is paralyzed by the fear of losing his “identity” and “forgetting” himself.²⁴

We cannot say we have not been warned.

²¹ Al Mohler Blog, "When the Lights Go Out: The Death of a Denomination," <http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/05/04/when-the-lights-go-out-the-death-of-a-denomination/>.

²² See Jones, *One or Two*, 169-183.

²³ Jeff Walton, "Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) Drops Sexuality Standard," Christian Newswire, <http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/7256916966.html>.

²⁴ Eliade, *The Two and the One*, 123n1.