

Marin Responds to Critique with Character Attack and Circle-the-Wagons Approach; Followers “Share the Love”

Robert A. J. Gagnon, Ph.D.
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
gagnon@pts.edu, www.robagnon.net
Sept. 6, 2010

Little did I know when I wrote “Truncated Love: A Response to Andrew Marin’s *Love Is an Orientation*, Part 1” (<http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homosexMarinLoveIsOrientation.pdf>) that the reaction of Marin and his followers would itself become something to assess.

Marin has responded to my critique with a character attack and a circle-the-wagons approach. He and many of his supporters give the impression that strong criticism of his misinterpretation and misapplication of Scripture *must* be traceable not to any problem with Marin’s own reasoning but rather to a deep character flaw on the part of the critic. Marin reduces substantive critique of his work to a question of whether he is “liked” or not. He expresses a strong disinclination to engage anyone who does not first bend the knee a bit to his accomplishments in ministry. And he asks, “Who are they to critique me?”

All of this has the obvious design of giving himself an excuse for not having to deal with, and answer to, substantive criticism. Unfortunately he has also provided his followers with a bad model. When they act even worse than he does, he does little or nothing to caution them. On the contrary, at points he appears to commend them. And this comes from someone who emphasizes the importance of unconditional love and humility as the foundation for his ministry.

I hope that we are not seeing here the marks of a cult-like group where the leader is criticism-averse, the followers see critics as the vile enemy with darkened hearts, and the group generally regards itself as being the true followers of Christ over and against most of the church worldwide. At any rate, the kind of behavior that has been exhibited in the past few days, coupled with Marin’s distorted theology and practice, again raises the question of why InterVarsity Press and some conservative-to-moderate Christian organizations are giving Marin a platform to espouse his views free of substantive challenge.

Despite the fact that others have seen a disturbing pattern here in Marin’s reaction to criticism, let us hope that his and his follower’s initial reactions are soon replaced by a more mature response. One hopes that Marin will actually respond to substantial and substantiated criticisms of his philosophy and praxis, either with strong counterarguments or a humble admission that he was in error.

I’ll begin by looking at Marin’s reaction to my critique, then the reaction of Marin’s followers on his Facebook page and Blog, and finally some emails that I have received. The vast bulk of what follows is citation of public blog and Facebook postings. Where emails sent to me are cited I have received permission to post the contents and often also the name of the sender.

I. Marin's Reaction to My Critique

Almost immediately after posting online my critique of Marin's book on Thursday, Sept. 2, I sent Andrew Marin the following private message on his Facebook site (the only direct contact address email address that I could find for him). It said simply:

September 2 at 7:50pm
Andrew,

I thought you might want to know that I have just posted Part 1 of a critical review of your book at <http://robgagnon.net/ArticlesOnline.htm>. For a direct link go to: <http://robgagnon.net/articles/homosexMarinLoveIsOrientation.pdf>.

Blessings,

Rob

Robert A. J. Gagnon, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of New Testament
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

I thought I might get a direct response from Marin. I didn't (and still haven't). You would think that if he were so appreciative of my time and effort, as he says he was in his blog posting, he would have written me to thank me. Oh well, I won't hold my breath. While Marin didn't take a minute out to simply acknowledge receipt of my message, he did find time to post a "response" of sorts in his blog by early afternoon of the next day (<http://www.loveisanoorientation.com/2010/gagnon/>). The title of the post was revealing:

Conservative theologian REALLY doesn't like me, or anyone ASSOCIATED with me

Let's look at this interesting title, shall we? First he starts with "**conservative theologian**," which, I suppose, is designed to isolate me into some fundamentalist/evangelical ghetto. Never mind that in the use of historical-critical methodology in the study of the Scriptures I am to the left of Marin; or that none of my degrees are from evangelical institutions, that I don't teach at an evangelical seminary, and that I mostly publish in non-evangelical publications (including my two books).

Then we have his: "... **REALLY doesn't like me**" (the caps are original with Marin). How about this for a title instead: "Biblical Scholar Strongly Disagrees with My Use of Scripture in the Homosexuality Debate"? I never attack Marin's motives or his character. I criticize his major misreading of biblical texts, where what he claims to be the context for his "big 5" texts on homosexuality is, in most cases, actually the antithesis of the real context. And I criticize his near total neglect of scholarship on the issue (except for his two brief citations of dated homosexualist works). Yet, for Marin, my critique surely can't be about his sub-par treatment of the biblical witness. My critique means I "REALLY don't like" Marin as a person (whom, incidentally, I have never met). This suggests Marin understands criticism as "You don't like *me*."

And, according to Marin, not only do I "REALLY" not like Marin but also I really don't like "**anyone ASSOCIATED with**" Marin. I mention in the first paragraph that I

was stunned that an evangelical publisher (InterVarsity Press) would publish such a deeply flawed book such as this and that an evangelical scholar and an evangelical reporter would blurb for it. But I promise not to put any pins in any images of such persons or hurl any execration oaths at them. I simply believe that Marin's interpretations of Scripture in this book are so poorly done and his application harmful enough to the church that his book merits a strong critique. I can understand that Marin would be pained by this but hopefully the pain of criticism will be temporary and he'll make the appropriate changes (in line with 2 Cor 7:8-12).

His reaction reminds me of the scene in the movie "Bruce Almighty" where the character Bruce (played by Jim Carrey), who has been given God's power for a time, tries to get his ex-girlfriend to come back to him. He extends his hands, crying out: "Love me! Love me!" But it sadly has no effect. Marin needs to realize that the issue in my critique is not about whether I like him but rather whether he has any responsibility for badly mangling and applying Scripture to his ministry to homosexual persons who want to remain in the homosexual life. Take a deep breath. So you did poor work with the biblical texts and made some glaring over-reaches in your application? Learn from it.

Instead, on his Facebook page Marin, a couple of hours before posting his blog response, described my purpose in writing in apocalyptic terms:

there's nothing like waking up at 7am to a conservative theologian emailing you for comments, after he already posted a 24 PAGE critique of my work. Wow, **he sure spent a lot of time on trying to prove to everyone why I'm the devil...** [bold mine]

When I noticed this posting it first confirmed for me that Marin did in fact get my initial Facebook message to him. The reason for his non-response was not due to him not seeing the message but to some other reason. Then I was surprised by his over-the-top characterization of a serious attempt at critiquing his work. So not only do I "REALLY" not like him but I'm trying to prove to everyone why Marin is *the devil*. Anything exaggerated there? One can see why he had prepped himself to launch an *ad hominem* attack on my motives.

Marin was, of course, upset about the length of Part 1 of my critique, though he tries halfheartedly to say otherwise: "Here's the kicker to his 24 page document, those 24 pages are *just Part 1*. No, seriously, they [*sic*] are" (his bold and italics). All I can say is that Marin had a lot wrong and shows little knowledge about the biblical texts in context, and that I left out a lot of material that I could have put in the critique. Then Marin gives a throwaway line of appreciation:

I greatly respect and appreciate all of the time Gagnon must have put into this work. He went to quite the lengths, especially if this is only Part 1. [bold added]

It is hard to take the above line about appreciation seriously when a few hours before Marin is telling people how distressed he was that I was "trying to prove to everyone why [he is] the devil." And, again, if he greatly appreciated it, why didn't he respond personally to me with a thank you after I had sent him a private message on his Facebook page? He later posted in his blog as a response to reader comments that confirms his lack of real appreciation:

I tried to read it. I really did. I couldn't make it through the whole thing – especially due to the tone he wrote it in. I'll try to finish it tonight if I can. It's almost like it's a battle of attrition; one that I'm not at all interested to get involved in, even though I'm tempted because a lot of the very right activism groups/sites have picked up on it and are having a field day with it, and me. **I just don't have enough energy to do that though. I could use it on more productive stuff...** But for what they are saying, doesn't much look like they're interested in dialogue. [bold added]

What this sounds like to me is: Marin can't spend the time to see if he needs to correct bad interpretations and applications of the biblical text. He'd rather just keep doing what he's been doing and not let Scripture get in the way of his preconceived views (as we will see below, he does have time to read gay and lesbian literature). The use of the term "dialogue" is supposed to convey, I guess, that I must first grant that Marin's ch. 7 on Scripture had a lot to commend it. But what if it doesn't have a lot to commend it? What if, as I contend, it is a very bad interpretation of Scripture? It seems that Marin doesn't even conceive of the possibility. Until, and unless, he can show my criticisms to be off-target, one would assume that he can't make an effective rebuttal. But, then, maybe he should humbly admit that he was wrong. He adds:

Glad we had that Living in the Tension discussion on handling criticism last week.

I'm glad too because given his reaction to this point and the *ad hominem* to follow, if this is how Marin was responding *after* learning how to handle criticism appropriately, I can only imagine how he would have responded *before* he had such training.

There was, then, a disingenuous quality to his remark about appreciation. Let's be honest here: It's obvious that he appreciated little to nothing about my critique. So when he later responded to a reader on his blog, "In fact I commended him for putting so much time and effort into what he wrote," let's be honest enough to admit that it was nothing more than a rhetorical ploy that he didn't really mean.

Then **Marin unleashed his *ad hominem* strategy** in order to deflect his followers from the failings of his own work:

But there was one big red flag for me. Gagnon publicly posted the following, and **please read what Gagnon wrote about himself very carefully:** [colors and bold are Marin's]

"I have written extensively on homosexual practice for a decade now, with two academic books published and many scholarly articles and articles for a general audience. I'm widely recognized as the world's leading authority on the subject, certainly from a 'traditional' (i.e. scriptural) perspective. Yet CBN never asked me for a comment on Marin's work, much less ever devoted an article on my work."

I think that says enough.

The snide remark "I think that says enough"—along with the red type, the "big red flag" remark, the cautionary bold face to "please read ... very carefully"—is designed to communicate to his followers that this guy Gagnon should be ignored because he is some kind of megalomaniac who wrote against me only because he was mad at the good press that I was receiving and he was not. That Marin's attempt was to raise questions about

my character can hardly be doubted in view of a posting that he made on his Facebook page:

Andrew Marin: "I'm widely recognized as the world's leading authority on the subject..."
Let's be honest, that was what popped out to me right away too. Was shocked he put in in print in public. I'm not sure who self-proclaims themselves as a world leading authority on anything... hum. [bold added]

It's nice to see Andrew "being honest" about what he really thinks about me. It's good to know since elsewhere (see below) he denies—apparently when he was in one of his less than fully honest moods—that he at any time questioned my character or motives. *If he wasn't raising a question about my character or motives why even post the quotation in his blog response? Just precisely what is "the big red flag" for him?* The citation doesn't have to do with any of my arguments in my critique of his book. So why post it—except as a smear tactic? What did he want readers to deduce from the citation?

I think the answer is fairly obvious. Someone would have to be in deep denial to argue otherwise (and we're not talking here about a river in Egypt). Marin made no effort to understand my comment in a larger context, see it in the best possible light, or email me to ask me what I was thinking when I said it (which he could have done by simply hitting the reply button to the Facebook message that I had previously sent him).

As it is, the characterization that Marin would like to imply about me is false. It is just a smokescreen to deflect from the problems with his book. Let's get a number of facts straight here for Marin. I didn't write these words to boast in myself (that is, to claim for myself something that isn't true) and say, "Give me attention too." The context was that of writing to the CBN reporter who did the puff piece on Marin. My whole point was to say to the reporter: Marin takes stands that are problematic as regards a faithful reading of Scripture and he himself has little knowledge about what the Bible says on homosexual practice. Shouldn't you be getting a recognized expert on the subject, who disagrees with Marin, to balance out your report? I offered myself as an example of someone she could have contacted. Since she apparently didn't know me from Adam, I had to state my credentials. My main point was not: Pick me for comment. My point was: Get someone who is knowledgeable on the subject to provide a more balanced assessment of Marin's theology and praxis. And, for the record, I didn't publicly post the email exchange on my site; Matt Abbott of *Renew America* asked for permission to post it. In retrospect I could have stated things in a way that would leave me less vulnerable to the kind of smear tactic that persons like Marin could make.

The truth is that I have indeed written more than anyone else in the field on the issue of the Bible and homosexual practice. That's an empirical fact. And I am "widely recognized [i.e., by other scholars in the field] as the world's leading authority on the subject [of the Bible and homosexual practice], certainly from a 'traditional' (i.e. scriptural) perspective." That's also an empirical fact. Even scholars that disagree strongly with the stance that I have taken against homosexual practice have said as much. Who else is a candidate from the traditional side among biblical scholars? One could mention Thomas Schmidt and Richard Hays as persons who have provided solid defenses of the historic church position but they haven't written anything since the mid-1990s and even then not with the same breadth. There aren't that many of us! It's not like I posted the remark to Marin (I didn't) and said, "Just accept my position because I'm such an

expert on it” (I didn’t). I spent time in my critique making a meticulous case to Marin and made absolutely no appeal to my “authority.” My case against Marin’s work stands or falls on the strength of my arguments, which is just the way I like it.

In view of Marin’s smear efforts, it is surely hollow for him to post later on his blog in response to someone:

The one thing I would like to point out is that I have never, ever critiqued, accused, doubted, etc Dr. Gagnon or his intentions (theological, in life, or otherwise). Never. Not once. That is not my style, and **even thinking of doing such things makes my stomach cringe. I am not patting myself on my back** by saying that, I am stating a fact. **Can you see the disconnect in our differences in engagement?** [bold added]

I can see the disconnect between what Marin is claiming about himself and what he did in relation to me. And I can see the disconnect in our differences in engagement: I did not smear Marin’s motives and intentions but Marin did attempt to do precisely that with me. Also I contacted Marin directly; he has not answered me directly.

To be sure, as Marin states in a response to a poster on his blog, he was upset that I didn’t come to him personally before I posted the review:

If I had a question/problem/doubt/uncertainty/etc with him, I would have reached out behind the scenes to talk brother to brother. The potential to start off any type of trusting relationship is shot after what he did. I mean, how long has he been working on this 24 page Part 1? I’m sure there is sometime in there he could have emailed/called/FB whatever. And I know he knows how to contact me because I was alerted of his public critique (which he sent to numerous public outlets and individual people – I know this because some of them have told me) by him FB emailing me saying “Critical Review” with the link. That is not acceptable.

What is this but more attack on my character that has nothing to do with responding to the substance of my criticisms? I spent no more than a few days working on the criticism. That’s all I needed to show how bad his work was. And why should I limit my critique to a private conversation with Marin? I’m going to wait for him to get back to me about a 24-page, Part 1 critique? He has given every indication that he doesn’t have the capacity to rebut what I have written there. And how is just talking with him privately going to stem the bad influences that he has had on others? He has published publicly and publicly chastised the church for certain views on homosexual practice. So I’m to trust Marin to represent accurately to others the case that I have against his book? I don’t think so.

There is nothing “not acceptable” about my behavior. If I have misrepresented his position in any way (and I don’t believe that I have), then he can show that to readers and I, not he, will look bad. Nobody is stopping him from responding *now* to what I have posted. Yet he himself has admitted that he doesn’t have the “energy” to respond. I don’t fear public debate. That’s all that this is: public debate. Just make your case. Show me where I’m wrong, if I am, and otherwise be humble enough to acknowledge error. We don’t have to develop a “trusting relationship” before we can have a meaningful exchange or before I can evaluate his use of Scripture. And, as we’ll see, a lot of Marin’s followers have hurled vitriolic, personal attacks against me and Marin has done absolutely nothing to date to dissuade that, except to deny falsely that he himself has insinuated things about my character that he has clearly insinuated.

Later that night after Marin's smear attempt, I sent him a second private Facebook message:

September 4 at 12:33am

Andrew,

The "big red flag," boldface, changing colors, "read what Gagnon wrote about himself very carefully ... I think that says enough." It is sad that you chose the ad hominem route in attacking me as a person, implying something sinister about my motives, rather than dealing with the arguments that I present. I guess I should expect that from someone who apparently feels scared and ill-equipped to fall back on substantive arguments.

My point with the cited remarks to the CBN reporter was simply to note that, given the controversial aspects of your ministry, she should have spoken to at least one other person, someone who is both knowledgeable on the subject of the Bible and homosexual practice and takes a different view of your approach. I would be an obvious choice because I have published more academic analysis on the issue of the Bible and homosexual practice, certainly from the "traditional" (i.e. scriptural) side than anyone else. That was not intended as a boast; it is a simple fact. But CBN could have checked with some other evangelical-to-moderate biblical scholar who has published on the issue, if not me; though there aren't many. The main point was just: get another opinion, an informed opinion, by someone who actually has some academic expertise on the issue.

I think that in the end your ad hominem approach will backfire on you; I've already had a number of emails noting that you don't take criticism well and resort to ad hominem. Even someone who agrees with your overall position mentioned to me that he thought this side of you was troubling. I could have gone ad hominem with you, if I had wanted, in my critique of your work, questioning your motives for adopting the clearly unscriptural positions that you adopt. But that would be a cheap shot and off the mark from substantive issues that need to be addressed.

I still hope for better from you.

Blessings,

Rob Gagnon

P.S. It occurred to me: You want to convey something bad about me as a person with your quotation of my words and uncharitable (snide) comment ("I think that says enough"). But, pray tell, how does someone who writes "my award winning book" on his own blog and does lots of what others regard as blatant self-promotion justify throwing ad hominem stones at others? It seems a tad inconsistent to me. Maybe you can explain.

Needless to say, Marin has yet to respond to me, even though he has since then found plenty of time in his blog to talk about me to others who send in comments. So he doesn't really take his own advice.

The last point in my message to him conveys the irony of Marin accusing me of shameless self-promotion when he has been roundly criticized by many gay activists for doing precisely that. Marin also describes his own book in glowing terms as having "won more awards than any other individual book in the long-standing history of InterVarsity Press." Apart from the fact that the awards are mostly from little-known organizations or publications, the line appears immodest, doesn't it? Marin makes no secret about the fact

that he thinks that *he* is doing *avant-garde* work, that *he* is living out the gospel, and that this makes *him* beyond reproach in his actions unless his “critics” are out doing precisely what he does (but, if they are doing that, then they are not likely to be critics). Read what Marin himself has to say in his thread of blog responses (specifically the same thread cited in the two previous block quotes from him):

I am here to live and love in real time [as opposed to others]... I am here to live in my Kingdom Job Description (Billy Graham quote). That is my focus; not entering theological debates. As I said in my book, you can find thousands of theological books and articles on the subject all claiming THE REAL TRUTH. **They are all just theologically talking past each other instead of to each other! I cannot stand that**, do not find it productive in the least bit, and it does no good for on-the-ground-reconciliation as they are all working off of a success/failure model. Well, **my real truth is found in God through Jesus living and loving everyday** in the middle of a huge LGBT community that deserves it like everyone else. *If they are not living that out amongst the LGBT community, who are they to critique me?* (italics and bold mine)

Yes, who are *we* to critique Marin? Pardon me if I’m mistaken but can’t Marin “in the field” stand to learn something from someone who knows Scripture on this issue better than he does? I have had opportunities to share Christ’s love with many self-identified, self-affirming homosexual men and woman. I don’t hide the fact that repentance includes leaving behind the homosexual life (unlike Marin) but, when talking to people one-on-one, I don’t push it in their face either. I haven’t had as many experiences as Marin has, to be sure, because that is the full-time ministry that he does and my full-time job is as a professor at a seminary. But what I do have a lot more of than Marin is knowledge about what the biblical text says on the issue of homosexual practice. So since Scripture study is not exactly Marin’s strong suit, and since it is in relation to Scripture that Marin should test his ideologies developed from personal experience, why shouldn’t he allow his theology and praxis to be critiqued by someone who has important knowledge that he doesn’t have? “Who are *they* to critique me?” (my emphasis). That’s not a helpful or humble attitude.

Furthermore, how can Marin claim that my critique is just “theologically talking *past*” what he has written? I don’t know how it would be possible to be more directly engaged with what Marin himself has written than the critique that I have supplied him with. If there is anything that doesn’t “talk past” Marin’s book (at least his ch. 7 that my Part 1 addresses), it’s my critique. No one else has supplied the kind of detailed critique and direct engagement that I have supplied and will yet supply.

II. What Marin’s Followers Have to Say on His Facebook Page and Blog —and How Marin Does Nothing to Curtail the Personal Attacks

So Marin, by his own testimony, has never “doubted” my “intentions,” “never,” and that “even thinking of doing such things makes my stomach cringe”? Apart from his own insinuation about my character, why does Marin’s stomach not cringe on his Facebook page or on his blog thread when his followers make personal attacks against me? One can’t say in Marin’s defense that he may not notice these comments; for, in fact, in both venues Marin actively and regularly intersperses his own comments. All one need to do is

go to Marin's Facebook page for the comments posted on Sept. 3-5 and to his blog for the same time period to see many *ad hominem* attacks on my character and on my alleged motives by Marin's admirers. Samples include the following (bold added):

Tori Phillips: Now you know how Jesus felt about **the Pharisees**. [Though as a strategic matter Tori cautions minutes later: "Best to respond With Love. Otherwise everyone will see you arguing With **the village idiot** on the street corner."]

Simon Sarmiento: Being attacked by **this particular nutcase** is surely a badge of honour.

[Note Marin's Facebook posting just minutes after the posting of the above two character attacks; Marin does nothing to discourage these sorts of remarks but in fact commends them]:

Andrew Marin: Wow - my heart is so humbled by all of your comments! Thanks for re-orienting my spirit towards Jesus and what happened with him!!! I'll be posting on my blog about this soon. It was Dr. Robert Gagnon who wrote it all. **Much love!!!!** (!)

Paula May Mager: I want an I LOVE **HATERS** t-shirt.

Jack Skip Harris [who identifies himself later as a "gay Christian male"]: **I will give him credit for his citation abilities ..they are top notch!**

[Note: I deliberately left out most citations because (1) my books and published articles provide copious citations (something that Marin must surely know and that any reader can check), (2) it would have made an already long critique much longer, and (3) there are still more citations here than in Marin's published book. Yet Marin immediately responds to the above posting with: "**Jack - I literally just laughed out loud at what you wrote.**"]

pm September 3, 2010 at 1:43 pm: What do these '**haters**' have in common?

Dora September 3, 2010 at 2:15 pm: The trap is in battling the hopeless, and **the Dr Gags out there are pretty hopeless**. Dora September 4, 2010 at 11:16 am: After reading **all this gagging nonsense**, I'd say the most serious threat to the American family is the rate of divorce among straight people. Why this isn't issue # 1 among the Dr. Gags of the world is beyond me.... And as for people "ministering" to me, hey, I would never have straight people EVER and I mean EVER have that kind of power. ...

Dr. Gag does not minister to lesbians nor do any of those guys. He is inherently out of order, his "scholarship" one-sided and obsessive, and I'd say **he is probably a deep closet case who can't deal with his own issues**. Otherwise, why would he care that much?... **I'm hoping that at some future date, people like this are thrown on the trash heap of history along with the pro-slavery types, who are seen as completely and utterly white supremacist and evil today**. Back in the day though, they fully advocated for black slavery and that slaves should obey their masters. They still love to go on and on about how wives should obey their "masters" I mean husbands. Sick, but they are still doing this.

What is Marin's response to Dora's little post above? Silence. This silence is conspicuous since Marin in his blog Sept. 3-4 is assiduous in responding immediately against nearly every *positive* comment about me or my work in the blog thread. I guess personal attacks are acceptable to Marin so long as they are done in service of him. And why should Andrew be concerned to curtail such un-Christ-like responses? He has

promoted them himself with his smear insinuation in his blog. Marin does take the time to respond to Dora in a previous message shortly before:

I've read a bunch of general lesbian feminist books... not so much specific to lesbian Christian feminists though. But I'll check those ones out and let you know how they go. Thanks Dora.

So Marin has no problems responding to Dora gratefully about the need to read more lesbian Christian feminists, which he is more than willing to do. Moreover, he has no problems correcting people who caution him about his reaction to me. But he can't bring himself to say to someone like Dora: That is inappropriate rhetoric. And he has the time to read lots of lesbian books but he can't find the time, in preparation for a book on homosexuality and the church, to read works like mine that provide strong support for a male-female prerequisite in Scripture?

Remember now that all the above comments slamming my character are from a group that tells us "Love is an orientation" and prides itself on exhibiting "unconditional love." Indeed, the heading for his "Marin Foundation" website reads: "Love is not just a word. It's a measurable expression of one's unconditional behaviors toward another." From what I've seen this slogan is not applicable if the Marin group is subjected to rigorous criticism for bad exegesis, theology, and praxis.

As I noted above, some of the postings on Marin's site are critical of the way in which he has initially responded to my critique. One interesting one comes from a person who is in Marin's own camp:

Eugene September 3, 2010 at 11:26 am

Frankly, I don't understand what Andrew is complaining about. I have easily made it through the whole thing. It's well written, reasonably polite and focused on the issue in question, **not** on Andrew's personality or people associated with him. Gagnon doesn't say anything **new**, though, so I guess that's why no one asked him for a comment. Still, he raises a few important questions that are based on reasonable interpretations of the Bible. That's why Andrew's attempt to discredit him as an attention seeker looks like a cheap shot. [bold in original]

[Note: I do say a lot that is new; most of the particulars of my argument have not been made previously and even some of the general arguments—but we'll let that slide.]

Pay attention to Marin's circle-the-wagons approach to someone whom he perceives to be a traitor in his midst:

Andrew Marin September 3, 2010 at 12:24 pm

Which of Gagnon's 'reasonable interpretations of the Bible' are you talking about Eugene? Examples would be great.

I find it interesting that you can't stand conservatism, as made abundantly clear by all of your comments over the last month. But when the time is right, you decide to jump on Gagnon's bandwagon, when you can't stand, and actively fight against anything he believes or propogates to others about you and your community? Very convenient for you.

Note that Marin apparently wants to claim that he is unaware of *any* reasonable interpretations of the Bible in my critique of him. Amazing. And for Marin it is inconceivable that anyone on his side could disagree with his initial reaction to my arguments. Eugene's response to Marin is to the point:

Eugene September 3, 2010 at 12:48 pm

I "jump on Gagnon's bandwagon" only because I'm being *objective* [smiley face]. In a way, it's *validation*. Yes, I surely can't stand anti-gay "conservatism". But it doesn't mean that I should reject logical and reasonable interpretations – even when I find them hateful and offensive.

The most obvious example is Gagnon's straightforward interpretation of Paul's words – 1 Corinthians 5, etc. (p. 2, 7, 8). The Bible plainly says "not even to eat with such a one" – and there is nothing we can do about it.

And Eugene adds:

Eugene September 4, 2010 at 4:32 am

Yes, it's impossible to be 100% objective. But we can be *as objective as possible*. And, yes, contextual information is important. But the message in 1 Corinthians 5 is straightforward: sexual immorality doesn't belong in a church. And it even makes sense from a purely secular perspective: you don't want sexually immoral people to represent the church (e.g. the Catholic church and pedophile priests).

Here are some other persons on the blog thread who express disagreement with Marin. Some, I suspect, are at least partially critical of Marin's ministry, some are not.

Debbie Thurman September 4, 2010 at 12:38 pm

Reading Gagnon's whole essay/review, Andrew, cannot be that difficult for a guy who is Moody-trained. I have an English degree (which only means I can comprehend English) and can only claim to be a lay apologist, but I agree with Eugene's assessment of the piece.

Gagnon did his homework, and he flatly says you did not, and points out holes in your exegesis. His examples are there for you to read and ought not have to be reiterated by anyone here. I know your book is not meant to be a scholarly tome, but addressing so delicate a subject does require a great deal of careful study and thought before drawing conclusions. Sin is a life-or-death matter, a point that Gagnon takes great care to reiterate.

Phelim McIntyre September 3, 2010 at 11:55 am

Gagnon has shown there to be faults with your theology Marin, as many others have done. Yet again you have not listened but gone on the attack like a spoilt child. Rather than boasting Gagnon had put his qualifications out to show why he has the right to review your book from a theological perspective – please note that he does not attack your evangelism just what he sees as your misuse of Scripture.

Gagnon has debated with the theologians you quote and written extensively on the issue of what the Bible says on homosexuality, he has also spoken with groups associated with both the pro-gay and ex-gay movement. He puts the quotes from Scripture that you use in their context, something that you fail to do. He asks why you only use gay theologians – something others of us have asked but you have failed to answer.

This post by you appears to be another case of a child throwing his toys out of the pram rather than acting in a mature way and talking with his critics. Opportunities and invites have been there which you have ignored because you claim that you will not speak with

people who attack you – but you see fit to attack those who question your position. Will you claim, as you have done about your other critics, that you have asked to meet them? Would you be brave enough to meet with and challenge the misunderstanding of the critics?

As someone who is ex-gay, has a number of friends in the gay movement, engages with the pro-gay lobby in meetings, in the media and often working behind the scenes on issues where we can work together, and works with churches and organisations across the world in outreach to the gay community I find your unwillingness to engage with critics concerning. Or is your speck to big?

Note Marin's immediate response to Phelim:

Andrew Marin September 3, 2010 at 12:17 pm

Oh Phelim, why would I ever want to engage with anyone who accuses first and asks questions after – whether in the past with your accusations, Anglican Mainstream, Gagnon or any of the LGBT bloggers, etc out there doing the same stuff? Doesn't make any sense.

Also, please re-read what I wrote. I didn't attack anything Gagnon said. In fact I commended him for putting so much time and effort into what he wrote.

I've already noted that his "commendation" was not sincerely meant; Marin's own words on his Facebook page and blog thread convict him on this point. Phelim (whom I previously had no contact with) noted to me in a separate email:

Marin spoke in the UK at Spring Harvest and when we put forward your name and those of people from Exodus type groups in the UK those who did so were told that we were not suitable as we were anti-gay.

And I've also noted that Marin obviously insinuated something negative about my character in setting up the quote and making his "big red flag" and "I think that says enough" comments, as is clear once again from his additional Facebook comment. Notice too that a criticism of Marin's work is an "accusation" and not something to be answered, no matter how valid, unless Marin judges the critic as someone who "likes" him. Phelim adds:

Phelim McIntyre September 4, 2010 at 12:43 am

Andrew – I met you in London, UK. I sent emails asking to talk and dialogue as someone who was involved with the homosexual movement and promoted gay theology, and is now actively involved in equipping churches to reach out to the homosexual community a number of times before I posted any comments. I always put a reply request to make sure people get my emails. I got those but no response before I went and made comments in the public domain. It is this that worries me. You want people to treat you one way but you do not treat them the same way. You have not done this with me, with Anglican Mainstream (who I do not work for), with Gagnon, with John Nolland (who again does not work for Anglican Mainstream) or anyone else. In fact when Anglican Mainstream you stated that you would not meet with me, Lisa Nolland, Dr Vinay Samuel (who has been involved with cross cultural evangelism since you were in kindergarten) or Dr John Nolland, Vice Principle of a leading theological college in the UK. So here are four people who know their stuff, have read your book and in two cases met you and have serious concerns. At least two of them have tried to raise them with you in private and have been ignored....

You read ex-gay watch. What efforts have you made to meet with anyone from the ex-gay movement, many of whom who have not commented on your work but are actually Facebook fans? Ignoring your critics will not help.

As I have said, I promoted gay theology and used the theologians that you quote to argue against the evangelical position when I read your book I turned to the person with me and said this is just a rehash of Scrogg's and Boswell.... But why have you not explained the major concern that you do not use any non pro-gay theologians in your book but use two self proclaimed liberal theologians, one of whom was a practising homosexual who died of aids? Are you unaware that their theology is now outdated and even groups like the Metropolitan Church don't use them that much.

Here is my challenge – stop ignoring the ex-gay movement as we can tell you stories that will make your hair curl; stop ignoring your critics – I admire what you are doing and believe that there is much we need to learn from you but that does not excuse poor theology (a view expressed by V J Samuel if you actually listened to his talk) – get out of the sand box and start dialoging with people who disagree with you rather than just attacking us.

Marin's response claims that I and Anglican Mainstream "acuse [*sic*], blame and name-call first" so "why would I want to engage under these circumstances?" But where have I "name-called" Marin in my critique? And to characterize justifiable criticism of his exegesis and application of Scripture as mere accusation and blame seems inappropriate. Imagine a person being called out for grossly distorting what a document says and saying, "I don't have to respond because you just accused me and blamed me for something!" Well maybe the criticism is justified and needs to be taken to heart, leading to a change in behavior. Marin seems to think that if you make him feel bad about himself by criticizing his work then he doesn't have to give any serious weight to the criticism.

Let's continue with postings on the blog thread critical of Marin:

Ralph September 4, 2010 at 5:20 am

Rob Gagnon is an academic who uses words with precision. As such, he goes on the attack, rather like an OT prophet, when someone else writes without clarity. He certainly doesn't mince words. Rather than studying his reaction, one would do well to study what he has written. I believe he would welcome intelligent criticism.

Anyone interested in the current Great Matter cannot be truly informed without reading "The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics." He clearly refutes the false teachings of the pro-homosexual activists.

I would challenge anyone to debate him on the specific topic, "Homosexual practice is incompatible with Scripture."

Indeed, I would be delighted at any time to talk about the issue of the Bible and homosexuality with Marin or anyone else in a public venue where we are both present (radio show, church forum, etc.). Just name the time and place, Andrew, as long as we get equal time and appropriate time for response to each other.

John Tang Boyland September 4, 2010 at 10:37 am

Andrew:

I hope you could at least address Gagnon's main two points.
He claims:

- (1) All homosexual behavior is porneia, and a serious form of it as well.
- (2) Porneia is not something that the community to leave to the conscience of the individual Christian, but rather something requiring pastoral admonition and possible excommunication.

On point (1), I believe he has an unassailable position. If you disagree, then you need to take the effort to understand and refute his many strong arguments. It's no good to say you're not interested in the arguments. It is disappointing that apparently the book does little more than quote some tired liberal arguments and then drop the issue.

It is in the area of point (2), that you might be able to build an interesting point. If one concedes point (1), is there still any way that the evangelical community can do a better job of loving the homosexual? Gagnon uses 1 Corinthians 5 in which Paul recommends excommunication of the sexual offender. This biblical argument cannot simply be dismissed as out of context; this letter was to the Corinthian church which was ministering to precisely these sexual offenders, as much as today's church needs to minister to the GLBT. As 1 Corinthians 6:11 says, many of the Corinthian congregation has in fact come out of precisely this population, repenting of their sins and putting on Christ.

Jason ·10:45 PM

Hi Andrew,

I'm not sure what your point is. Would it make any more difference to the substance of his rebuttal if Dr. Gagnon had referenced the work of another scholar instead of his own? In many scientific research articles, for example, the principle researcher often cites his or her own previous work, partly as a way to lend credence to the present research article (since those previous articles have been refereed).

Another thing I'd like to kindly point out is that writing a substantive, well-reasoned rebuttal does not equate with "REALLY not" liking you, as the title of this post seems to suggest. Sure, he finds fault with some of your arguments. In fact, I'd say his desire to point out some of what he thinks are crucial flaws, is driven by much of the same sincere hope and concern that drove you to write your book.

One would think that the above postings on Marin's blog would cause Marin to rethink his *ad hominem* attack strategy, be more honest to others about having employed that strategy and fueling it among his followers, and focus on dealing with the substantive criticisms that I've raised about his work rather than react with "who are they to critique me?" Thus far I see no sign of it. We hope for better things in the future.

III. Emails That I Have Received

For the remainder of this article (another 11 pages) I want to introduce some correspondence that I have had on the issue with persons who have emailed me. Almost all the responses that I received were positive (just like most of the responses Marin received on his blog were supportive of him, though a substantial minority of the blog posters had reservations about his initial reaction to me). Samples include:

Dr. Gagnon,

God is love, but love is not God. There is a huge difference... And if love is the only criteria, then anything goes.. Thanks for posting this... I agree: "The church can never

give up its obligation to rebuke offenders (in an appropriately loving way, of course) and require repentance." And those who believe.. "when engaged in grossly immoral behavior, have to be given adequate opportunity to see the error of their ways and repent." Appreciate your gift and wisdom, Dr. Gagnon!

C Dawn McDonald

Dear Dr. Gagnon,

Did you see Marin's blog post? It's funny how he didn't address any of the points that you addressed but simply made it personal by quoting you. Then signs off, "Much love." Seems a little disingenuous. But he's doing what he does well: skirt around the issue. The message which Marin gives is basically, the only way we can build a bridge to the gay community is by being very, very unclear about what the Bible says about homosexuality.

[Name withheld]

Rob:

Your material is simply the best scholarly information currently available on this subject. Thanks for keeping me in the loop so that I can provide more resources to my friends in academia and ministry.

David C. McClain
Baptist Bible College & Seminary
Clarks Summit, PA

Dr. Gagnon,

Thank you for your excellent critique of Andy Marin's book, *Love is an Orientation*. It addresses the selective textual approach utilized by Andy and highlights the areas he needs to address in a constructive way.

I can appreciate a desire to keep dialogue open with non-believers, but Andy's work falls far short of justifying many of his approaches. To dialogue in a loving way follows an understanding that love always does what is right, and it is not loving to give unbelievers in sin a wrong picture of their situation. Nor is it loving to give believers justification for their sin due to a perceived ambiguity amongst Bible interpreters. I agree with your textual and contextual assessments and would suggest that Andy might benefit from a deeper study of logic and the construction of arguments. You have it right in your statement referring to his methodology and hermeneutic in 1 Corinthians: "*The misrepresentation of the text of Scripture at this point is so monumental and so key to Marin's whole program as to discredit the whole of it and call shame upon any who help to further it.*"

In the bonds of His grace,

John

John A. Jelinek, Th.D.
Professor of Theology
Vice President and Academic Dean
Moody Theological Seminary

Dear Dr. Gagnon,

I just finished reading your part 1 response to Marin's book. Good job! Actually, much of what you write in response to Marin could be use to refute the ELCA's recent "bound conscience" nonsense. Thanks for your faithful work!

Pastor Tom Eckstein

Robert,

I continue to marvel at the concise scholarship you bring to this subject. Thank you for continuing this work for Christ and for not growing weary.

Laurie Prince

Rob,

Your review is as extraordinarily good and lucid as his theology/exegesis is extraordinarily bad and convoluted.

Blessings!

[Name withheld]

Hello Rob:

I want to convey my sincere gratefulness for your time and energy in such a beautifully intelligent Biblical appeal of truth in your truly loving confrontation of the gross error of Andrew Marin's book. Although I have no doubt he genuinely desires to be loving and make a difference for the sake of friends and human compassion, as good as it may be, it falls way short of the Glory of God and His very character which is REAL LOVE, "for God is love." I really look forward to your part 2 on this review.

THANK YOU SO MUCH ROB!

Holding you in high regard,
Your friend,
Stephen Black,

Dear Robert:

I do hope you get notes of encouragement from time to time. Thank you for taking the time to do this.

This book is quite disturbing. I find myself thinking often now of the eugenics movement endorsement calamity in the early 20th century here. Many mainline churches capitulated, but what is often forgotten is so did many evangelicals. In this sense, history is alas repeating itself.

God bless,

Kendall Harmon

Dear Rob,

Following my one conversation with Andy Marin during which I made Herculean efforts to find out what his theological position on homosexual practice is, he finally said that he holds orthodox theological views--and then he asked me not to reveal publicly what he had said. This led me to believe that he is either concealing his orthodox views from his

multitude of homosexual friends or concealing his unorthodox views from his Evangelical friends. I think it's clear which of those beliefs are accurate.

I now believe he has perhaps an even more troubling side. I say this after reading his post about you today. He tries to create the appearance of gracious generosity by saying that he "greatly respects and appreciates" your work, and then while his compliment lingers in the air, he sneaks in an insult, implying without stating that you are motivated by self-aggrandizing impulses. Marin's rhetoric is both mean-spirited and dishonest.

Another trait or habit I sense is his manipulation of his audience's sympathy. Both in this post and another, he plays the pitiable victim, eliciting protective responses from his sympathetic audience.

Marin doesn't respond to any of your substantive points, but instead tries to impugn your character and/or motives.

Here's a quote from Marin from an interview he did with Gay Christian Network (GCN):

"Well, to answer your question first, Justin, pretty much all of my best friends are gay. I'm getting married November 3rd of 2007, and my fiancée's family is, [chuckles] you know, they were raised in the same very large conservative church as myself. And when I told them that I was going to have, um, gay people stand up on my side during the wedding, and one of them is a girl on top of that, they were a little weirded out by that whole situation." http://www.gaychristian.net/gcnradio/trans_010207.php

Despite Marin's attempts to appear to be an orthodox Evangelical Christian, it is becoming ever clearer that his theology tilts heavily away from orthodoxy. I think his ideas must be exposed within the evangelical community. At this point, it's not enough merely to stop inviting him. His flawed ideas and strategic approach must be exposed in order to undo the damage he has done.

[name withheld]

In addition to comments such as those above I had a fruitful email exchange with a gentleman supportive of Marin. He gave me permission to reproduce his email responses, asking only that I withhold his last name. The exchange is lengthy (5 pages) so now is the time to stop reading if you are tired out! I include it here because I supply some information not supplied elsewhere in this article or in my critique of Marin.

Dear Dr. Gagnon,

I plan on reading Pt. 1 of your response to Andrew Marin sometime in the next couple of days but entering into the article, I am having difficulty taking you serious already. Because I don't want to discredit your thoughts, I figured emailing you to maybe get clarification from you would be best.

1. You write, "*that persons such as Scot McKnight (a New Testament professor at an evangelical university, North Park) and a certain Michelle Strombeck of Moody Broadcasting Network (a conservative evangelical organization) would provide endorsements for it. (A foreword by Brian McLaren is not surprising since McLaren had already surrendered to a homosexualist view. The same applies to Tony Campolo, whose enthusiastic video endorsement is posted on Marin's site.)*" The perception this leaves, for me, is that you are already unwilling to look at this book unbiasedly and instead judge it based on connections instead of content. Much like liberals do to the tea party movement. You make character attacks on the mentioned people in order to make your own point significant. For me, this seriously degrades the point and prompts me to dismiss your work right off the bat.

2. After reading this article: <http://www.renewamerica.com/columns/abbott/100826>, I

wonder if this was more about you not being asked to comment or you simply having a chip on your shoulder, it was a poor perception to read your quote stating, *"I have written extensively on homosexual practice for a decade now, with two academic books published and many scholarly articles and articles for a general audience. I'm widely recognized as the world's leading authority on the subject, certainly from a 'traditional' (i.e. scriptural) perspective. Yet CBN never asked me for a comment on Marin's work, much less ever devoted an article on my work."* Would it be wrong of me to encourage you to maybe simply offer some of your articles and ask if you could be another voice in a future piece on this topic instead of assuming that everyone and anyone knows about you and your research? To be honest, I had never heard of you until your name was brought up by Marin himself on his blog.

3. I have no doubt that you are approaching this out of concern that Marin is leading people down a wrong path but I also don't think you have taken the time to even ask Marin about what he is doing. Andrew appears to be open to dialoging, even if that means you walk away disagreeing. If he knew that you were writing such a critique, I am sure he would have made some time to speak with you which may have dealt with your assumptive points. It's not like Marin is like Glenn Beck and completely unreachable for these types of responses.

If you are as academically strong in this topic as you say you are, then may I encourage to possibly think about attending The Idea Camp in Las Vegas at the end of September where they will be dialoging about all these topics and the churches approach to them. You can check out the site at <https://www.theideacamp.com/>. Totally based off of assumption, you are hoping to insert your voice into these types of dialogue, but like any well written piece of academia, looking at all sides is important. If anything, it may help you forge a good relationship with Marin who is doing research in this area. I will be attending so it would be great to meet you and maybe hear more of what you have to say.

Forgive me in advance if this comes off as a rebuke in any matter, it isn't meant to be but instead I wanted to simply throw my perceptions out there so I could get honest answers in return. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Have a great Labor Day Weekend,

Ben

Dear Ben,

Thanks for your comments/questions. Let me take them in the order in which you gave them.

1. I'm not sure I understand your point. Let me make two points: First, I came to my assessment of Marin's book by first reading it, not by any repugnance for persons endorsing it. I didn't even know Campolo endorsed it until after I had written 99.9% of the review. I don't know McLaren personally; I know his stance on the homosexuality issue; that's all. And I certainly have nothing against Scot McKnight or people associated with Moody. My point is merely this: After reading Marin's book and seeing how flawed it was, I'm surprised that someone of McKnight's caliber and views would write an endorsement for it; and surprised that someone associated with a conservative organization like Moody (more conservative than me) would endorse it. I'm not surprised that McLaren or Campolo would endorse it because they have already bought into the argument that homosexual practice is no big deal. I did not, contrary to your assumptions, judge Marin's work "based on connections instead of content." The opening paragraph of my articles is one of the last things that I write; I write it after I know what conclusions I will be reaching.

Second, I do not believe I made any “character attacks,” as you put it. My entire point was to say: This book has been making inroads into evangelical circles and I don’t think those inroads are justified by the content of the book. Given that Marin’s book, I think, ultimately promotes the homosexualist cause, I’m not surprised that “evangelicals” like McLaren and Campolo, who do likewise, would endorse the book. Where’s the character attack in that?

2. No, I did not write a critical review of Marin’s book because CBN did not interview me. Marin put up a snide comment on his blog, citing this quotation and adding “I think that says enough.” I’m not surprised that Marin would go the *ad hominem* route. I suspect that he knows he’ll have a hard time responding to my criticisms of his misuse of the biblical text; so what else is he going to do but try the *ad hominem* approach. Gagnon couldn’t have written a response so critical of my work because of any problem in *my* use of Scripture so he must be some sort of jealous egotistical guy with a personal axe to grind, right? As it is, I wrote the review because the CBN puff piece made clear to me how much influence Marin’s book was having; influence that, given the content of the book, was in my opinion unmerited and having a negative effect on evangelical views. My subsidiary point was that CBN should have spoken to someone at least who is both knowledgeable on the subject of the Bible and homosexual practice and critical of Marin’s practice. I would be an obvious choice because I have published more academic analysis on the issue of the Bible and homosexual practice, certainly from the “traditional” (i.e. scriptural) side than anyone else in the world. That was not intended as a boast; it is a simple fact. And I am widely recognized in the mainline denominations as the chief person on the issue; certainly in the academy of scholars and among most denominational leaders. That doesn’t mean everyone will know me (like yourself); only that a reporter should have some awareness of who the experts on the subject of the Bible and homosexuality are and check with some of them to see if Marin’s view of Scripture checks out. Any seminary professor, for example, who knows anything about the Bible and homosexual practice in terms of academic research knows at least about my work. But CBN could have checked with some other biblical scholar who has published on the issue, if not me; though there aren’t many. In retrospect I would have worded things differently, as indeed anyone would when something one says is taken the wrong way (sometimes deliberately) by others and used against one in order to deflect from the main point.

3. I have no problem talking with Marin about my critique. But it’s a chicken-and-egg sort of thing. Which does one do first? I think that I’m pretty good at reading a person’s argument carefully. And I think I’ve done that in the piece I put out. I want to respond to what Marin has put on the public record. I don’t want to start by piecemealing Marin’s views from disparate conversations with him and his short answers (in which, in any case, he would have to refer me to his book for more detailed discussion). Marin also is developing a reputation among many as pitching himself one way when talking to the “gay crowd” and pitching himself another way when talking to the “conservative Christian crowd.” I prefer to start with what he has put on record for a general audience; think carefully about what he has written; put out my critique; and then let Marin come back and tell me what he thinks I’m wrong about or misunderstood, etc. I will make corrections if something needs correcting. I did email him on Facebook last night to alert him that I had just posted my Part 1 so I’m not hiding anything from him. I welcome engagement. He can reach me anytime he wants to. I’ll be happy to dialogue with him at any time now about the section of his book that I’ve critiqued and about the rest after I’ve put out an analysis and critique of those sections.

If Marin wants to dialogue or debate with me in a neutral forum where we have equal opportunity to make our respective cases I would be more than happy to do that, any time, any place (presumably both our expenses would be covered by whatever organization putting on the dialogue or debate). The event that you are talking about does not appear to be such a venue.

God's blessings to you, my brother.

Dr. Gagnon

Dr. Gagnon,

Thank you for your response. It does clarify a bit where you are coming from. Like I said, I was simply presenting perceptions of how I was reading your article, I do believe you that you were not making character attacks though I would state there seemed to lack a certain amount of tact primarily because no one would know how you came to your conclusions in your introductory paragraph of your paper.

That is simply my opinion.

I have personally wavered on Marin's approach to calling out people that disagree with him. When I meet him in Las Vegas I would like to get a better understanding of how he handles criticisms. Personally, knowing how sensitive I am, it is easy to move into full defense mode when you feel that you are being unfairly attacked. It appears you did not attempt to contact him before you wrote the article and had that happened, I believe you both could have at least said that you had dialogued and agreed to disagree in some areas but that the conversation was fruitful or that you felt that Marin was dodging the questions. That is a simple observation that you can discard if you want.

In response to your third answer to my question. I think that the problem that presents itself in an academic setting is Marin's ability to provide narrative as research. Because you want to argue from a scripture only point of view, it makes it difficult to add a narrative response within that type of setting. It would be like me writing a paper about Palestine and Israel but only including statistics and quotes from politicians. Unless you bring in the narrative points that represent the people who are being affected, your research is only partially done.

That is a struggle primarily in academia because narrative references don't necessarily represent a whole point or even a factual point but it would be unwise to dismiss the story. If anything, this is a major area that Marin should be applauded for because for the first time he is providing an avenue for the GLBT population to express their narrative. Does that mean the church should respond in a manner that bends toward that person's point of view, no but should the church somehow recognize and affirm that story in hopes that healing can take place, absolutely!

Marin's reputation is pretty strategic, if you ask me and somewhat mimics Bill O'Reilly. Bill always says that if he is getting attacked by the left and the right about how he addresses a topic, then he is reporting the story correctly. Marin reminds me of a missionary that is entering a culture, with few resources or tools on how to approach a culture that wants nothing to do with the church. I believe it is difficult to truly judge the motives of someone and how they are handling a situation when we are simply not called to minister to that lost culture. As I said, when I meet Marin in Las Vegas I hope to hear more about how he is approaching this.

With all of that said, I would whole-heartedly encourage you to come to the Idea Camp, not as a speaker but as someone who can share his thoughts in a room of people that also have other views but desire to see the church respond in a stronger way. The Idea Camp is not necessarily a place for debate or arguing but a place to hopefully set the church up to be stronger. I will leave it at that.

Your paper will be very interesting and after taking a cursory glance at it, I will learn quite a bit from the historical nature of the scriptures. Now, how you present a different solution than Marin's on approaching the GLBT community would also be interesting. It's one thing to talk about our disagreements and problems, it's another to be part of the

solution.

Thanks for your response, I am enjoying the dialogue.

Ben

Ben,

Thanks for your response. Although I do not agree with many of your points you have presented yourself reasonably and well in your response to my comments. My comments on your response:

1. I think if anyone read beyond the first paragraph or two it would become immediately clear that I have a large number of substantive arguments for finding Marin's work to be significantly sub-par. I suppose I could add a line or footnote to the first paragraph. I'm not sure it is necessary but I will think about it.

2. Once again when I talk to Marin personally I want to do so in an informed state; that is, as someone who has read and analyzed his key work. I didn't feel a need to call him in advance because I found his position clearly stated, understood his points, but simply believed that they were terribly bad arguments and conclusions. An example: Marin believes the "eternal principle" to derive from the context of 1 Cor 6:9 is "to know when to release control of someone else's life." The context is the exact opposite: Paul demanding that the Corinthian church put the incestuous man on church discipline. How is a prior conversation between us going to change my critique of such an argument. He simply has no case for his position. as for his ad hominem remarks, since I did not impute something nefarious to his motives in writing the book (like wanting to be liked by others, financial gain, etc.) I don't expect my motives to be impugned. I have nothing against Marin personally. What I am opposed to is his very bad exegesis, interpretation, and application of Scripture.

3. Your observation about the need for narrative evidence doesn't (in my view) take adequate account of the fact that Scripture, not experience, is primary in defining the church's theological and moral witness. One's personal experience has to be tested against Scripture, not the other way around. To be sure, we read Scripture through our own experiences (as a fact of life); but we also need to work hard to distinguish between what Scripture says and what we want it to say. And if Jesus and Scripture generally regard something as a core value then we have to bend our own will to that view, on the assumption that we are not God, God's Messiah, or the apostolic witness to that Messiah. Marin's whole conduct to the homosexual community is premised on the view that, at worst, homosexual practice is not a big deal, at least not a big enough deal that could lead to offenders being excluded from God's kingdom. But that premise is based on a gross misreading of Scripture. If Scripture (including Jesus) indicates otherwise, then either Marin needs to change significantly his whole approach of not stating that homosexual practice is a sin or proclaim himself, rather than Jesus or the apostolic witness to him, as the authority for the church. No experience comes out with an automatic self-interpretation. The experience must be evaluated by the witness of Scripture. People get taken in by tear-jerk stories and then move away from the scriptural witness because they act on false and misleading emotional grounds. It's all designed to lower the opposition to homosexual practice.

I'm not sure I know what you mean by "recognize and affirm" the homosexual narrative but I would be very careful with such a view. Do you have to "recognize and affirm" the polyamorist narrative or the pedophilic narrative in order to speak against polyamory and pedophile respectively? Did Paul make a mistake in not first "recognizing and affirming" the incestuous man's narrative before giving an emphatic "NO" to incest and exhorting the Corinthians (for the offender's sake) to put him on church discipline? I don't think so. Marin is giving a platform for homosexual persons to be the victim and the church the

victimizer while ignoring the fact that homosexual practice is egregious immorality from the perspective of the authors of Scripture. That is not a good thing. Tell enough stories from the perspective of persons in sexual unions involving 3 or more persons concurrently and very soon you will wear down the resistance of the church to polyamory.

Having people attack him from the left and right can just as well be an indicator that he is just plain wrong. It is certainly no argument that he is right (as my article shows regarding his interpretation of Scripture). If he is in a strategic position he has done badly with that position by putting repentance, the teaching of Scripture, and church correction all by the wayside and giving a greater platform for those promoting an immoral life. And I'm not "judging his motives" here (I'm sure he has some good motives!) but rather evaluating his instruction of believers.

The Idea Camp is not helpful if the people coming with the ideas are not adequately informed about what Scripture says about homosexual practice. No progress can be made until the question is still settled from the pages of Scripture whether homosexual practice is an ecclesiastical matter of indifference like diet and calendar, an extreme instance of sexual immorality that can get the perpetrator excluded from God's kingdom, or something in between. The Idea Camp would be a place where people, lacking this knowledge, are trying to explain the shape that love should take without first resolving the critical truth question of how serious the offense is.

The "solution" is to do what the church has always been called to do: Proclaim the undiluted gospel, which includes a call away from behavior that leads to cataclysmic destruction; and do so out of a desire to recover and save the lost. The gospel shouldn't be changed to make the message more palatable to persons who want to continue in an immoral lifestyle. There are other pastoral reflections that one can put forward (like distinguishing between the mere experience of sinful desire, for which one is not culpable, and acquiescing in one's thought life and/or behavior to such desire, for which one is culpable) but that is for another time.

At this point I have to move on and would prefer that you read my article carefully through before we continue any dialogue. But I've enjoyed it thus far.

Blessings,

Rob

Dr. Gagnon,

Thanks for your response. Your fingers must be tired from typing now.

I will look at your article when I have more time and maybe lay out some new questions for you.

Talk to you soon,

Ben

The only nasty correspondence that I received was from a certain John Montez.¹ It is another long correspondence (4 pages) and, like the exchange with Ben above, contains

¹ I did not ask John for permission to make public his email. As a rule any nasty correspondence that I receive I post as a way of encouraging persons not to be abusive.

some information not found elsewhere in this article or in my critique. Though Montez is unpleasant at many points, I still think one can benefit from reading the exchange.

You spend lots of time refuting homosexuality, you must have a vested interest. You've heard the old saying I'm sure, "He that screams the loudest...!"

People who live in glass closets should be careful of stones they throw!

John from Arizona (a born-again Christian and brother in Christ)

John,

Thanks for reading my heart so well. You must have some kind of amazing gift as a brother in Christ. Did the Spirit give you that discernment?

Marin has devoted himself wholly to the issue of saying "I'm sorry" to homosexual persons and telling the church to shut up about saying homosexual practice is a sin. What's his vested interest? That he likes the praise of the broader culture and the material benefits that flow from it? I wouldn't want to say because I don't have your spiritual gift for long-distance discernment.

Maybe this is my "nefarious" motive: I see lots of people in and out of the church writing that homosexual practice is acceptable; I see a foundational principle of sexual ethics (according to Jesus and the entire apostolic witness), a two-sexes requirement for sexual relations, now becoming an "endangered species" even in many sectors of the church. I think that getting rid of that prerequisite and endorsing what Scripture clearly regards as egregious immorality as creating a broad-based problem for sexual ethics in the church. Since few other people have had the courage to defend the scriptural witness I have had to bear much of the burden after writing a big book on the subject. I'd be happy for others, equally qualified, to step up to the plate. Unfortunately I don't see many.

By your reasoning if the culture endorsed polyamory or pedophilia and someone devoted a lot of time to defending monogamy and the adult-character of sexual relations, that person would have to have some nefarious motive for doing so, right?

I'm not throwing any stones but I think you just did. Anyone can be forgiven any behavior. But one does have to repent and not continue in the behavior. What did Jesus say to the woman caught in adultery: "Go and from now on no longer be sinning." He would have said the same thing had two men having homosexual intercourse been brought to him to be stoned. Unfortunately Marin and others don't want to say the kind of thing that Jesus said. But that leaves the offenders trapped in their sin and at high risk of God's judgment. I don't think that is loving. Do you?

If you are a "born again Christian" as you claim you should really be interested in reading what Jesus thought about the matter and what the apostolic witness to Christ says. How about reading what I wrote before shooting from the hip?

Thanks for your thoughts.

Dr. Robert Gagnon

Dear Mr. Gagnon:

Wow, that was a lengthy piece of work. My first impression, you have a need to be heard. Well, I heard you. I note that you are an Associate Professor of New Testament at

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.... Does that mean you hold a Ph.D in Psychology and Human Behavior?

What's so wrong about "Saying I'm Sorry? The church has and continues to treat the LGBT community as second class citizens. Doesn't the Bible state that we are all created in the image of God? It's interesting that you quoted from the Bible, the woman caught in adultery. There is one glaring omission with the quote you used. You left out what Jesus said, "Let him that is without sin, cast the first stone."

I read an article today on the Renew America website. Its title, "CBN and the dubious Christian outreach to Homosexuals" by Matt Abbott. In Abbott's article you are quote from an e-mail you sent to CBN. Here are a few highlights that caught my attention: "I have written extensively on homosexual practice for a decade now, with two academic books published and many scholarly articles and articles for a general audience. I'm widely recognized as the world's leading authority on the subject, certainly from a 'traditional' (i.e. scriptural) perspective."

Is this issue about qualifications, expert opinions, leading authorities, and/or scholarly articles? In 2 Peter 1:20-21 the scriptures clearly state that "...no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit". Now correct me if I'm wrong, but are you saying that if you are not an expert and a leading authority that you can't rightly divide the Word of Truth without the Holy Spirit's help? If so, we might as well go back to the dark ages when the "Church Leaders" were the only ones to handle and interpret the Word of God.

You may have your theology organized and nicely packaged, but you lack one thing, compassion! Step out from behind your desk and bring some humanity to your work. I challenge you to work with transgendered youth who are contemplating suicide for the rejection that they feel from family, friends, and church. I challenge you to volunteer for a hospice program which cares for gay HIV+ patients who have no one at their bedside to comfort them because their families are embarrassed. I challenge you to love and counsel those gay men who have undergone reparative therapy only to fail time and time again, and then to be told, "your not trying hard enough."

Mr. Gagnon, I'm sure you're a good man, but your theology lacks heart and that is something Jesus never lacked. And by the way, my relationship with Christ isn't a claim, it's a relationship.

Sincerely,

John Montez
Safford, AZ

Dear John,

You are scolding me about love and you write the kind of emails to me that you do? Please. No, I don't have to be heard; that is, if I say something against God's word. But God's word does need to be heard when it is being distorted by people like Marin and, apparently, you.

No, I do not hold a Ph.D. in psychology, nor do I need to in order to know that homosexual practice is wrong. Do you need a Ph.D. in psychology to know that even adult-committed forms of incest and polyamory are wrong? I didn't realize that agreeing with the witness of Jesus and Scripture generally required a Ph.D. in psychology. So I guess only psychologists can determine morality, not Scripture? The added irony here

is that I probably know the psychological scientific literature on homosexuality better than you do.

Nothing is wrong about saying "I'm sorry" if the sorry is circumscribed to refer to specific abuses and explicitly does not include a sorry for declaring the witness of Scripture that homosexual practice, like adultery and incest, is sinful sexual behavior that, if not repented of, can lead to exclusion from the kingdom of God, even for the person who claims faith in Christ. It's that second half that I don't hear from Marin that makes the one-sided use of the statement problematic. Mostly the GLBT community is angry at the church for not changing that message and for not supporting legislation that would promote homosexual unions and muzzle those who disagree.

We are all created in God's image. But homosexual practice threatens to mar that image with image-dishonoring behavior. This is Paul's point in Rom 1:24-27. Homosexually active persons are not treated as 2nd class persons in the church when they are reprovved or disqualified for ordained office for engaging in such behavior. They are being treated as persons created in God's image who should not harm that image through such behavior. Treating them as 2nd class citizens would happen if we handed them over to the control of same-sex attractions and encouraged them to dishonor themselves. That's handing over, incidentally, is what Paul in Rom 1 calls "wrath."

As regards the women caught in adultery text in John 8, I am well aware of the "stone" text. But you misuse it. Jesus was not saying: Don't regard this woman's adultery as wrong or seek to dissuade her from engaging in it further. On the contrary, in saying to her, "Go and from now on no longer be sinning" Jesus is clearly making the judgment that adultery is wrong and commanding her to stop doing it. As the parallel line in John 5:14 indicates, the implied follow-up is "lest something worse happen to you." The something worse than being literally stoned to death is loss of eternal life. The "throw stones" is not a metaphor in context referring to mere judgmental feelings; rather, it refers to literal stoning, the problem with such being that dead people don't repent. Jesus wants to extend every possible opportunity to repent because so much is at stake as regards inheriting the kingdom of God or not. But from your perspective, apparently, this theology of Jesus that treats the woman as a "2nd-class citizen" by declaring her actions sinful and commanding her to sin no more is a theology that "lacks heart." We should protect the homosexual person from being literally stoned or beaten up. I fully agree with that. But, given Jesus' example, we are not to follow Marin's model (or yours); but instead say to the homosexually active person, "Go and from now on no longer be sinning," If you think like Marin rather than like Jesus, then obviously you are not following Jesus' example of loving with heart.

So what about the quotes in the Renew America website? They are all true. I have published more than anyone else in the world on the subject of the Bible and homosexual practice; and what I have published has made others consider me the most effective and knowledgeable proponent of the "traditional" (i.e. scriptural) position. So what? These are simply statements of fact. I'm not bragging about it. My point to the reporter was simply that her puff piece on Marin needed balance; that there are serious problems with the theology and ethics behind his ministry; that Marin has no expertise in understanding what the Bible does or doesn't say about homosexual practice. I didn't say that she should only talk to me. I merely used myself as an obvious example of someone who could have given her the balance in her article that she needed. But it is interesting that Marin and you pull the ad hominem card, attacking a person's character (whose character you know nothing about) rather than dealing substantively with the arguments raised. I could have easily attacked Marin's character by saying something about his need to be liked by others or look at how he's profited from the homosexual community for his stance, etc. I didn't do that because that would be a cheap shot and wouldn't deal with the substance of his arguments. But that, John, is the sordid path that you and Marin have chosen because you know you have no substantive case for your position.

And, again, I didn't notice you turning the same charge of inordinate attention on Marin and others who distort the biblical witness. I wonder why: Could it be because he agrees with you? And as long as he agrees with you that exclusive attention is okay?

I'm certainly not saying that I am the only one who can speak to the issue of homosexual practice. But if someone is going to make claims about what we can and cannot say about Scripture's message on homosexual practice then you have to make an effort at least to do your homework and read the best literature on both sides. Then you have to make effective arguments, the best arguments. Marin did none of this. Rather, he showed very poor research and repeatedly missed elementary points about literary and historical context (the very thing that he himself said that interpreters should know about in dealing with these texts). I don't just say: Hey, I have all the credentials: listen only to me! No, I make a strong case from Scripture for my arguments about homosexual practice, in fact, multiple lines of evidence. What you can't demand is what you are demanding: namely, that your view is equally valid when you are utterly lacking in substantive arguments for your position. Take your exegesis of the woman caught in adultery text. You clearly didn't know that literal stoning is meant. You clearly didn't pick up on Jesus' explicit condemnation of adultery or command to stop doing it. You didn't know that the parallel text in John 5 supplies the implied follow-up: "...lest something worse happen to you." So, not realizing these things, you arrived at a distorted interpretation. Well, you can't say, then, given your poorly informed reading, that your reading is better or just as good as the one that I presented. It is not so much who has what credentials as who makes the best arguments for a given reading of the text. And you and Marin have clearly not done that. I'm sorry if that offends you but it happens to be the reality here.

I've been in some of the very situations that you mention. I've befriended homosexual men dying of AIDS and seen the difficulty of trying to do God's will when faced with intransigent same-sex attractions to the contrary. So there's some more of your uninformed ad hominem attacks against me. But witnessing these things and having compassion on those going through it (and we certainly should have compassion) does not lead to step in God's place and declare, against the clear witness of Jesus and Scripture, that homosexual practice is acceptable to God if done rightly or at least no big deal. If I did that, I would be acting in hate because I would be deceiving them with respect to the truth. If I don't say with Jesus, "Go and from now on no longer be sinning" I am not walking in love. And neither are you if you don't accept Jesus' own example. By all means, let us eat with persons homosexually active as we seek to share with them the full truth of the gospel. But don't deceive them into thinking that we have no idea whether God finds homosexual practice abhorrent because Scripture clearly indicates otherwise.

Faced with choosing the way Jesus and Scripture define love and the way that you and Marin define it, well, don't take offense but I'm going to go with Jesus and Scripture on this one. You claim that you understand Jesus' views and ministry better than I do and you have all some sort of psychic power to know my heart from a distance. Make a better case because I haven't heard a good one from you yet. Less heat and more light would be helpful. Less ad hominem and more understanding.

However it is, may God lead us all to the kingdom, whatever the cost to our own innate urges to do what God forbids.

Blessings,

Rob

That's it. I'm sure that reactions to my critique of Marin's book will continue to pour in through the weeks and months to come. My hope is that there has been some benefit in looking at the way that Marin and many of his supporters initially handled substantive criticism of his work—at least to urge them to be more self-critical and less abusive.