

Theologians challenge homophobia & signal a time for change: The Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research's new report: "Christian Objections to Same-Sex Relationships: An Academic Assessment"

The urgent need for this report:

The Wijngaards Institute's study has been two years in the making but is being launched at an opportune time, coming just after the recent (March '21) statement from the Vatican that upheld the ban on blessing same-sex unions stating: "You cannot bless sin". In this new report, theologians have joined forces to prove there is no warrant for the official Catholic Church's vilification of same-sex unions.

For decades the bible has been used to justify discrimination against same-sex relationships. This new study presents ground-breaking research showing that the biblical verses so long held to condemn those relationships do nothing of the sort. The report also deals with the classic condemnation of same-sex orientation as "unnatural" and highlights the scientific findings which now regard same-sex orientation as a natural variant of human sexuality. **The Vatican as well as most other Christian Churches** bear responsibility for continuing discrimination against people in same-sex relationships by asserting biblical grounds to justify their condemnation. Our report intends to help end this cruel and false teaching.

Report launch – May 2021

- The report and summary statement will be officially launched on **May 4th**
- Our press release will **call for an urgent change in teaching based on these definite findings which are intended to serve as the final nail in the coffin of biblical arguments justifying homophobia**
- It will be shared with all reform groups and Christian organizations seeking to end discrimination
- A copy will be sent to Pope Francis as well as other Christian leaders
- Panel discussions with theologians and high-profile Catholics will be organized in the coming months
- A printable version of the Statement is available to enable sharing our findings more widely
- The Statement has already been translated into 8 languages and the full report into four languages

What's unique about it:

The Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research has been coordinating an interdisciplinary panel of academics over the past two years to produce a research report evaluating the morality of same-sex relationships from within the Catholic and Christian traditions. This is the first such report to bring together and assess the most recent peer-reviewed research on the biblical passages used to condemn same-sex relationships. Much of that crucial research has only been published as recently as March 2020 and so is still only known within academic circles.

Key discoveries:

While the report also examines scientific and sociological evidence, much of it is devoted to recent ground-breaking studies on the most important -so-called- "clobber texts" in the Bible:

1. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are popularly believed to be the most explicit and general condemnation of same-sex relationships. **Our study can confirm that the traditional interpretation is based on a mistranslation.** On the contrary, those verses only refer to specific kinds of *male* same-sex sexual activity (specifically, adultery and incest) and none condemns same-sex relationships in general. Indeed, the fact that the prohibition addressed a specific type of activity suggests same-sex relationships outside the forbidden category were viewed as permissible
2. Also, Romans 1:26-27 is misinterpreted as new research has convincingly revealed
3. There is no condemnation anywhere in the bible of *female* same-sex relationships, and of *consensual and faithful* same-sex relationships in general
4. From the point of view of the natural sciences, it can be affirmed that, homosexuality is a "natural variation within the range of human sexuality"

Academic study participants:

The foreword to the report is written by **Rev. Dr Krzysztof Charamsa**, former Official of the **Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith** & former Assistant Secretary of the International Theological Commission at the Vatican, former Professor of Theology in Pontifical Gregorian University and Pontifical Ateneum Regina Apostolorum, and former Professor of Anthropology in Institute for Religious Studies, Rome.

The full report ([link will be added to press release](#)) is a 75 page interdisciplinary study with **twenty academics contributing**, including biblical scholars, theologians, ethicists, evolutionary biologists, and sociologists. Such as: **Margaret A. Farley**, PhD, Yale University Divinity School; **Hille Haker**, PhD, Loyola University, Chicago; **Todd Salzman**, PhD, Creighton University and **Mark S. Smith**, PhD, Princeton Theological Seminary.

The ([Academic Statement](#)) is a summary of the report's full findings and has been endorsed by **a further 60 + academic scholars**. In addition to all nineteen academics who contributed to the report, the high-profile signatories so far include: **Antonio Autiero** STD, **Lisa Sowle Cahill** PhD, **Krzysztof Charamsa**, PhD, **Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza** PhD, **Thomas Hieke**, PhD, **Gerhard Kruij**, PhD, **Bernhard Lang**, PhD, **Mary McAleese**, PhD, **Susanne Scholz**, PhD, and **Wolbert Werner**, PhD.

Addressing religious leaders:

The research report is a critical assessment of current papal teaching which bleakly condemns same-sex acts and relationships. We want to draw the attention of Vatican authorities and bishops worldwide to the disconnect between papal teaching and academic scholarship and compel them to review and change their outdated and cruel teaching. We also want to help all Christian communities by offering robust academic support to their initiatives to resolve divisions and make Churches fully inclusive of people in same-sex relationships. We aim to **end discrimination dressed up as doctrine**.

Scope of the study:

- The Wijngaards Institute's expertise is gathering qualified academics who can challenge the Vatican's theologians as peers and dismantle their arguments via specific texts used to prop up prejudice
- The study references the *"Ethics of Free and Faithful Same-Sex Relationships"* to get to the crux of the Catholic hierarchy's preoccupation with and pronouncements against same-sex unions/marriage
- But the point is made that the health and worth of the broader range of all same-sex relationships are to be evaluated according to the same criteria demanded of heterosexual relationships
- Our report encompasses same-sex relationships for women and men and any gender identity
- The scope is limited to sexual orientation because it is a separate issue from gender. We also needed to consider the length of the report and be able to gather consensus on this one topic to start with
- For many Christians, biblical arguments remain an obstacle to accepting same-sex relationships; by gathering as many experts as possible, we aim to dismantle the root cause of lingering homophobia
- Although many theologians have moved on from biblical arguments, the official Church has not and so neither can we. We hope this study will help close down the biblical argument once and for all
- Our academic material will support campaigners around the world in their work to expose false teaching and end the demonization of gay Christians and their relationships

Supporting this call for change is the author of the foreword to our report - **Rev. Dr Krzysztof Charamsa**, former Official of the CDF, *"A message of hope in an hour of wavering certainties: This Academic Statement is a gift and a commitment to the Church. Theologians, aware of their scientific and Christian responsibility, address themselves to helping the judgment of the Church to mature... By presenting the progress of the humanities and biblical sciences, the signatories perform an act of intellectual honesty and trust in the Church."*

Another high-profile signatory of our academic Statement, **Professor Mary McAleese**, writes: *"This international collaborative research project is the first serious attempt to use the tools of interdisciplinary scholarship to challenge, probe and interrogate church teaching in the area of homosexuality. The People of God have needed this to help convince a blinkered magisterium to open its eyes and ears, to see and hear the damage inflicted on good people young and old by teachings that run counter to science and counter to the love of the Creator. The scholarly work of the Wijngaards Institute brings hope where it is needed"*

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The Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research is an educational charity dedicated to academic research by theologians and academics to question the church's teaching where it is based on prejudice and the misinterpretation of texts. Our previous report on the Ethics of Contraception was launched at a UN hosted event in 2016 and resulted in a meeting with the head of the Pontifical Academy for Life in the Vatican to discuss our findings and recommendations. Our founder, Dr John Wijngaards, is a Dutch priest and theologian who resigned from active ministry in 1998 in protest at Vatican teaching on homosexuality, women's ministry, clerical celibacy and contraception.