

On the Construction of Contemporary Society and Sexual Minorities by Christianity

Zijian Zhao*

School of Marxism, Jiangsu Normal University, China

**Corresponding author: Zijian Zhao.*

Abstract

As a global religion, Christianity's doctrines and the practices that have developed from them have profoundly influenced the structure of gender norms and ethical values in today's society, while also engaging in complex and contradictory interactions with sexual minorities (LGBTQ+). In a society dominated by heterosexuality, sexual minorities seem to face structural oppression and identity struggles, which are closely related to the construction of contemporary social marriage and family ethics by Christian values. This article will explore the influence of Christianity on the social structure of modern Western and Chinese societies, as well as its role in shaping the gender roles of individuals and the perception of sexual minorities, starting from the historical context of Christianity, the original Bible, and the framework of human society. It will also attempt to uncover the deep-rooted reasons for the “discrimination and exclusion of sexual minorities” in society and propose solutions and practical concerns for the problems.

Keywords

christianity, sexual minorities, social structure, gender roles, reconciliation

1. Introduction

The mainstream voice in today's world (including both the East and the West) is “gender equality”. Some Christian denominations, such as the Catholic Church, have relaxed the conditions for women to hold positions in the Vatican since the Second Vatican Council. In Protestant denominations such as the Anglican Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Calvinist Church, it is quite common for women to serve as clergy. This seems to align with the “trend” of society at the administrative level of religion. However, from the perspective of the Christian classic - the Bible, men and women are essentially unequal:

“Then the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man”. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, for she was taken out of Man.”

From this, it is not difficult to see the inequality between men and women. In the Bible, women were created after men by God and were formed from a rib of a man, being described as “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Even the name “woman” was given by a man. This provided the prerequisite ethical conditions for the gender division of labor in Christianity that “women are subordinate to men” in later times.

Apart from influencing the social status relationship between men and women, Christianity has also had a profound impact on contemporary social systems. The strict monogamous system originated in medieval Western Europe under the influence of Christian morality, while in other regions of the world before industrialization and modernization, polygamy (one man with multiple wives) was commonly practiced. Looking back at the history of marriage ethics in China, it can be found that “monogamy” is actually an “abnormal” marriage model. Instead, the “one man with multiple wives and concubines” model was the mainstream of the social marriage system in ancient feudal China and even in modern times until the Republic of China. In contrast, in Christian countries in the West, it is completely different: a husband can only have one wife by law, just as a wife can only have one husband by law. This can be found in the Bible: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” In the Epistle to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul also repeatedly emphasized the sacredness of marriage and the loyalty between husband and wife.

The influence of Christianity on marriage and gender ethics is just the tip of the iceberg of its impact on human society. And the shaping of the marriage system by Christianity is not only the result of the dissemination of doctrines, but also closely related to the colonial power structure. For instance, the Western missionaries and colonialists pushed a similar agenda of subjugating the receptor’s core aspects of life. Among their targets were aspects of culture, religion, gender, and sexuality. This trend continues in the contemporary era within different global spaces (Shingange, 2023), and colonization greatly promoted the spread of Christianity throughout the world. It can be said that contemporary society is a product of “Christianization.” Next, the author will interpret the construction of Christianity on contemporary society and sexual minorities from the perspective of the more far-reaching “patriarchy.”

2. Gender Perception and Responsibility of Social Individuals in a Patriarchal Society Influenced by Christianity

Christianity has also shaped the gender perception and sense of responsibility of individuals in contemporary society. As can be seen from the previous paragraph, under the influence of Christian doctrines, women are in a state of “dependence on men”. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are filled with such ideas. Here, we only take a passage from the Epistle to the Ephesians as an example: “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.” Similarly, before the Second Vatican Council, women were generally considered unable to hold positions such as acolytes, lectors, or even in choirs in the Catholic Church. It can be said that the early Christian Church, especially the Catholic Church, was a completely “male church”.

In fact, the objectification of women is not unique to Christian cultural countries. Almost all civilizations, after entering the civilized stage, have chosen the path of objectifying women. In China, a woman's marriage is called “giving her away”; the man needs to pay a “bride price” when marrying a woman, just like buying a commodity. In Ethiopia, Patriarchy not only solidifies gender division of labor, but also rationalizes oppression through religious discourse. For example, regarding the child marriage system, some Church leaders in Ethiopia argue that it plays a protective role within their communities (Tukura & Gashure, 2025). Whether in the East or the West, since humans emerged from primitive tribes and entered civilized nations, men have always held the dominant position in society. Despite women's continuous efforts in the feminist movement to fight for women's rights and claim “gender equality”, we have to admit that our society, in the past, present, and even for a long time in the future, will remain a “patriarchal society” in various senses.

It should be clarified that “patriarchy” here does not merely refer to men's control over power in all aspects, but rather an “unequal distribution of responsibilities among people under a certain culture”. For instance, in a family, there are at least three roles: “father”, “mother”, and “children”. However, the role of “father” is not necessarily played by a biological male. Responsibilities such as working to earn the family income, protecting the children, and making major family decisions are usually shouldered by men, while women are more often responsible for raising children, doing housework, and maintaining the family's operation. In some families, women take on these “male” responsibilities, and in such cases, we can say that women have become the embodiment of “patriarchy” in the family. On a societal level, this division of labor

stereotype is even more prominent. For example, we generally believe that men are more suitable for physical labor, corporate and government decision-making positions, while women are more suitable for jobs such as preschool teachers and nurses. Therefore, the rule of “patriarchy” has permeated every aspect of people's social lives, like a ghost that constantly governs our ways of dealing with things.

From the above discussion, we can see that in a family, both men and women must assume corresponding responsibilities. These responsibilities are extremely heavy. To form a complete family in the Christian sense means getting married and having children, which means that men must take on the main burden of the family, and women must submit and maintain family harmony... This idea has profoundly influenced the composition of contemporary families. Research has found that people approach positive stimuli faster than negative ones and avoid negative stimuli faster than positive ones. This phenomenon is called the approach-avoidance compatibility effect. The heavy responsibility of the family is equivalent to a negative stimulus. Some people instinctively avoid it, and the way to avoid it is to choose not to form a family with the opposite sex, thereby avoiding this responsibility - this assumption can be used to explain why the LGBTQ+ community has emerged in contemporary society. The author believes that compared to “family responsibility” (a negative stimulus), choosing to be a member of the LGBTQ+ community is a “positive stimulus” - that is, one does not have to bear such heavy responsibilities. From this perspective, we can also infer that most LGBTQ+ individuals who choose to be so because they refuse to bear family responsibilities should be bisexual (B), tending towards one gender (the same as their own), rather than simply homosexual (LG).

The gender ethics influenced by Christianity can also explain why there are significantly more male LGBTQ+ individuals than female ones. In the context of Christian culture, women are “impure” and “the ones who tempted men to eat the forbidden fruit”: “It was the woman you gave me to be with me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.” Christianity has a natural prejudice against women. In the early Tridentine Mass of the Catholic Church, women were required to cover their heads with veils because “if a woman does not cover her head, she dishonors her own head, for it is the same as having her hair cut off.” There were many other norms imposed on women, which were only improved or abolished after the Second Vatican Council. In the wave of modern female awakening and the movement for gender equality, Christians (including all those influenced by Christianity) have such a contradictory mentality: on the one hand, we respect women, believe that “gender equality” should be achieved in law, and view marriage as a “sacred union”; on the other hand, we consider women “impure” and “tempting”, objectifying them and subconsciously having a sense of rejection and estrangement towards them. As a result, men are more likely to reject women at the social psychological level and choose to be with the same sex. This hypothesis may also explain the formation of male homosexuality (G).

The formation of homosexuality (LG) can actually be explained from another aspect of the influence of Christian culture. In the previous text, we discussed the concept of “patriarchal society” and argued that this concept has been promoted and widely spread in regions influenced by Christian culture. By analogy, it is not difficult to find that the absence of a certain role in the family is usually accompanied by an overly powerful “patriarchal role”, which leads to the LGBTQ+ community's dependence on various aspects of the “patriarchal role”. Take female homosexuality as an example. The author believes that it can be explained by the common “absence of the mother role” in psychology, that is, in a family, the growth process of a lesbian lacks the company or care of the “father” role, resulting in the absence of “fatherly love”. Due to the double dependence on “motherly love”, lesbians form their sexual orientation. It is not difficult to find that in such a “distorted” family, the mother, in the eyes of the lesbian child, plays the role of a “patriarch”.

3. Christian Culture Persecutes Sexual Minorities

Domestic sociologists believe that young homosexual people in China are facing a split between tradition and modernity. On the one hand, they are deeply bound by the traditional “old self” ideology, while on the other hand, they want to reconstruct a “new self” and a discourse system, ultimately forming a “discounted self”. Here, the “tradition” refers to the profound influence of Christian culture. Under the influence of Christian culture, people are well aware that homosexual behavior is “sinful” and “unacceptable”, but sexual minorities cannot abandon the fact that they are sexual minorities in their minds. This creates a strong sense

of identity fracture. In fact, traditional Chinese culture has been relatively inclusive of sexual minorities (specifically referring to gay men), as evidenced by stories like “Long Yang's Love” and “The Broken Sleeve”. However, with the influence of Western Christian culture, we began to view sexual minorities as “sinful” and “to be avoided”. Although modern Christianity has become more open towards sexual minorities, it is still generally harsh rather than lenient. Even Pope Francis, who is considered relatively progressive, has said that “sin cannot be blessed” (referring to same-sex marriage). Under such cultural influence, sexual minorities are actually in a state of being “persecuted”. Under the mainstream heterosexual ideology of society, on the one hand, they must hide their sexual orientation; on the other hand, they cannot suppress their inner desires and are eager to express their demands and thoughts.

In such an extremely repressive Christian social background for sexual minorities, they have to make their own choices. Some choose to “come out” to people they trust and follow their hearts, pursuing the life they desire, even if it is not legally permitted by society; but more people, or the vast majority of sexual minorities, choose to remain “in the closet” under such oppression, that is, not revealing their sexual orientation to anyone. Some choose not to marry for certain reasons, or follow their families' advice to marry and have children. However, the author believes that no matter which choice is made, it is essentially “unfree” or “forced”. Because whether they choose one way or another, it is essentially a process of “sexual orientation identification”. Tragically, such identification is not chosen by personal will but constructed by Christian society. In the Middle Ages, the Christian Church strengthened the exclusion of sexual minorities by enacting laws (such as canon law). For example, sexual minorities were labeled as “heretics” or “demons” and faced extreme punishments like being burned at the stake. In modern society, the example here is taken from Sweden, patriarchy not only solidifies gender-based division of labor but also leads to systemic violence against sexual minorities, especially for bisexual women, who had 49.4 times greater odds of experiencing forced penetration than heterosexual men did (Löfström-Bredell et al., 2025). The combination of religion and law constructed the identity of sexual minorities as a symbol of “moral degeneracy”. Although in modern times, with the decline of religious political influence and the gradual opening of people's gender awareness, attitudes towards sexual minorities have become more lenient, there is one fundamental point that remains unchanged: that is, “sexual minorities” are an “abnormal” and “sinful” group. This concept has gradually and imperceptibly influenced each of us through various means. For instance, in the medical system, we still hold a discriminatory attitude towards sexual minorities: Although previous studies have explored discrimination in health care for LGBT people, to our knowledge, no previous studies have examined these inequalities through the experience of LGBT people facing advanced illness, not limited to HIV/AIDS (Bristowe et al., 2017). Therefore, sexual minorities choosing to hide their identities is influenced by this trend of thought; even if they “come out” to others and pursue the life they desire, it seems like a form of resistance, but in essence, it is still a reluctant acceptance of their “sexual minority” identity, which is essentially constructed by Christian society. Therefore, no matter which choice is made, it is essentially a “forced” and “helpless act”.

4. Bearing the “Cross” of Sinners: Realistic Care and Reconciliation

The construction of contemporary sexual minorities (LGBT) by Christianity has always been entangled with the constraints of doctrinal traditions and the demands of human liberation. In this era, it is not only the sexual minorities who bear the “cross” of sinners, but also the entire Christian Church - regardless of denomination - in its reflection on its own doctrines and structures.

Before we embark on our “realistic concern and reconciliation”, let's re-examine why sexual minorities are burdened with the “cross” of sinners - this all stems from the dualistic interpretation of “sin” in Christianity. The Church has always regarded “homosexuality” as a “contrary to nature” sin, a notion reinforced in Leviticus 18:22 and Paul's letter to the Romans 1:26-27 as an “abomination”. However, this doctrinal moral judgment simplifies the complex “sexual existence” into a binary opposition of “violation/obedience” (obedience being the adherence to God's command of “one man and one woman”). The author believes that the concern for sexual desire should not merely be moral discipline, but should rise to the level of “pastoral accompaniment”, and instead focus on how a Christian individual can seek holiness

in brokenness - as Pope Francis once said: “If someone is homosexual and has faith in God, what right do I have to judge?”

In fact, contemporary churches seem to have responded to Francis' question, and here are two examples: the first is “Stewardship Ethics”, which views sexual minorities as unique creations under the stewardship of the Creator. God created them, which is a testimony to the diversity of humanity; the second is “Process Theology”, which holds that God's redemptive work is “dynamic”, that is, God's redemption is not immediately “flawless”, and the Church should accept the unfinished holiness of the Creator, just as in Tibetan Buddhism, Death is not to be feared; it is merely the beginning of another life. The cause and effect of the previous and subsequent lives are connected, which not only strongly urges and encourages the living to endure suffering and strengthen self-cultivation, but also allows the dying to view death calmly. The world is constantly in a process of alternating cycles. Viewing seemingly imperfect death as the beginning of new life (holiness). However, such reconstructions have been strongly resisted by conservatives - some American Catholic churches still exclude sexual minorities from the Eucharist. This contradiction reflects the deep predicament of doctrinal renewal: how to find a redemptive path for sexual minorities that is both in line with tradition and responsive to reality in the tension between “truth” and “mercy”?

The reconciliation and realistic concern for sexual minorities, in the author's view, ultimately need to return to the soul-searching of the ultimate meaning of life. Christianity points to the humanitarian ideal of “goodness in both life and death”. The contemporary significance of this ideal requires the Church not only to focus on the “rights in the world” of sexual minorities, but also to pay attention to their “existential anxiety”. The deeper issue lies in redefining the relationship between “sin” and “redemption”. In the traditional Christian doctrine, the sexual minority identity is often defined as a “sin that needs to be cleansed”, but we cannot ignore that everyone's sexual existence has a certain “brokenness”, and true redemption precisely lies in the inclusion rather than exclusion of this brokenness of sexual existence. Only when the Church learns to walk alongside sexual minorities as a “healed healer” can it truly practice the gospel spirit of “weeping with those who weep” (Romans 12:15). The cross is not the last straw that crushes sinners, but a symbol of Jesus' holy death that reconciles God and humanity. In his encyclical “Laudato Si”, Pope Francis creatively juxtaposed the ecological crisis of the earth with the oppression of marginalized groups, presenting a vision of “integral ecology”. This holistic perspective implies that the exclusion of sexual minorities and the plundering of nature both belong to the “rupture of relationships”. Only when the Church lays down its moral superiority and intervenes in reality as a “steward” rather than a “judge”, can the cross transform from a tool of oppression into a sign of liberation. Fortunately, the international community has already begun their efforts: a group of UN and regional human rights experts highlighted the resilience and strength of communities in confronting violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (United Nations & Regional Human Rights Experts, 2025). Today's Christianity also needs to forge a narrow path in the wilderness of sexual ethics that upholds truth while being full of grace. On this path, there is no song of complete victory, only the hope of constant breaking and constant rebuilding - and this is the most profound contemporary significance of the cross.

5. Conclusion

Through its gender ethics and marriage norms, Christianity has profoundly shaped male-dominated social structures and exacerbated the marginalization of sexual minorities. Doctrinal narratives of inequality and strict definitions of the “natural order” have perpetuated the stigma of “sin” for sexual minorities, leaving them in a state of torn identity. However, the contemporary Church's search for inclusivity - such as the ethic of trusteeship and the reflections of Pope Francis - offers the possibility of reconciliation. Christianity needs to go beyond moral judgment and embrace the plurality of humanity with a “holistic ecological” vision, transforming the cross from a symbol of oppression to a symbol of reconciliation. Only by humbly embracing the tension between brokenness and reconstruction can we realize the true spirit of the Gospel and open the way to symbiosis between truth and mercy.

References

- Bristowe, K., Hodson, M., Wee, B., Almack, K., Johnson, K., Daveson, B. A., Koffman, J., McEnhill, L., & Harding, R. (2017). Recommendations to reduce inequalities for LGBT people facing advanced illness: ACCESSCare national qualitative interview study. *Palliative Medicine*, 32(1), 23-35. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269216317705102>
- Löfström-Bredell, M., Åkerman, E., Sörensdotter, R., Ström, S., Källberg, H., & Klingberg-Allvin, M. (2025). Sexual violence across gender identities and sexual orientations: a stratified, population-based, cross-sectional study among young people aged 16–29 years in Sweden. *BMC Public Health*, 25(1), Article 1878. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-22970-3>
- Shingange, T. (2023). Biblical discourses and the subjugation of Africa: A decolonial-Foucauldian perspective. *Acta Theologica*, 2023(sup36), 108-126. <https://doi.org/10.38140/at.vi.7015>
- Tukura, T., & Gashure, S. (2025). Child marriage practice in the eyes of evangelical church leader and elders in the Wonisho district of the Sidama region, Southern Ethiopia. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12(1), Article 706. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-05056-8>
- United Nations, & Regional Human Rights Experts. (2025). *Human rights experts call on States to partner with LGBT communities, not police them.* https://www.oas.org/fr/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/en/iachrmedia_center/PReleases/2025/104.asp&utm_term=class-dc

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

This article was completed under the guidance of my dear supervisor, Dr. Hailong Hu. I would also like to thank Tianqi Yin and Yimeng Zhang for their considerable help with my article.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).