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The (Un)Holy Bible: Slavery, Female Objectification, and Harm

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ABSTRACT

This project further elucidates the ability that the Biblical text has of being used as a justification for immoral actions. By using a textualist approach, we find that analyzing the effects that the literal text could have if used to justify action, allows us to see what Scriptural-based morality is subject to at all times. We approach this matter by classifying Scriptural interpretations under a spectrum that varies by degree. This is useful to see that the lowest bar for an action to be theologically justifiable, is whether it is in accordance with a literal reading of the Biblical text. On this thesis, we investigate three categories of what we contend to be immoral actions that, according to a textualist approach, the Bible deems either permissible, commanded by God, or not condemned in the Biblical text.

Our approach comes as a tentative to show what the aggregate of Christian believers can be and are subjected to because of the entailments of Christianity and the Bible being marketed as the sacred word of God. We do not aim to constrain this discussion merely to the standpoint of scholars, academics, and theologians. Rather, our exegetical approach is useful for engaging into a discussion of what the lay person or believer can plausibly derive from the Scriptural text. The standpoint we are concerned with is the standpoint of the masses, as this is the standpoint of the overwhelming aggregate of Christian believers and/or biblical theists.

By highlighting the Biblical prescriptions on slavery and racism, women's status and sexual immorality, and categorical harm, we hope to show the most glaring instances in which the Biblical text can, undeniably, be coherent theological defenses for one's engagement in certain immoral actions. Via the described means, we wish to expose that Biblical-based morality can be dangerous, and coherently so. With this, our goal is to underscore that it should not be permissible for Scripture to be advertised as an acceptable moral guide for society.

“As it became more widespread, Christianity not only failed to regenerate the souls of all the people, but itself degenerated, became materialistic and bureaucratic; from the practice of fraternal teaching one of another it changed into papalism, from wandering beggary into monastic parasitism; in short, not only did Christianity fail to subject to itself the social conditions of the milieu in which it spread, but it was itself subjected by them.”

– Leon Trotsky

INTRODUCTION

The argument for religious morality mostly suggests that its followers have some moral or epistemic advantages in contrast to non-believers (Hitchens 32). If we consider the Christian religion, the epistemic supposition asserts that the divine Scripture is helpful in allowing people to identify true morality as opposed to non-believers who neither follow nor recognize the Scripture's moral authority. Morally speaking, religion entails motivational aspects, a) the existence of a divine entity responsible for policing, punishing, and rewarding behaviors, and b) the very relationships with the divine tend to generate feelings and emotions that motivate action. This incentive, thus, would predispose religious believers and followers to display a moral behavior. Due to this motivational aspect, the dovetailing claim is that followers of religious-based morality actually act more morally than non-believers. I will argue that, analyzing Christianity, Biblical-based morality not only fails in the motivational aspects but also in the epistemic one.

While every religion has different moral precepts, this paper will focus on the biblical morality system, that is, morality that is derived directly from Scripture. We choose Christianity, not because it has some intrinsic greater evil than other religions, but merely because we find it to be one a relevant case study. We emphasize, however, that religion in itself is categorically different than other guiding moral principles. The characteristics that belong to religion, such as its categoricity of commands and its insulation from evidence differentiate it from any other guiding belief or principle (Leiter 34). Specifically, the categoricity of commands, which interlocks with afterlife punishment or reward delineates the special character of religion and of action derived from its guiding principles, as “*demands must be satisfied no matter what an individual antecedent desires and no matter what incentives or disincentives the world offers up* [emphasis added]” (Leiter 34). As it is, it is undeniable that societies across the globe oftentimes grant exemptions or privileges for religious claims of conscience because of this special character – many of us agree that we don't want to burden believers to possibly suffer eternal punishment because of civil laws. As we saw, the categoricity of commands creates duties that

can have both earthly and eternal consequences. Thus, we argue that the discussion of the effects of religion as a guiding moral principle for action must be separate from matters of which belief in doesn't issue in this categoricity of commands that are insulated from evidence, such as e.g., utilitarianism as a guiding moral principle for action.

The biblical Scripture is a source of morality in two different ways – by example and by direct instruction — and thus, many Christians market it in the Christian realm as the immutable and absolute law of the divine authority (Dawkins 268). Theists have for long argued that divine commandments are *needed* for people to act in a moral fashion, however, empirical evidence will hardly support that. It is imperative to recognize that if it is the case that some Christians do act virtuously, this falls short at establishing a necessary causal relationship between the religion, or Scripture, and virtuous behavior. In addition, this paper aims at showing supporting evidence for the claim that Christians *do not* act exclusively in a virtuous fashion, and in fact, have utilized Scripture as a means to justifying killing, torturing, dispossessing, and oppressing other human beings, in a, concerning, theologically defensible manner (Harris 23).

In arguing that religious morality not only is unnecessary for identifying true morality, and for acting morally, but also is itself immoral, this project will pose the issue of Christian biblical-based morality. This includes its flaws as a proper moral guide and how immoral acts have been done in the name of Christianity. Hence, we will build a case for why Biblical-based morality is an unhelpful source in the search for how to act morally, culminating in the need to make it obsolete as an acceptable moral guide, that is, it must not be permissible for societies to allow its advertisement as a proper moral guide.

This paper will be written in opposition to the common hermeneutical moves that attempt to make Scripture seem less discomfiting. The goal is to show that biblical morality has what I term a loophole issue – Scripture allows contemporary readers to derive highly immoral stances justified by biblical reference – that stems from what I term as the ‘Scriptural interpretation spectrum’ – Scriptural interpretation is under a spectrum that contains several possibilities and variations for interpreting the text, some leading to immoral acts, others to moral acts, all validly

theologically justified— due to the existence of Scriptural ambiguities and/or contradictions. Once those have been established, our goal is to show that all across the spectrum, the lowest bar for an action to be deemed theologically defensible is a textualist reading that conforms to the literal text. Showing that this coherent interpretation of Scripture theologically defensibly allows for immoral action, whereas it should have the character of a moral guide, will clarify the need for receding biblical morality as an acceptable societal moral standard.

Biblical morality is ridden with ambiguities that allow us to derive seriously unethical stances, and I will argue that deriving ethical stances from a book that vouches for unethical ones is a flawed method for achieving the goal of formulating proper ethical positions. First, I will explicate the definitions of the Abrahamic God and Providence theory, which will allow me to clear objections on the basis of anachronism toward my Scriptural interpretation. Then, I will define the role of the Bible according to the Church and theists and the interpretation spectrum, which will create the basis for the coherence of the biblical interpretation presented in this project. Further, I will explain the loophole issue that stems from the interpretation spectrum, which will create the foundation for my main objection to biblical morality.

It is important to distinguish the two arguments which I will respond to as each will require different replies: first, that the seemingly immoral prescriptions in the Bible only assume this shape due to an exegetical error on our part. Second, that what the Bible portrays as (im)moral is so *because* biblical morality is in itself superior to other moral systems. In addition, I will analyze Scripture under three main categories of questionable moral prescriptions: slavery, women and sexual immorality, and categorical harm, which will exemplify how biblical moral precepts set precedent for immoral behavior by showing the disparate ways in which it has been and can be used to justify moral and immoral actions.

Through these mechanisms, I will argue for the obsolescence of biblical-based morality due to its lethality when it creates a theological defense for immoral behavior. If my account of the interpretation spectrum and the loophole issue is accepted, we should not allow society, especially laymen, to have a tool for acting immorally. This means that it should not be

acceptable that the Bible be advertised as a moral guide. Civil society should endorse a new standard for morality – one that is independent of divine Scripture or commands.

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Before going any further I must address the type of biblical interpretation chosen for this project. First, let's use a hypothetical example to consider the common scenario that concerns this project: the laymen's standpoint. Z lives in a modest community where attending church is part of the daily life of her community. Religion is a big thing in Z's life, born and raised Christian, her individual experiences indicate the veracity of her beliefs. An avid churchgoer, she always heard attentively the preaching on the sacredness of the word of the divine savior. Her first Bible taught her, "The Bible is God's personal Word to us. (...) Because God is always good and truthful, his written Word, the Bible, is worthy of our complete confidence and trust." (*English Standard Version* 7). She would never forget her favorite passage from Deuteronomy 4:2 "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it". 2 Timothy 3:16 asserts, "All Scripture is breathed out by God, and profitable for teaching (...) and for training in righteousness", informing Z's biblical theism – the belief in the Bible as divinely inspired – and her faith in those being God's sacred and unchangeable word. To receive afterlife reward, she "must obey God rather than man" (Acts. 5.29) – follow the prescriptions laid out in the one book that contained God's posited commandments.

Her morality views follow directly from biblical commandments, which represents the word of God, in her view. Reading the Bible allows Z to understand how to be a good person because she believes that God's commands are directly related to her earthly moral obligations. Z heard multiple times during mass that God is perfect and immutable, confirming that she does well by following biblical moral prescriptions, as God's morality is unchangeable (Broom 102). Mostly, Z also understands divine command theory, and how her obligations are "grounded in

and constituted by the commands of a good, just God who may issue occasional difficult commands to achieve a greater good” (Copan and Flannagan 12).

It is self-evident that not everyone has the same views regarding God, the Bible, or morality as Z. However, following Divine Providence theory, I argue that Z would have most coherent interpretation of the Bible. Providence theory explains that God’s divine perspective is different from human beings’ (Boethius 72). While humans see and experience time under an earthly temporal realm, God’s perspective is timeless, seeing past, present, and future as one eternal present (Boethius 72). That means that if the Holy Bible is indeed the true word of the Christian God, then God has known in his Divine Providence that for millennia people would read his sacred book in contrasting ways. Throughout different historical periods, some would take a literal interpretation of it, some would read it loosely, and that others would choose to believe some literal matters in the book but not others. If Divine Providence theory is true, he has known the effect that the literal words written in the book would have on people, and that the only source of his posited wishes on Earth is this singular book that, self-describedly contains his words in it. With this knowledge, he chose the exact words, commandments, and parables that would be in it for eternity. This train of thought does not, in any form, attempt at posing that we have knowledge of God’s wants. We concur with Leibniz in that, “to know in detail the reasons that could have moved him [God] to choose this order of the universe – to allow sins, to dispense his saving grace in a certain way – surpasses the power of a finite mind” (5). Thus, we merely provide that, if we consider Providence theory to be true, it is possible that the literal words in the Bible represent God’s wants, at least in accordance to his ends of which we remain agnostic about, and thus, plausible for people to follow it in such a manner.

This either means that a) whatever is written in the Bible as a commandment or a moral duty *still* reflects a Christian's moral duties and expectation as followers of God, or b) that there is no way to properly know one's moral duties since to this date there is no other type of evidence of another literature, monument, or appearance that displays what it is that this God is or wants from people as a divinity besides this one book. We should consider that the evidence strongly points to the fact that a) is the case or is more plausibly to be understood to be the case since it is the only answer that can coherently justify the Bible being marketed as God's sacred, perfect, and immutable words, from the standpoint of those who do.

If God is a perfect all-knowing being that knows time differently than humans, knowing past, present, and future in a single unity, and it is the case that what is written in the Bible echoes God's wishes and commandments, then it must follow that the only fair assumption to be made, as finite-minded human beings, is a literal Biblical interpretation can illuminate believers as to living a moral life under God. The only assumption that doesn't extrapolate outside the falsifiable facts is that God may really still want what is described in that book. If it weren't the case, then the book would be a different one, or its purpose at least wouldn't be that of guiding one's life in a divinely inspired fashion. It seems that Z's layperson biblical perspective is entirely coherent considering the textual evidence and Providence theory. For the sake of clarification, I will reiterate that the Christians this paper refers to are those as described under the term "biblical theist" by Copan and Flannagan – believers in God and in the Bible as his authoritative word – and that look at it for information to distinguish right from wrong in the individual choices people make (141). They also believe God is an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent figure who has set his moral commandments in the Bible (Harris 21).

Notwithstanding this analysis, we must account for the rejection of claim b), that we cannot know what moral compass the followers of the Christian God must pursue due to the lack of evidence of extra-biblical support for his wishes. The Catholic Church denies this on natural law grounds and, likewise, on the grounds that the Church itself is an institution established by God to interpret its sacred word. The Catholic Church proclaimed itself as the interpretive authority of Scripture since it was written in such a difficult fashion (Mirus 1). The Church can then decide what is to be taught, what interpretation is accurate, and disambiguate between the allegorical and historical parts of the book. Truth is derived per the Holy Spirit's intentions and is transferred through papal infallibility and the bishops teaching alongside him (Mirus 1). This strategy criticizes those who distort Scriptural interpretation with fundamentalist readings and those who deny the supernatural characteristic of the book (Mirus 2). Therefore, morality according to God can still be derived, but with the aid of the magisterium. I wish to leave this consideration on hold for the moment, so we can later understand the implications of this factor when the appropriate tools for doing so have been established.

I have previously claimed a point that might not be so self-evident, which is that the Bible has immoral prescriptions. This may be seen as a failure to understand the historicity of the time period in which the book was actually written and canonized, or as a certain imposition of contemporary moral values to a different culture (Copan 78). Perhaps this is so because, as humans, we cannot understand the mind of an eternal divinity, and we are in no place to judge what is moral or immoral due to our limited point of view, our lack of Providence (Harris 49).

To the first point, I want to clarify that the only way to anachronistically interpret the Holy Bible is to take it as anything but literal. If what we accept of God entails his perfect nature, unchanged throughout time, and his commands create a moral obligation to his followers, then his commandments are immutable, absolute, and most importantly, perfect (with the

acknowledgement that the historicity of the canonization process does entail that some of the language portrayed in the Book also follows its own time). Following this scheme, the moral obligations put forth by God in his book are unchanging as well, regardless of the passing of earthly temporal periods, as it is irrelevant within God's Divine Providence realm of time. To the second point, we must use our reason as well as our intuitions to validate the moral prescriptions in the Bible, considering that not all humans abide it but are still affected by it (Harris 49). Even if biblical moral prescriptions are moral to God, non-believers shouldn't be bound by it or blindly believe it to be moral. And if it is the case that non-believers find some prescriptions in his book to be immoral, even if by contemporary morality standards, then this at least indicates that it might be the case that such prescriptions are not moral at all, objectively speaking.

Now we also reach an important point. If people like Z are looking up to this book as the divinely inspired word of their God, in which they are prescribed and commanded to perform moral duties as to avoid eternal damnation, and there are unethical and immoral prescriptions in this book, then we have encountered a concerning problem. If the biblical prescriptions of morals and conduct are absolute and unchangeable, and people are reading it as such – and they are – then some might find what I will render to be immoral in the following section, as permissible acts that must be performed, even in contemporary times. Most concerning, it would mean that any change in people's conception of what is right or wrong, and good or bad that has taken place since God revealed his word is wrong and immoral in the eyes of the divinity. If we can point to a realm of morality that considers the progress made with the advancement of Civil Rights, women's rights, and minority rights to be regress, then we have stumbled upon a type of morality that is at least, incongruent with contemporary moral standards, and at most, intrinsically wrong. In theory, such acknowledgment should be enough to render such kind of morality as of little use to society, however, this view has also been met with some objections.

To conclude this section, I must underscore the utility in utilizing this criterion of interpretation for the sake of the goals of this thesis. This approach doesn't come as an attempt of providing the correct, or the one true interpretation of the Biblical text, or of God's will. The

object of our critique is precisely that any truth-claim in that regard is utterly unfalsifiable. We contend that we cannot know or infer into the mind of the divinity at our will. This is why the various interpretations across the soon-to-be explained Scriptural interpretation spectrum are theologically defensible – exegesis claims all across it are unfalsifiable and can be made to be theologically defensible alongside extra-biblical methods. Thus, claiming to know what God wants would constitute an inference into the mind of the divinity, which we claim to be absurd.

Rather, by exposing the literal side of the spectrum, in at least the three categories that we will be analyzing, we can see passages with highly explicit textual meaning in literal readings that individuals all across the spectrum can theologically defensibly resort to in order to justify action or beliefs. Our aim in providing this literal reading is showing the lowest bar that must be met for an action to be theologically justified. Anywhere in the spectrum can one still resort to the notion that some passages are to be read as literally true or literally commanded by God and be theologically justified in so. Instead of claiming that the literal interpretation of the Scriptural text is the *correct* one, we merely expose that literal readings of certain passages *can* coherently justify (immoral) behavior. We merely expose that low bar, what it entails, and how it has shaped individuals' actions, without claiming to have actual knowledge of God's wants.

THE SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION SPECTRUM

Clearly, not every Christian identifies with Z on religion itself or biblical writings. This actualizes itself because people interpret the Bible in several different ways, from laymen to scholars, from Catholics to Protestants. I want to introduce what I have termed as the ‘Scriptural interpretation spectrum’. When we consider how the Bible has been interpreted since its rudimentary form, to its canonized structure, throughout time, among different people, different cultures, and different branches of Christianity, we see it has been met with an expansive array of interpretations. I think it to be more useful to see these disparate views within a spectrum.

At one far end of the spectrum, we find fundamentalist interpreters that have a strictly literal interpretation of the Bible – exactly what is written in there reflects God’s wishes and commandments. On the opposite end of the spectrum, we find loose- or non-interpreters – those who barely recognize Scripture to have any value worth interpreting, and that don’t see its connection with general life, giving it no interpretive value other than strictly allegorical. In between those far ends, we find the most populated area of the spectrum, the cherry-picking middle. In this middle you find interpreters that cherry-pick, or more accurately, that subjectively distinguish in one’s own interpretation what should be understood as literal from what is to be seen as allegorical, deriving from this arbitrariness truth about the book’s action-related commandments. The closer one’s interpretation is to literal, the closer they are to the literal end of the spectrum. The closer one’s interpretation is allegorical, the close they are to the allegory side. The more one picks and chooses according to one’s whims what is to be taken literally than allegorically, the more one finds oneself in the middle of the ‘Scriptural interpretation spectrum’.

When it comes to Scriptural interpretations, we have a wide range of possibilities that can be theologically defensible manners of interpretation. However, I have argued that the most

coherent interpretation will find itself in the literal end of the spectrum per Divine Providence theory. Any interpretation that is not literal, needs external factors and influences in order to extract any truth from it. I want to explore an analogy that might exemplify this easier. W tells X: “I am so angry that you stole my car, I will kill you” because W and X are friends, X knows W’s character display, his past actions, how W speaks, what kinds of metaphors and expressions W uses. Thus, X interprets W’s utterance as a joke, rather than literally—that X might be in a life-threatening danger. X used external factors— previous knowledge and experience— in his interpretation of the utterance to accurately derive the correct interpretation of what has been said. As Nicholas Wolterstorff claims, *unless there is good reason otherwise*, an interpreter accepts some piece of discourse to accurately represent whatever discourse is being appropriated (qtd. In Copan and Flannagan 29).

If X and W are complete strangers, and X has no external factors that would rationally complement his interpretation, X has no reason to assume that what has been said wasn’t meant literally. X might wish that it wasn’t meant literally, and thus choose not to interpret it that way, but without any explicit reason, guidance, or external factors that point to the fact that X shouldn’t derive a literal interpretation, doing so would be unwarranted wishful thinking, at best. Without a concrete reason to assume that W doesn’t truly mean to threaten X’s life, assuming so goes beyond the set of facts in the scenario, hence, opening the door to any kind of interpretation of the utterance. The interpretation that W’s statement was a joke or that W’s statement was a metaphor, irony, a warning, or an expression of someone else’s wishes, all have the same value, because they are all interpretations that required external factors that subjectively represent one’s preferred interpretation of the utterance. Subjectively because once you open the door to external

factors, each factor can be or not used as a plausible one to ground one's interpretation, as each factor will display a subjective relationship to the interpreter in contrast to others.

The interpretation that what has been said expresses irony is completely different than the one that derives literal truth from it, and both are equally different from the interpretation that the utterance, for example, signified someone else's wishes. One of those interpretations – where irony is derived – is better for the listener, than the one in which there is still a threat to X's life. But to derive one or the other is subjective and goes beyond the facts that allow X to coherently comprehend the utterance. Hearing "I will kill you" with no context whatsoever, no facts about the person, no contextual tone or sensations that would lead one to derive a non-literal meaning, the only coherent interpretation of the facts that doesn't extrapolate them in a fickle way, is the literal one. With no facts that point against the fact that W is telling X their life is in danger, one can only reasonably take into account what has been said in order to derive its true meaning.

Likewise, from centuries of the Christian tradition, many have gone outside the literal words of the Bible in order to interpret it. Precisely because, as the motivational character of Christianity implies, believers do not perceive God as a stranger. Christians perceive their relationship to God as an intimate one, which informs their interpretation of God's wishes. This doesn't circumvent the subjectiveness in interpretations that stem from this relational view. If anything, this scenario highlights the instability in this kind of exegesis. While one believer may derive, from one's own understanding of their intimate relationship with God, that he has prescribed a certain moral duty, another believer may derive the completely oppositional moral duty based on their own intimate relationship with the divinity. Even if one doesn't perceive God as a stranger, and believes they have plausible evidence for grounding a particular moral duty

over the other, the claim is nevertheless unfalsifiable and its truth value cannot be distinguished, objectively speaking.

Many passages, however, don't warrant an extra-biblical interpretation due to their clarity in meaning. For example, in Psalm 53:1 we find "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good.", which makes it fairly clear that those who deny the existence of God are wicked immoral people. Any interpretation that attempts to deviate from that – as by saying that this refers only to the people at that time, and that God doesn't really think everyone who doesn't believe in him is wicked – is going outside of the text, beyond the facts that we have, to make the text less discomfiting. Hence, one could derive any sort of interpretation from the text as one desires. Yet, the only interpretation that doesn't subjectively extrapolate the text is the one that non-believers are wicked for the divinity. This can be applied across the entirety of the Holy Bible, showing that any passage can be interpreted according to one's whims, if not taken literally, which is subject to contradictions and blatant falsity. As Copan explains, one can put troubling passages in the Bible in a proper perspective by choosing where to derive one's interpretation (339).

On that note, I will show that the acceptance of 'moderate' biblical-based morality is an open invitation to fundamentalist likewise-based morality. It not only allows for people to choose their interpretations, but it allows them to choose immoral interpretations of the Bible that have empirical dangerous consequences. This is what I term the loophole issue. The Scriptural interpretation spectrum shows how contemporary readers may derive very differing and, at times, opposing interpretations of the entire book, or of specific passages. The loophole issue comes to play when some of these interpretations allow for theologically defensible interpretations that lead to the propagation of immoral behavior. People in the 'pick-and-choose'

middle-ground adopt, whimsically, what the actual moral prescriptions are and what is merely allegorical, but it's a personal decision. Contrarily, some people take passages literally, which opens the door to performing atrocious behavior that is also justified by Scripture (Dawkins 269).

One person may read Deuteronomy 13:6-10 literally and derive that it is morally permissible to slaughter family members that e.g. invite you to go to a non-Catholic place of worship. One may also read the same passage and derive, subjectively, that the passage only refers to something that should be done in the past, or that "You shall stone him to death with stones" is just metaphorical (Deut. 13.10). Nonetheless, one of these is clearly immoral as it involves murder on the grounds of religious intolerance, and I will attempt to show further exemplification of cases where this loophole issue arises in the following sections.

Still, it is important to point out that picking and choosing morality in the Bible indicates that the criterion for morality may absolutely stem from Scripture, and is somewhat available to all people, religious or not (Dawkins 269). Many come to the defense of the 'pick-and-choose' middle-ground because the contemporary times are radically different from the Ancient Near East, and this period difference calls for changing the application of Biblical moral truths. However, our intuitions may point to the implausibility of an all-knowing God not having taught fundamental moral truths to his chosen people from the beginning of his covenant (Bergmann et al. 101). We will deal with this matter in what follows.

THE MORAL DEVELOPMENT OBJECTION

It could be the case that the divine teachings were not precise from its inception because God's commandments are to be seen as analogous to the relationship between parents and children, where we find parents teaching certain things to children in accordance with their development (Bergmann et al. 146). Nevertheless, such objection appears to be the result of a faulty analogy. When it comes to teaching someone in relation to their development, picture the following scenario: a child steals from their friends in school and comes home with stolen pencils. Just because she is a child doesn't mean that the parents should, or would, say something to the effect of "you can only steal from us, not from your friends at school". That would certainly teach the kid that stealing is not outright *wrong*, or else it would be definitively impermissible. Parents do in fact teach kids not to steal *because* of the relation to one's development. If right from wrong isn't taught when wrong actions take place, the action might become a habit, and if it already is a habit, then the teaching needs to be even clearer, stricter, and precise.

There is little reason to assume that an omnipotent God was unable to teach Israelites morally right from wrong, discarding impotency as a reason. The Israelite's moral stance might have been one inferior to contemporary times, but nothing points to the fact that a divine commandment wouldn't lead to practical change. Even so, much that was taught did transcend their time, so it wouldn't be implausible for the divinity to add a few more lines on more pressing issues that would also not be easily accepted at first. While parents may be unable to change their children's mindset, and children might oppose the moral teachings, not acting by them, parents still teach right from wrong – which, I must admit, can be context-dependent. God then, either did teach right from wrong and such is exemplified in Scripture, leading to

problematic literal interpretations, or he did not teach the entirety of morality, leaving people to work it out themselves as time goes by, which can also lead to problematic arbitrary interpretations and nevertheless allows for one's ability to still resort to the fundamentalist reading. I am in no way asserting that God did either one of the other. The crucial matter is that either way, the loophole issue arises, which indicates the impracticability of such a moral system.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S INTERPRETIVE AUTHORITY POSSIBILITY

It is necessary for me to go into a discussion of how the Catholic Church's teachings fit into this schema. We can now return to the consideration regarding the Church's interpretive authority. This maneuver is a great exemplification of the contradictions that the Scriptural interpretation spectrum can subject us to. The Catholic Church deems itself as the interpretive authority of the Bible, justifying such by claiming Scriptural evidence for God's desire to have such an institution able to disambiguate complicated passages of his Holy Book, as well as the Tradition of apostolic succession. It discourages a merely literal reading of the text, further relying in the Church's ability to discern what the correct interpretation of different passages are.

The first thing we must address is the claim that the Church's interpretive authority is warranted through Scripture. As the Vatican claims, "Scripture itself bears witness to Tradition and gives evidence of the Magisterium in that it recalls the teaching of the apostles" (*Catholic Teaching* 2). Several different biblical passages have been considered to substantiate the apostolic succession claim, as Matt. 16:18-19, "(...) I will give you [Peter] the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven", or Matt. 28:18-20 where Jesus tells his disciples to "go (...) make disciples of all nations, (...) teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you". At the same time, we can see that Protestants, for example, have pointed at other verses to justify the exact opposite position, such as Acts 17:11, "Now these Jews were more noble (...), examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.", or 1 John 2:27, "But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you". This in itself does not indicate that one or the other is more or less accurate, but it does indicate that both cannot be true at the same time.

We must note that the Church's claim in itself is only possible because of its own interpretation of the Bible, thus, the argument circularly begs its own question. We have three aspects that predicate the Church's authority in discerning "God's word and will": first, the "two swords" theory that asserts the Pope's role as earthly vicar of Jesus, who granted him full authority (Witte and Nichols 13-14). Second, the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" theory that derives that Christ delegated popes with a "key of knowledge" for identifying God's will (Witte and Nichols 14). Third, the Church's Traditional Authority over Christian sacraments (Witte and Nichols 14). The first two aspects illuminate our claim in that the "two swords" theory is derived from an interpretation of the Scriptural text under Luke 22:38 and the "the keys of the kingdom of heaven theory" from the abovementioned passage under Matthew 16:18 (Witte and Nichols 13-14). As the Vatican illustrates, "(...) any interpretation of Scripture that regards it as inspired and therefore normative for all ages is necessarily an interpretation that takes place within the Church's Tradition, which recognizes Scripture as inspired and normative" (*Catholic Teaching* 1).

If the reason why the Church claims its interpretive authority, including the possibility of the apostolic succession is due to its own interpretation of certain verses, and such interpretation leads to supporting its interpretive authority, then this interpretive authority claim has the same value as any other claim for interpretive authority. The Church interprets the text, its interpretation says there needs to be a church to fulfill the role of the interpretive authority, thus, they claim interpretive authority based on their initial interpretation that they are the ones expected to fulfill such a role. Further, they interpret the sacred text to have rendered Peter with apostolic succession. This has the same value as if the case was that Protestants interpreted the text and the interpretation derived that they were the interpretive authority, thus they have

interpretive authority following from their own interpretation. Do we have any reason to say one or the other is correct? I find it hard to say so, at least on these grounds.

The claim for one kind of interpretation or the other is extra-biblical, inferring into the mind of a divinity, resulting in the very same things that the Catholic Church criticizes others for doing. The only difference is that in the Catholic Church case, their interpretation established their authority among that section of believers, and the majority of them are following it. The Catholic Church claims that there are lots of ways of interpreting a text, especially a divinely inspired one, so there needs to be *an* authority. However, if the supposed authority just chooses one kind of interpretation to warrant it, that authority is unwarranted. Not that my goal is to reject the probability that there could be *an* interpretive authority, but taking the Church's authority for granted based on an interpretation that justifies itself, is giving in to a fallacious argument that not only begs its own question but can be subject to intense contradictions.

The Church holds that the Bible is divinely inspired especially on matters regarding morality ("*On the Inspiration of Scripture*"). It points to the Gospels as the true instruction for morals, but because of the complexity of the book, regular individuals are not suited to derive a truthful interpretation ("*On the Inspiration of Scripture*"). This points back to the previous discussion of how people can wrongly interpret what is to be taken as allegorical or literal truth, or how to distinguish ephemeral teachings from obligations. In order to avoid this, the Church identifies itself as the infallible interpreter of the divinely inspired truths in the Bible ("*On the Inspiration of Scripture*"). An example of the contradictions that this kind of interpretation is open to is when we look at papal infallibility.

The Pope, as the head of the Church, holds infallible authority on biblical interpretations. This infallibility entails the "exemption from the possibility of error" ("*True Meaning of*

Infallibility”). Now, if we analyze history, we can see that popes and bishops across time have vouched for extremely immoral positions. Pope Nicholas V wrote *Dum Diversas*, the pro-slavery document that authorized the Portuguese capture and enslavement of pagans and Saracens (Shermer 194). The document was reiterated and renewed by following Popes for almost thirty years, only to be partially revoked almost a hundred years later with Paul III’s *Sublimus Dei*. The full revocation only came over 400 years later with Pope Leo XII.

In more modern times, Pope Pius XI was not only complicit with the rise of fascism in Italy, but he also described Mussolini as a “man sent by Providence” (Hitchens 235). Pius XI also ratified the Lateran Pact, gaining territorial sovereignty and moral educational monopoly for the sake of supporting Mussolini’s fascist administration (Hitchens 235). But this wasn’t the only fascist government that had the magisterium’s avowal. Hitler’s administration’s first treaty was with the Vatican itself. In exchanging educational control for silence in the face of a threat against human lives, even Parish records were made available for Hitler’s administration to judge racial purity (Hitchens 238). Not only this, but papal instruction led to the annual celebration of Hitler’s birthday. Moreover, Pope Pius XII sent Hitler a letter containing the Church’s continuous efforts for devotion in the Fuhrer’s leadership (Hitchens 239). Shouldn’t we then conclude that the Catholic Church has infallibly deemed immoral acts as theologically defensible? We shall return to this question.

Before going down this route, we need to acknowledge that the Church doesn’t claim infallibility to every single act of the Pope, but rather, only to teachings that can be properly considered *ex cathedra* (Toner). For a papal teaching to be considered *ex cathedra*, it needs to fulfill some requirements. The teaching needs to be done publicly and be done in one’s capacity as a member of the Church, rather than as a private individual. Not only that, but the teaching

needs to be related to faith or morals in order for it to be considered infallible. The teaching needs to be done with ‘defining intention’, that is, the intention of the teaching must be that it is representing his clerical authority in determining the irrevocability of such doctrine. Lastly, for a teaching to be considered *ex cathedra*, the Pope needs to intend to “bind the whole Church”, or else it won’t be considered infallible (Toner 16).

This allows for comprehending the seemingly immoral papal complicity we previously saw. It is not the case that Catholics are supposed to deem Hitler as a divine gift, or to deem enslavement rightly for infidels, because those were never infallible teachings in the first place. Moreover, it is also not the case that the Church doesn’t have definitive teachings, but it is the case that the Church claims to accompany the development in the secular world, which allows for fully playing their role as the interpretive authority (Toner). In fact, the Church points to at least three infallible teachings: the doctrine of infallibility itself, Mary’s Immaculate Conception and her Assumption (Toner). Even though I could argue that at least Pope Nicholas V and Pope Pius XI’s acts fulfill the requirements for being *ex cathedra* teachings, such is beside the point. It is clear that the Church’s strategy is susceptible to contradictions when it becomes possible for certain Popes to place the Church in a slavery-supporting role for centuries, and also have Popes placing the Church in the abolitionist role, but neither be a definite infallible stance on the issue.

If we are not to deem the aforementioned seemingly immoral teachings to be infallible, as they are not, by the same token, we know that all other teachings for more moral things e.g. later papal oppositions to slavery, are also not to be deemed infallible, as they are not per the Church’s own teachings. One may argue that even if fallible, the latest teachings can be deemed more coherent to the core principles of the Church than the earlier and more problematic teachings. Although this can be a useful strategy for followers to disambiguate moral from immoral claims,

it doesn't change the fact that the Catholic Church has not yet placed a definite interpretive authority via *ex cathedra* teachings on several immoral Biblical issues, which allows for the loophole issue to arise. If the Church hasn't presented a definite infallible stance on certain matters yet, one can still act upon these issues based on which past papal teaching one prefers. This allows Catholics to perform immoral actions that have been avowed by the Catholic Church in the past, even if not infallibly, since there isn't a definite opposition to it by the supposed Church authority. The Church's authority has not issued infallible teachings regarding many moral issues, and this silence allows for the issues with the Scriptural interpretations Spectrum to arise. The loophole issue comes not necessarily regarding Catholics cherry-picking Bible passages, but Catholics cherry-picking the Church's non-infallible teachings as one pleases as well as the Church's representatives having cherry-picked what the Bible signifies or not at different times. The church's maneuver of establishing itself as the authority is a smart one, but not an unfailing one. This scheme is still prone to contradictions, allowing immoral behavior to be performed with a theologically defensible justification.

BIBLICAL MORALITY

Before we go into a discussion of the immoralities in the Bible, I want to give a brief analysis of arguments for it. First, let's assess the claim that the immoral prescriptions in the Bible are only seemingly immoral due to an exegetical error. The claim is that Moses' commandments and Old Testament Law reflect a moral improvement in relation to other nations in the ancient Near East in the social context of warfare as a means for survival (Copan 84, 138, 287). Thus, throughout time, God aimed at the moral improvement of his people by portraying "his redemptive purposes" despite Israelite's then-current inferior moral condition (Copan 84). God had to settle for not being explicit about the epitome of morality while still desiring improvement pointing people towards the true ideal of morality (PC 84, 224). The only reason why it would look like certain prescriptions are immoral is due to a failure in understanding this context. However, not only does this argument neglects to account for the possibility of the New Testament's immoral character, but also, besides Jesus' teachings on divorce, at no other point can we definitely say that God indicated his 'settlement for less' or what any moral improvement would look like outside Scriptural prescriptions, and assuming such, although comforting, is not sufficient evidence for the case.

In the same light, at no point are the readers directed to understanding 'the ideal', and the book is often sought for containing the ideal itself. In the least, the book presents itself as ambiguous regarding what the ideal is. Moreover, the Bible includes extensive sections with quite insignificant pieces of information (morally speaking) – chapters giving proper dimensions for building a temple – while failing to disambiguate between subjects of vital importance, for example, giving a definite judgement on slavery (Conner 82).

Another argument arises from this line of questioning, which is that what is portrayed as moral or immoral in the Bible really is moral or immoral *because* such is stated in the Bible. This stems from the idea that God cannot be contradictory, and since his nature is that of goodness, he cannot also have an evil nature (Broom 103). Hence, his commandments cannot be evil, or better said, his moral prescriptions cannot be immoral. As an attempt to solve the Euthyphro dilemma, this argument asserts that morality, objectively speaking, is based on God's perfect and unalterable nature (Broom 104). Thus, this line of thinking maintains that in rejecting God's moral standard, we would be judging him by his own moral standard, thus, validating it (Broom 113). But to claim that there is such a thing as an objective divinely-based morality without a serious attempt to substantiate the claim is meaningless. I contend that we judge the Biblical morality by our human moral standards. In summation, it is not the case that morality is necessarily directly and correctly derived from the Bible, but by our intuitions of right and wrong when faced with moral questions. Either way, we find that there is insufficient evidence to the claim that the pious is only pious *because* God loves it.

THE IMMORALITIES IN THE BIBLE

With all of this into consideration, we can analyze different passages in the Bible that are, at minimum, seemingly immoral, to show the danger that biblical-derived morality poses to society. To do so, I will discuss three different categories of prescriptions: those relating to slavery, women and sexuality, and categorical harm. The goal of the following discussion is to show that abiding by biblical moral prescriptions allows for the theological avowal of heinous acts, which overweighs any good that may come from it. By analyzing different viewpoints within the interpretation spectrum, we intend to provide a holistic view, but will nevertheless take the literal side for the aforementioned coherence concerns and for the purposes of elucidating the lowest bar to be met for that an action be theologically defensible.

1. SLAVERY

Many credit Christianity for the abolition of slavery or at least for the moral progress in condemning such institution. This has been intensively challenged by the notion that Christianity had a driving role in the institution of slavery. In this section, my aim is two-tiered. First, to show how Christian institutions, authorities, and followers have, at times, assumed a supporting role to the enslavement of human beings. Second, to demonstrate that this role was assumed due to the loophole issue, in this case, that following biblical precepts on the matter has and can still lead to pro-slavery and racist stances that are, at the same time, coherent with Scripture.

To begin this quest, we should look at what the historical evidence shows. Slavery has been a ubiquitous practice, taking different forms wherever it arose. Although the history of slavery can be dated back to the Ancient Near East, derived from war policies, the undeniable peak in chattel slavery took place in the beginning of the 17th century, in the form of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Currently, in hindsight, many point out to the positive effect that the rise of Christianity in the antiquity had on this practice (Bradley and Cartledge. 2). Others, however, point out

Christianity's role in "(...) reforc[ing], not to challeng[ing], traditional social structures" (Bradley, and Cartledge 2). The pervasiveness and normalization of the practice for most of history indicated that "Christianity did not make a difference to slavery in antiquity" (Bradley and Cartledge 2). Christianity may not have created chattel slavery or been the only social institution that endorsed it, but in the peak of the practice, Christianity did have *a* role in its propagation, and it wasn't always of ameliorating it.

Scholars have indicated that Latin America's slavery wasn't as tough as slavery in the English America *because* of the Catholic Church's influence in the former, while others render this a myth (Nascimento 62). The institution of slavery lasted its longest in the Portuguese colony of Brazil, where colonization was undertaken alongside a project of expanding Catholic doctrine in the nation. Christian missionaries aimed at converting infidels in Africa and at giving support to the market that trafficked Black lives to South America. One example of Church officials' complacency in human enslavement can be seen through the actions of prominent priests like Father Antônio Vieira. He would preach to the enslaved in Brazil to obey good and evil masters alike because God had put them in the position of a slave for a reason. The narrative asserted that slaves should be thankful for God had saved them from integrating with the so-called 'infidels' left in the African continent. It wasn't the case that Catholicism led to less dehumanization of enslaved populations, rather, in Brazil, the Catholic Church became the main ideological anchor for the institution of slavery to its most brutal degree (Nascimento 62).

Notwithstanding, this was not unique to Catholicism or to Latin American slavery. English Protestant Pastor Morgan Goldwin also used the same rationale in his own dealings. He preached that Christianity had established the rightful authority of masters over servants, grounding the enslaved's duties to their owners – to not misbehave or resist. But most importantly, Pastor

Goldwin used the common rhetoric that by serving one's owner righteously, heavenly reward would follow (Nascimento 63). Oftentimes, Christianity not only accepted but encouraged the institution of slavery in spite of its brutality (Nascimento 63). In particular, we can see this encouragement personified in the ante and postbellum United States, where an array of Christian preachers of different denominations justified the maintenance of slavery with the biblical text, e.g. Noah's son's curse into servitude became a basis for that attitude (Hitchens 167).

The United States saw both in the Civil War and the Civil Rights eras a similar instance. Abraham Lincoln himself contended that both the abolitionist as well as the pro-slavery stance were both endorsed by faith (Hitchens 178). In Dr. Martin Luther King's time, Southern churches blessed the institutions of segregation and discrimination (Hitchens 179). After the World War II, emancipation talk came to the fore only to be undermined, as "discrepant descendants of Noah were not intended by god to be mixed" (Hitchens 179). This kind of rhetoric would still run deep, at least in the American South. The cries for desegregation were challenged with religious discourse and Sen. Pat Robertson's words are marked in history, "I'd sure like to help the colored, *but the Bible says I can't* [emphasis added]." (Hitchens 179).

In *Bob Jones University v. United States*, Genesis 10-11, Acts 17:26, Deuteronomy 32:8, Daniel 7:13-14, Zechariah 14, Revelation 21:24 and Romans 9:19:24 were grounds for the sincerely held belief that interracial relationships, dating or marriage, were forbidden by the Bible – that mixing Blacks and whites was "*satanic*" (Drennan 572). If we also pay heed to Numbers 12, or Deuteronomy 7:3, "you shall not intermarry with them (...) for you are a people Holy to the Lord your God", teaches the sin of miscegenation. As Christopher Hitchens argued, "the chance that someone's religious belief would cause him or her to uphold slavery and racism was statistically extremely *high*" (180).

I must point out that there is another side to this story. While it is true that some have framed Scripture to warrant the enslavement of others, many have done otherwise. On the one hand we have seen figures like Muhammad Ali, basing his religious conversion on the white-supremacist character of Christianity i.e. its role in the enslavement of his ancestors, or Fredrick Douglass' view that the most devout Christian made the most savage slaveowner. On the other hand, other prominent figures like Martin Luther King Jr. advocated for the Civil Rights movement using biblical references. He saw that God freed his people from a life of servitude in Egypt—one of the warrants that Christianity opposed such a condition (Hitchens 174).

The Scripturally derived pro-slavery and the abolitionist stances are contradictory. This contradiction may stem either from an exegetical problem that leads to a failed interpretation of the true meaning of the text, or the problem is one of arbitrariness: cherry-picking instances that more conveniently support one's opinion. This issue can also be understood as a matter of a failure of imagination in the Church's teachings. The lack of infallible teachings on this matter, as exposed in the previous section, amounts to one of the reasons that individuals can derive contradictory views on the same subject, based on the same biblical foundation. While one may argue that the Church has not explicitly and/or infallibly endorsed slavery, this does not impact the position I am arguing for. The subject of my concern here, is rather, that the Church has not, as one of their infallible teachings, condemned slavery. Whether it failed to regard this matter as an important one, or one that requires an infallible teaching, slavery was never denounced as an immoral act by the institution in the same way it had issued infallible teachings on other matters, i.e., the Assumption or the Conception.

But the real question becomes: is it the case that pro-slavery stances have been coherently derived from biblical Scripture? In other words, have those who derived a pro-slavery stance

from Scripture done so in a theologically defensible way? If this happens to be the case, whether it is possible for one to also derive an abolitionist stance out of it becomes superfluous – the biblical text *can* present a theological defensible stance for slavery. If such, we will have demonstrated that the notion of a Biblical guide for morals fails, at least on this matter.

In order to find the answer to this question, I think it is useful to look at what the Scriptural text asserts. Starting with the Old Testament, a few verses explicitly enable slavery as well as the poor treatment of slaves. To exemplify, in Exodus 21:20-21, where the laws regarding slaves are explained, we find, “When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged, but if the slave survives a day or two he is not to be avenged, for the slave is his money”. Not only is slavery upheld by this deity, but also, we find provisions as to the amount of physical punishment a slave master is permitted to inflict upon his slaves. If we go further, under Leviticus 25:44-46, “As for your male and female slaves whom you may have: you may buy male and female slaves from among the nations that are around you. You may also buy from among the strangers who sojourn with you and their clans that are with you, who have been born in your land, and they may be your property. You may bequeath them to your sons after you to inherit as a possession forever”. Now, we see more clearly that the provisions regarding slavery also deal with what to do with foreigners – you’re permitted to enslave them according to the Scriptural provisions. This narrative is coherent with Deuteronomy 20:11, that provides that whenever arriving to a territory that you want to conquer, upon offering peace terms, “all the people who are found in it [territory] shall do forced labor for you and shall serve you”.

But it may be argued that looking at the Old Testament for this is an error. One must approach the Bible holistically to see that the progressive positive change in attitude towards

slavery and the treatment of slaves (Copan 87). It is argued that the New Testament doesn't display an endorsement of slavery, and that verses like Luke 4:18, show Jesus' clear opposition to the practice – Jesus claims to fulfill the Scripture in freeing the oppressed and the captive (Copan 226, 229). Not only is this not an absolute repudiation of slavery, but to claim that the New Testament does not provide instances of avowing the enslavement of individuals would be quite disingenuous. Several books after Luke show, at minimum, a lack of opposition to the dehumanizing practice. For instance, in Ephesians 6:5, St. Paul advises slaves to obey their masters as they would obey Jesus Christ (*New International Version*). Colossians 3:22, 1 Timothy 6, and Titus 2:9 all emulate the same rhetoric – “(...) obey in everything those who are your earthly masters”, “regard their own masters as worthy of all honor”, or “slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything (...)” (*NIV*). While it is true that Paul's claims don't necessarily endorse slavery as moral *per se*, the issue in hand is precisely what he doesn't claim – to condemn slavery and its immoral character. Further, in 1 Peter 2:18, we more specifically understand that even under the most unjust slave master must the slave graciously show obedience and respect, and salvation will follow (*NIV*).

We can now use this exposition to analyze other facts that we have in hand. As explained previously, Father Antônio Vieira was one of the most high-profile figures in the apogee of Portuguese colonization efforts in Latin America. His discourse on slavery obedience to good and evil masters alike surely mirrors 1 Peter 2:18's “(...) be subject to your masters (...) not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust” (*ESV*). Pastor Goldwin's rhetoric that slaves mustn't resist or misbehave against their masters also emulates Titus 2:9's provisions. His sermons on how obedience is met with heavenly reward also mimics the arrangements under 1 Peter. Likewise, some Christian denominations “have been founded on the proposition that

chattel slavery could flourish alongside the gospel of Jesus Christ” as it was divinely mandated (Jones 1).

What appears to be the case is that pro-slavery attitudes on this matter are highly coherent with what Scripture provides. Again, whether these attitudes were correctly or wrongly derived from Scripture is outside of our scope – what concerns this project is whether such stance could have been coherently derived from the Scriptural text in a theologically defensible way. Thus, responding the crucial question of this section, it does seem that the loophole issue holds – it is possible and plausible for individuals to derive a pro-slavery stand based on the Holy Book’s provisions. It follows, then, that one is able to derive a theologically defensible pro-slavery attitude, as many have, indeed. If 1) it would be sound to hold such a stance in relation to Scripture, and 2) at least contemporarily, we acknowledge the moral impermissibility of the practice of enslaving others, then it would follow that 3) Scripture fails as a proper moral guide on the matter.

2. WOMEN AND SEXUALITY

The current exposition of immoral Biblical commands also takes into the task of analyzing the relation between prescriptions on the topic of women and sexuality and societal attitudes. I argue that, just like the discussion on slavery, Scriptural commands have also been detrimental to the treatment of women and of homosexual individuals and communities. First, due to the rhetoric that displays the objectification, commodification and overall inferior status of women. Second, by stigmatizing natural bodily processes, specifically that of menstruation. Third, by the endorsement of sexual assault, especially against women. Finally, by condemning homosexual relations. The contemporary discussion on these matters is very controversial, and disparate Christian denominations have different views on the subject. The goal of this section, however, is to show that one can in fact coherently derive a discriminatory, either misogynistic, sexist or homophobic stance purely based on Scripture, thus, being theologically defensible.

We shall begin by looking at the biblical rhetoric that inferiorizes, objectifies and commodifies women. Starting at the book of Genesis, women were treated as objects undeserving of respect (Dawkins 272). God, after creating Adam, the first man in the world, decides to “make him *a helper* [emphasis added] fit for him” (*ESV*, Gen. 2.18). After creating the helper, that is, Eve, God explains that if a matter of contention comes in between her and Adam, “he shall rule over you” (Gen 3.16). This indicates a kind of expectation regarding the relationship between a husband and a wife, but what about women who are not yet married? Well, as the descendants of Adam started to multiply themselves, men simply “took as their wives any they chose.” (Gen. 6.2). And this objectifying relationship solidifies itself when we see Lot giving his two daughters away to “men of Sodom”, to “do to them as you please” (Gen. 19.4,8). An important consideration to add is that later, in 2 Peter 2:7, we find that Lot is

considered a righteous man (Conner 62). In the lead off chapter of the Holy Book, we noticed the primary conceptions that women are to be regarded as either their father's or their husband's property and/or exchange tool. A woman's desires are not free from the constraints of her husband, that is, as long as she wants to work towards receiving the eternal salvation from God.

In giving his Ten Commandments, god ossifies the intrinsic objectified character of women. Commandment number ten, "(...) you shall not covet your neighbor's wife (...)" sheds light into how women are seen in a quasi-property status, as coveting is the desire for something that rightfully belongs to another individual (Exod. 20.17). Women, in this sense, are seen to rightfully belong to her husband, like his "house, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's." (Exod. 20.11). Counted among other 'lesser' things, women are displayed as another object for possession. While this only applies to free women, slave women are also seen as inferior to their male counterparts. While the latter adult may be worth fifty shekels, the former, only thirty (Lev. 27).

The inferiorization of women also concerned the gender inequality in marital as well as clerical relations. The manifold instances in which Scripture incontestably tells women to "submit [themselves] to your own husband" clearly show the epistemic inequality between men and women (Eph. 5.22, 24, Col. 3.18, Titus. 2.4, 1 Pet. 3.5). Additionally, Scripture doesn't fall short of making clear what this submission entails. A wife is to be "under her husband's authority", to the degree that any vows or oaths that she commits to can be nullified on the basis of her husband's or father's desire (Num. 5.29, 30.5-13). This is not, however, the only matter to which a husband is entitled authority over his wife. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7:4, explains to us that "(...) the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does". But surely it would be deceiving not to mention the following verse, that "[l]ikewise the husband does not

have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” (1 Cor. 7.4). We might be drawn to analyze this passage to see that it represents an equal marital standing between a husband and his wife, but we soon realize such equal standing is illusory. Paul clarifies that, “(...) the head of every man is Christ, *the head of a wife is her husband* [emphasis added]. (...) Neither was man created for woman, *but woman for man* [emphasis added]” (1 Cor. 11.3, 9). Essentially, there is a hierarchy where men are above women, who were merely created for men, as we have seen previously, as his ‘helper’, whose thoughts and actions are under the prerogative authority of a man, either her husband or her father.

In the ecclesiastic realm, we also see how Scripture maintains the inferior status of women. Women are not allowed to speak in churches, they are supposed to learn quietly, and if they need to ask questions, they can direct them to their husbands when at home (1 Cor. 14.34, 1 Tim. 2.11). Women’s professional activities are limited as they are not permitted to “teach or to exercise authority over a man” (1 Timothy 2:12, 3). Not allowed to speak in churches, to teach or assume any position hierarchically above a man, a woman’s job is to “respect her husband”, be “self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands” so “that the word of God may not be reviled” (Eph. 5.23, Titus 2.4). A husband’s job in turn, is to “live with your wives in an understanding way, *showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel* [emphasis added] (...)” (1 Peter 3:7). Intrinsically weak and submissive by obligation: this is the view on women any layperson can clearly and distinctively derive from the Holy Bible.

Nevertheless, a woman’s nature is also ostracized. Menstruation, a natural bodily process, is rendered a curse, an uncleanness. Scripture is quite explicit in these matters, “When a woman has a discharge, and the discharge in her body is blood, she shall be in her menstrual impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening. And everything on

which she lies during her menstrual impurity shall be unclean. Everything also on which she sits shall be unclean. (...) And if any man lies with her and her menstrual impurity comes upon him, he shall be unclean seven days, and every bed on which he lies shall be unclean.” (Lev. 15:19-20, 24). This conception of menstruation as a sin has fueled the taboo many Western cultures have cultivated around it, both in the civil and the clerical worlds.

In 1878, women were subject to social restrictions when menstruating because it was seen as dangerous (Guterman, et al. 4). Many Catholics still hold the belief that it is prohibited to have intercourse with a woman on her period (Guterman, et al. 4). Russian Orthodox Christians make women live in a secluded hut while on their periods: they are prohibited from contact with men or food, and are thought to be polluting the air around them, or of causing bad weather (Guterman, et al. 4). Orthodox Jews, who observe the Pentateuch closely, make women take ritual baths to cleanse themselves from the uncleanness of menstruation (Hitchens 54). In what it pertains to the Church, this menstrual taboo has been foundational to women’s exclusion from authority roles in Christianity, and from receiving communion (Guterman, et al. 4). What Gottlieb has found is that the root of the widespread of menstrual taboo notions has been the Bible of the Jewish and Christian traditions (146). It is true, however, that not all necessarily see menstruation as a sin or as curse, but menstruation is still dealt with as a disease, a fundamental defect that ravages women’s bodies and psyches. It is thus inevitable to see the connection between Scriptural prescriptions in this matter, and how it has been dealt with for millennia.

Nevertheless, the most serious Scriptural undertaking when it comes to women, is its unequivocal toleration and, at times, endorsement of sexual assault against women. We have already mentioned Lot’s giving away of his daughters for men to “do to them as you please” (Gen. 19.8), which one way or another indicates the easiness of the practice. We mustn’t wonder,

however, for God specifies his laws about social justice. In Exodus 22:16-17, the Lord tells us, “If a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her, he shall give the bride-price for her and make her his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the bride-price for virgins”. Not only is her father’s consent and approval the only one that matters, but regardless of her consent, she must marry whoever lied with her, so it may be that she must marry her rapist. More similar situations appear across Scripture. The prescription that, “If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. *Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her.* [emphasis added]”, clearly shows how the woman has no choice, and if her husband dies, her brother-in-law will take her as he shall in order to fulfill his duty (Deut. 25.5-10). Deuteronomy 22:28-29 emulates this rhetoric, “if a man meets a virgin who is not betrothed, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are found, then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has violated her”.

As disheartening as it may be, a woman has to remain married to her sexual abuser, as if that is what a victim of rape would like for themselves. In the end, a woman’s rape is her own fault, as she is capable of crying for help, “If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the fate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry for help though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor’s wife” (Deut. 22.23). The Scripture’s narrative disproportionately burdens victims with the responsibility for not being assaulted, interestingly, a common rhetoric to this day. Lastly, virgin women were constantly being sought for King Ahasuerus’ harem, where they would be forced to beautify themselves for

twelve months to be at the whims of the King, waiting for when she would be summoned to lie with him (Esth. 2.12-14).

If free virgin women's sexuality was another commodity irrespective of their consent, servants and prisoners of war bore the brunt. Genesis 30:3 portrays a controversial passage nowadays, which has inspired the teachings of certain Christian denominations, i.e. People of Praise. In Genesis, Rachel gives Jacob her servant Bilhah so that he can have the child he desires, and so he does. Sarah gives Hagar, her handmaid for Abraham to impregnate (Gen, 16.3). Leah also gives Jacob her servant Zilpah to bear his son, and so she did (Gen. 30.9). Most striking is Leah's assertion that, "God has given me my wages because I gave my servant to my husband", showing that not only did she do the right thing in giving her servants out to be raped by her husband, but God also *rewarded* her for it (Gen. 30.18). Another similar divine endorsement is seen in 2 Samuel 16:20-23, where we find that Absalom rapes David's concubines in public after Ahithophel counsels him "as if one consulted the word of God".

Women were also, naturally, part of war conquests, so "when you go out to war against your enemies, and the Lord your God gives them into your hand and you take them captive, and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you desire to take her to be your wife, and you bring her home to your house (...) she shall take off the clothes in which she was captured and shall remain in your house and lament her father and her mother a full month. After that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife" (Deut. 21.10-13). Paul Copan argues that this is a "protective measure for the women prisoners of war", as this law aimed at protecting her personhood, not letting her be raped (Copan 187). This absurdity can only be thought of if one thinks that being kidnapped as a war prisoner, or that being married to your assaulter and hijacker would be protecting one's personhood. I find it hard to say that such could

ever be true, unless we are using a different definition of personhood in which women's very own individuality as a person is nonetheless tied to a man's whims. With the current exposition of the facts, however, it does not seem that Scripture is anywhere close to giving a true personhood character to women: their value is intrinsically connected to their reproduction and their submission to husbands, fathers, or masters. Not once is a woman's consent to sexual intercourse mentioned in Scripture; all that matters is whether her husband, master, or father approved it. You must not resort to the Bible to acknowledge that this is morally flawed, but you can find in it the foundation for holding this immoral stance. Even the Roman Church itself has been complicit with clergymen's widespread child rape, keeping offenders in the parishes where they are insulated from allegations (Hitchens 4, 228), so how can we expect mere laypersons to disambiguate what is moral or immoral in this context of sexual abuse that is so fundamentally part of the story of their salvation?

Lastly in this chapter, it is also important to touch on another prejudicial view: the prohibition against same-sex intercourse or relationships. A man that lies with a male as he does with a woman is seen as "an abomination", for those are "dishonorable passions (...) contrary to nature" (Lev. 18.22, Rom. 1.26). When men "gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another", these "shameless acts" of pursuing "unnatural desire" had very clear consequences (Rom. 1.26, Jude 7). This kind of "sexual immorality" sin is subject to three penalties: first, those engaging in it "shall be cut off from among their people"; second, "they shall surely be put to death"; lastly, they will undergo "a punishment of eternal fire" (Lev. 18.29, 20.13, Jude 7). Earthly and eternal castigation await those who commit the sin of homosexuality. Scripture's attitude on the impermissibility of these acts could not have been clearer, and once again, any layperson can clearly and distinctively derive that God, according to

Scripture, is definite about these matters, not according to one's own subjective interpretation of certain passages, but with a textualist approach.

Connections between Scripture and the poor treatment that the LGBTQ+ community is subjected to can also be drawn. Many Western religious societies (even if *de jure* secular) display high numbers of rate crime against gay men (2017 "*Hate Crime Statistics*"). LGBTQ+ youth in the United States is also 120% more likely to experience homelessness (Seip). In the entire world, approximately 20 to 30% of those living in homeless or analogous conditions are LGBTQ+ members (Carta Capital). To say that Scripture has a role in this negative, animal-like treatment of this group of people is the least. Here, I argue that Scripture has played a *distinct* role in propagating discriminatory notions that preach for the exclusion and death of certain people on the basis of their sexuality.

Surely one may object that contemporary conceptions of right and wrong sharply differ from those in the Ancient Near East. How dare I use our still in-progress conceptions of morality to judge actions of the long past? It is true that society has, widely speaking, a vastly different conception both on women and on homosexuality nowadays. It is not true, however, that those very ideas I cited from Scripture are dead in society. It is no shock that modern theocracies rank high in maintaining women under male domination (Shermer 222). Even the most conservative statistics place over 35% of the women in the world as victims of sexual harassment and violence ("*Rape Statistics by Country 2021*"). When it comes to LGBTQ+ members, many religious groups do not hesitate in expressing their volition to kill homosexuals, and Christian preachers still torment individuals to this day calling their sexuality, if not heterosexual, an abomination (Shermer 242, 252). A historical analysis points to how religious attitudes are among the greatest hindrances to the LGBTQ+ rights battle (Shermer 244). Framing not only acts but also

homosexual inclinations as sinful crimes renders the Bible into a static document in what pertains the conceptual moral change over these very notions (Copan 88). Even loose-interpretors or those in the cherry-picking middle have relied on Scripture to defend their anti-LGBTQ+ views. Copan and Flannagan cite Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1 as evidence for that *all* people are bound to the laws against homosexual practices, or against any sexual immorality as described in the Noahide laws, for that matter (56).

While many societies have adopted an equal and respectful treatment of women and LGBTQ+ members, it wasn't due to Scriptural teachings or religion. While there have been religious denominations that are far more progressive than others, Scripture couldn't be clearer in its precepts and condemnations concerning women as inferior beings, and homosexuals as unnatural anomalies. In the end, it was people that have fought for gay and women's rights, and some religious sects have followed along this trend, while many have not, only after a) progress was ongoing and b) after they have promoted heinous attitudes (Shermer 246, 253). Therefore, if we accept that 1) the Bible has highly immoral prescriptions when it comes to the treatment of certain persons *qua* persons of that kind, and 2) that Christian followers and/or biblical theists have and still adhere to those stances based on them being precepts from their religion, then 3) we can see that Scripture also fails as a proper moral guide in this matter.

3. CATEGORICAL HARM

Another matter subject to contention among scholars is that of Scriptural permissibility in what concerns categorical harm. In other words, does the Bible allow for actions such as genocide, death penalties, religious intolerance, child abuse, dispossessing people, and the lesser treatment of foreigners? In this section, I argue that Scripture allows for the possibility of individuals engaging in and supporting certain acts of categorical harm, theologically defensible, that is, while having Scripture as a sound justification for it. I find it useful to begin this quest by moving in accordance with degree of harm, finalizing this section on the question of genocide, which is undoubtedly the most controversial matter among the ones we are dealing with. With this discussion on situations that seem “to give Bible believers precedent for engaging in similar acts of aggression” (Copan and Flannagan 12), I hope to conclude our analysis on different moral issues as they pertain to Scripture and their connection to human action.

I characterize religious intolerance for the purposes of this project as not only the intolerance against a disparate religious belief, but also against religious *disbelief*, that is, believers’ intolerance against atheists. We already exposed in the beginning of this project that Psalm 53:1, that provides that atheists are corrupt because of their disbelief in God, could be easily utilized as a theological justification for the mistreatment and acknowledgement of atheists as immoral. Besides speculations, however, we can see the empirical form that this Scriptural prescription has taken. The biggest Bible apologetics in history such as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, or Aquinas, endorsed burning heretics alive based on Biblical interpretations, where Calvin himself burned a Unitarian heretic. (Bergmann, et al. 312). Both Saints, Aquinas and Augustine, thought heretics should be killed or torture (Harris 11). It is not a matter of chance that Aquinas saw God as the primary and principal author of Scripture and that he thus, followed

principles in accordance with Scripture (Copan and Flannagan 21). We will later in this section see how the conception of a group as wicked people with the potential of corrupting others, can form a theologically defensible grounds for their very end. No wonder that we can't even know much about atheists throughout history, as this disbelief has "in all times and all places been subject to ruthless suppression" (Hitchens 254). In need of timelier illustrations, we can see how the Colorado U.S Air Force Academy's agnostics and Jews were bullied by Born Again Christians that aimed at forcing belief in Jesus as a requirement for service. Complaints against the continuous proselytizing were met with suppression, while the bullies went unpunished (Hitchens 33). Countrywide, however, have the oppositional stances against atheists been. Charles Stanley, Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Atlanta, endorsed war against those that oppose God, *because* God says so (Hitchens 35).

Blasphemy, or one's dissenting opinion about the seemingly 'God norm', is also validly inferred from Scripture to be proper grounds for doing away with individuals. Leviticus 24:16 couldn't be more explicit in that "Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD *shall surely be put to death* [emphasis added]. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death". Salman Rushdie had a fatwa issued upon him and had to seek exile from India because of his controversial book, *The Satanic Verses*, where Rushdie paralleled the Quran with 'Satanic Verses'. For his was considered an act of blasphemy, he was wanted dead by the Muslim Ayatollah. The Vatican, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel, the Cardinal Archbishop of New York, and others, took the Ayatollah's side in that an immoral act was taken against the Muslim faith -- blasphemy. While the death threats may have been denounced, the support for blasphemy as a sin was upheld, opening the door for one's acceptance of the Biblical prescriptions against it

(Hitchens 30). Likewise, the Pope and Archbishop of Canterbury condemned the Danish cartoons that provided a caricature of Muhammad, validating the ‘immorality’ of blasphemy (Hitchens 281). Blasphemy provisions were also prevalent in the U.S – Maryland considered it a crime punishable by torture, branding, and death (Hitchens 34). Could these stances have been more coherent with the Scriptural text’s assertions? I don’t see how to argue otherwise.

In what concerns the religious intolerance against other religions, the Scriptural text is quite clear. Deuteronomy 13:6-9, shows to do what is right under the eyes of God is to kill those (even family members) that want to worship other gods or might try and get you to believe in other gods. Adding to this commandment, Exodus 23:24 clarifies that not only one shall not serve other gods, but one shall “utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces”. The abomination of idol worship or following other religions should also be met with death, whether you’re an old man, a young man, a young woman, a married woman, or a child (Ezek. 9.6). Moses himself, when he realizes his people started worshipping a golden calf, commands that the most amount of idolaters be killed, a commandment “ordained for the service of the LORD, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother, *so that he might bestow a blessing upon you this day* [emphasis added]” (Exod. 3.29) – killing idolaters was worthy of God’s blessedness. In Numbers 25, Moses also condemns the Midianite worshippers of Baal of Peor to impalement. Lastly, the book of Zechariah maintains the provisions against idolaters, specifically, “(...) And his father and mother who bore him shall pierce him through when he prophesies” (Zech. 13.3).

Both Exodus 34 and Deuteronomy 7:3 give precise prescriptions that one should destroy the altars and images of other gods’ worshippers, with apparent soundness with events as the Taliban attack against the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan’s righteousness. The Islamic law against idol worship may not have been directly based on the same Scripture that concerns this

project. Nonetheless, if it had been issued by a Christian government, it would still, according to the Scriptural text, present a pious action for the salvation of humanity. What is difficult to defend, however, is that any society should accept that as sufficient justification for the destruction of a certain culture. We certainly do not want to allow for the loophole in which divinely authorized murder is acceptable murder.

The rules on death punishments, as delineated by Scripture, include more than just provisions against atheists and idolaters. As we discussed previously, sexual immorality was punishable by death. Furthermore, so was cursing one's parents, as Jesus himself laid out the appropriateness of the Mosaic death penalty laws (Copan and Flannagan 42). In Deuteronomy 21:18-21, we find the provisions for when one's son is stubborn and rebellious: "all men of the city shall stone him to death with stones". But how can one discipline one's child? Proverbs 13:24 has the answer: "Whoever spared the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.", as we see previously that "a rod is for the back of him who lacks sense" (Prov. 10.13). If the issue remains obscure, Scripture enlightens us, "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol" (Prov. 23.13-14).

Surely one may object to the fact that this child abuse is not propagated in society and was fruit of the rudimentary times where Scripture was canonized. Unfortunately, we have empirical evidence that this text has led to real action from believers and informs societal views on disciplining children. The Bethel Baptist Church in El Sobrante, CA is a great example. It is not just that the denomination tells members to "Spank your children or oppose God's will", but that the church "recommends using a 'rod' or flexible stick to swat children until their will is broken" because "*all other methods are not designed by God* [emphasis added]" (Bergmann, et

al. 44). Child abuse has been foundational to biblical teachings, and they are still propagated to this day on the name of God. Child abuse in the name of God is not only a reality in North America. Brazil had to enact a law against the corporal punishment of children by their parents because of the high religiosity rate in the country in which the main justification for physical punishment was to please God (Alkimin). It is of little surprise that the fiercest opposition to this law came from the Evangelical Caucus in the Brazilian Congress, who saw this law as a hindrance to their religious freedom of disciplining their children as God wishes them to, based specifically, on the aforementioned biblical verses (Feitosa and Macêdo).

Whether one might see Abraham's sacrifice attempt or Jephthah's sacrifice of his own daughter as representative of that notion, we don't need to go this far into the dialectic of God's biblical commands. We already have in hand evidence that Scriptural explicit provisions on educating one's children not only demands child abuse but is in fact propagated as a proper guide of conduct *because* the literal text of the Bible says so. One can arrive at the understanding that educating children by spanking and abusing them is immoral *despite* of Scripture, but within it, one can find a theologically defensible justification for doing so (Bergmann, et al. 44). That is, of course, only if we consider that spanking one's child with a rod until their will is broken to be indicative of child abuse, which is a position I maintain.

Some of the systemic violence against women also had its biblical roots. In Leviticus 20:27 we find that due to their unholiness, "A woman (...) who is (...) a necromancer shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones; their blood shall be upon them" and Exodus 22:18 underscores the idea that one must never allow a witch to live. From these notions it followed that the Roman Catholic Church propagated the idea that witches are the causal explanation for evil, to the point of issuing guides as to how to prosecute them (Shermer 109-

110). Before we discard this by the virtue of its outdatedness, we must shift our Westernized standpoint. In countries like Papua New Guinea, India, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Tanzania, Kenya, and Sierra Leone, so-called witches still face the threat of immolation. Truth be told, witch believers outnumber non-believers in sub-Saharan Africa (Shermer 110). A 2002 World Health Organization report illuminates the severity of the issue: thousands of women and children have been killed and torched in Nigeria and Tanzania by not only just any believer, but by bishops as well (Shermer 110). More recently, in 2013, a Papuan woman was tortured “with a hot iron rod, (...) and doused in gasoline and ignited” (Shermer 110-111). Paul Copan himself admits that horrendous acts, including the witch hunts, have been done in the name of God or Christ, and once more, I find it extremely difficult to argue that Scripture cannot be used as a theological defense for such categorical harm (Copan 369).

Without much digression, I think it is also useful to see the kind of loophole that Scripture is subject to that allows for the justification on one’s discriminatory contemporary political stance, that is, the lesser treatment of immigrants. Paul Copan justifies the discrimination against immigrants in the U.S. and the neglect of their basic needs with Scripture. In Romans 13 we find the provisions regarding the submission to authorities. In it, tax payment is underscored as an act of submission to the authorities, and thus, to God. Copan distorts this text to affirm that according to Romans 13, “for the sake of maintaining order and preserving the privilege and dignity of citizenship in a country, priority should be given to tax-paying citizens over illegals when it comes to health care, drivers’ licenses, insurance, and the like” (240). His analysis continues, “The same held true in Ancient Israel. The foreigner (*nokri*) was more like an illegal immigrant. The resident alien/sojourner (*ger*), however, sought to play by Israel’s rules. Unlike the resident alien, foreigners weren’t willing to abide by Israel’s covenant relationship

with God, so they shouldn't expect to receive all the privileges of an Israelite citizen" (Copan 240). It is clear, thus, that the anarchy in Scriptural exegeses *can* and *has* allowed for the grounding of immoral views on the Bible.

Before getting to genocide *per se*, we shall analyze how the Scriptural text, in what pertains the dispossessing of people, has related to worldly colonization efforts and how it can inspire further dispossession in contemporary times. The Israelites had followed Moses' lead so that they could get to the Promised Land. However, the Land that is taken to be rightfully Jewish, was inhabited by other communities. Thus, we understand why in Numbers 21:32 Moses dispossesses the Amorites, and why Numbers 33:50 provides for the driving out and complete dispossession of the Canaanites. The book of Joshua shows the quest towards continuing the late Moses' legacy and taking charge in bringing God's people to the Promised Land. Reading this with history on our side, many people will derive from the book that God has promises for a new day coming in the future. However, many have not seen it under such light. As Nicholas Wolterstorff grants, the danger of the book of Joshua can be seen in that "Colonists are strongly tempted to read it as authorizing violent conquest in the name of God. That's how some of the American colonists read it, that's how some of the Afrikaner colonists read it, that's how some Israelis today read it, as they attempt to dispossess the Palestinians." (Bergmann, et al. 256).

It is precisely in modern day Zionism that we can see how Scripture allows for heinous acts to be done in its name. The Prophet Amos promised that the people of Israel would be brought from exile and "they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them", and that God "will plant on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them" (Amos 9.14-15). Israeli efforts in dispossessing Palestinians base their sovereignty claim over Judea and Samaria (now the disputed areas of the Palestinian West Bank) in passages such as

Deuteronomy 1:6-8, Genesis 15:18-21, and Exodus 23:31 in which God delineates the areas promised to his chosen people (Goodman and Levy 55). Therefore, Israel currently exercises colonial rule over Palestinians through disenfranchisement, occupation, land confiscation, and expulsion, in order to fulfill the divine prophecy and promise (Goodman and Levy 55). It is not only that the possibility exists that modern Israelites will make territorial claims over another nation and act on these claims, but rather, that *is* what currently takes place. Scripture is the foundation for Zionist sovereignty claims over Palestine, and thousands of Palestinians are being dispossessed by the day. The only standpoint in which this can be considered moral is the standpoint of the individual that believes to be entitled to this piece of land because they are part of God's chosen people. Otherwise, this dispossession on religious grounds is nothing but another humanitarian crisis.

We may now enter the discussion on I genocide warrants. As complex as this theme is, I must lay out my goal. I will present the Scriptural instances where, if literally read, God commands genocide. Then, I will present the argument that supports that God commanded genocide in specific instances, namely, the 'issuing of difficult commandments' claim. What will follow will be the contraposing argument that not all of God's seemingly genocidal commands were in fact such. I will respond to these claims posing the empirical evidence we have in hand in what concerns these matters, concluding that both arguments – the difficult commandments argument and the historical analysis – fail at circumventing the loophole issue, that is, despite of them, believers can and do still derive a theological defense for genocide.

There are around at least eleven occurrences of the biblical God commanding his chosen people to utterly destroy others (Copan and Flannagan 80). Highlighting a few, we have Numbers 31:2, where the Lord incites Moses to attack the Midianites, which in turn, would allow

them to be gathered to their people. Deuteronomy 20 gives guidelines on committing genocide against foreign people in a land that the chosen people would want to conquer, verse 16 illuminates that everyone in the nearby towns of the conquest should be killed. In 1 Samuel, Samuel asks Saul to “strike down Amalek, and put under the ban everything he has, you shall not spare him, and you shall put to death man and woman, infant and sucking, ox and sheep, camel and donkey”, and this very story still plays a political role for the Prime Minister of Israel in his dealings against Iran. Continuously, however, we find the issuing of commandments that relate to the destruction of other communities. In Jeremiah 50:21, God commands that his people “(...) kill, and devote them [Babylonians] to destruction” for their idol worship. The prescription against Babylonians continues in Psalm 137:7-8, “(...) blessed are those who take your little ones and dash them against the rock”. In the book of Joshua, 6:21 explains what took place in Jericho: “they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkey, with the edge of the sword”. Because of the explicit language, Richard Dawkins equated the accounts of the destruction of Jericho and the invasion of the Promised Land with Hitler’s invasion of Poland (280). In the following verses we find that “just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded”, “Joshua captured all the cities of these kings, and all their kings, and he struck them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed them” (Josh. 11.12). Further, in the surrounding cities, “(...) they left no one who breathed”, because God has issued this commandment to Moses, who passed it along to Joshua, who “left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded Moses” (Josh. 11.15).

What we can see is that the biblical text in itself is not esoteric in what pertains to the matter in hand. However, one of the views I aim at exposing solves the seeming contradiction between an all-loving good deity and a God that demands the utter destruction of whole

civilizations. What I call the ‘difficult commandments argument’ asserts that God, at times, has to issue difficult commandments to accomplish his purposes, and in certain highly unusual situations, God’s ends would justify these commandments. William Lane Craig argues that the crucial moral principle against slaughtering various peoples, in its *stricto sensu*, doesn’t hold for all always – a just God would have sufficient reason to deviate from this moral principle in specific instances (qtd. In Copan and Flannagan 145). One may wonder what could possibly characterize a circumstance in which a community’s annihilation becomes permissible? First, God wouldn’t issue the slaughter of innocents, only of morally wicked and corrupt cultures (Bergmann, et al. 99). Second, the wickedness of such a culture must be so abominable that it poses the danger of corrupting the righteous (Bergmann, et al. 142). So, following this argument, there are instances, as reflected in Scripture, in which God commanded the slaughter of certain wicked people, such as the Canaanites, the Babylonians, the Amorites, and Jerichoans, to accomplish his just and loving ends.

But what led these people to be so wicked? Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan enlighten us on the topic: “The kinds of wicked acts (Deut. 9:4-5) the Canaanites engaged in *were not trivial: incest, adultery, bestiality, ritual possession, homosexual acts*, [emphasis added] and most significantly, child sacrifice (Lev. 18; Deut. 12:29-31)” (75). They go on to explain that even modern Western societies render these acts impermissible, or illegal, and that to this day we consider these actions abominable, justifying some nation’s capital punishment against them. We also seem to have evidence that these abominable acts would in fact corrupt the Israelites, as the Midianites had led the Israelites into adultery and idolatry at Baal-Peor, inducing, precisely, the “divinely mandated battle against them” (Copan and Flannagan 273). However, haven’t we already seen that the Israelites themselves were morally flawed? First, God constantly threatens

to destroy the Israelites due to their bad actions (Bergmann, et al. 262). Second, if we recall the moral development objection we engaged with in the elementary sections of this project, wasn't the reason why God didn't issue specific and progressive commands to the Israelites *because* they were so corrupt that he had to "tone down" his moral demands? (Bergmann, et al. 93) It doesn't seem to follow that the utter destruction of others merely on the grounds of wickedness is sufficient explanation for the phenomenon. Further, if we analyze the so-called wicked actions, it is hard to justify that they are to be met with utter destruction. Incest itself is legal in certain U.S. states and several Western and Eastern countries. Adultery laws have long become unenforced and is hardly seen as a basis for capital punishment (besides in certain theocracies). Despite the eleven Islamic jurisdictions that punish homosexuality with death, the amount of nations that support "homosexual acts" outnumbers the dissenters. It is not so clear that, as Copan and Flannagan maintain, contemporary modern society also perceives these acts as abominable and worthy of capital punishment. Of course, the morality held in the Ancient Near East was completely oppositional to this, but whether people agree or disagree on these issues, the objective moral character of certain actions remains unchanged. What we are faced with is, thus, that certain actions, which are not *necessarily* and *absolutely* immoral were the justification for a group of people to be utterly destroyed.

If we are to uphold that God sometimes issues difficult commands for the sake of just and loving ends, Louise Antony's conclusion follows, that is, that the only crime the Canaanites committed were living in the land God wanted to give his people. That is the case because the evidence in hand already points to the notion that the Israelites *were* considered wicked, and so were the Canaanites, so the issuing of the command for the latter's utter destruction on the grounds of wickedness becomes superfluous. Further, this justification fails at evading the fact

that modern readers can derive that divinely mandated wars against wicked people (whatever one's subjective notion of wicked may be) for their salvation is morally permissible. As Wes Morriston argues, one could easily find an analogy between Biblical narratives and the possibility of a highly militarized country like the United States, "to obliterate (...) the nation of Iran", of which many find to be a wicked nation (qtd. in Copan and Flannagan 50). Surely, the response follows that the commandment against the Canaanites was issued under the specific context of the Abrahamic covenant, and thus, was an occasional command not intended to bind us moderns (Copan and Flannagan 57-58). At one point in history God may have commanded Joshua to utterly destroy the Canaanites, and "no other country in history was set apart for this purpose of party to this covenant" (Copan and Flannagan 57). The action doesn't become permissible merely because God commanded it in one specific historical context for a specific theological end, and one must not generalize its permissibility (Copan 293). While this aims at solving the issue of, for example, the possibility of the United States claiming a divinely mandated war against another nation, how is one to determine what is and what isn't a legitimate divine command? How are we to tell the sincere believer that his claim that God issued him a commandment for the killing of wicked people and that otherwise he will burn in hell is false? While we may want to render it false, I find it disingenuous to do so if we are to maintain that at one point God did issue this commandment. If he has done it once, who are we to infer into the mind of the divinity and interpret it as otherwise? We will return to this question shortly.

The counterargument asserts that an important part of this dialectic is that not all of the biblical genocidal commandments are in fact such. If the Joshua chapters were to be read literally and in isolation, it would be fair to conclude that Israel committed genocide against the Canaanites (Copan and Flannagan 82). If we compare, however, the biblical literature with other

Ancient Near East literatures, and we analyze the broader canonical context “it is evident [!]” that not all occurrences of the ‘utterly destroy’ language are to be understood literally, but rather, that “the biblical narrative utilizes hyperbolic (...) syntagms to build up the account” (Copan and Flannagan 99). The hyperbolic tone indicated by an extensive cross-analysis, thus, shows that it wasn’t often that God wanted to annihilate other peoples, sometimes they were just to be dispossessed (Copan and Flannagan 76). As Copan affirms, dispossessing people is completely different from wiping them out or destroying them. A historical and canonical analysis will tell us that it would be highly contradictory if it was the fact that in the book of Joshua genocide had truly taken place – the following books show how not everyone was killed. A grammatical analysis of Deuteronomy 20:10-18 shows us how the language only permits the killing of men in a certain situation, and not all people were killed anyway, as the Biblical war accounts are to be read as highly hyperbolic (Copan and Flannagan 58). This hyperbolic character also explains that the utter destruction of the Canaanites didn’t refer to their culture, but merely to their wicked religious practices (Copan and Flannagan 107) – one can derive these notions by engaging in a scholarly analysis of the canonization process, the history of the Ancient Near East, and the war literature of the time.

Unfortunately, the layperson, or in this case, the lay believer does not engage in this type of complex quest in search for the truth about specific syntagms and their meaning in Ancient literature. If one must engage in a highly complex scholarly endeavor to derive this idea, it is clear that such notion will not be available to all. So while we may argue that this or that morpheme means X, Y, or Z based on a holistic investigation of grammar, history, and theology, this won’t yield a practical effect: the bulk of believers are not, in fact, scholars and academics. Hence, relying on a highly intricate Scriptural interpretation with the hopes of illuminating the

fact that God probably did or did not issue a commandment to the extent that it is said to literally have been, is nothing other than an illusion. We can go back and forth *ad infinitum* pointing at specific passages as an attempt of showing which one does and which one doesn't represent God accurately, but this subjectivity is not only a cherry-picker tool, but also fails as a realistic option when we consider the demographics of believers across the globe.

Eric Seibert asserts that the distinction we must pay heed to is that, considering the hyperbolic tone, the 'textual' God may have commanded genocide, but it doesn't mean that the 'actual' God did (qtd. in Copan and Flannagan 50). I concur with Richard Dawkins in that theologians may protest against divinely commanded genocide actually having taken place, based on the cross-literary and holistic Biblical analysis, but "The point is that, whether true or not, the Bible is held up to us as the source of our morality", and what it does say loud and clear, is that the utter destruction of certain groups was mandated by God so that his chosen people could relish their Promised Land (280).

Yet, the crux of the matter isn't whether the facticity of these events holds, or which intentions God has. The latter, for example, is subject to the very contentions that are the object of this project. On the one hand some scholars' canonical analyses derive God's reasons for issuing certain commands, on the other hand, others contend that "Scripture leaves us largely in the dark as to why God issues the commands in the first place" (Copan and Flannagan 233). In spite of this, what concerns this project is whether these passages can be twisted for evil purposes in modernity, that is, whether one can use or has used these literally-read passages concerning genocide as a drive to action.

In the colonization of North America, Catholic nobleman Sir George Peckham resorted to the Old Testament to justify the British conquest: comparing God's commands to the Israelites in

Canaan to British prerogatives over North America, Peckham concluded that the British were God's new chosen people, "thus possessed a divine mandate to 'plant, possess, and subdue' those regions of the world still inhabited by heathens and savages", and he added that "(...) the extermination of Canaanite resisters (...) afforded ample precedent for the English successors to God's favor in their dealings with the 'heathen' and 'idolaters' who dealt in the New World Canaan." (Cave 282). In Colonial America, the Puritan Reverend Richard Mather rendered the Pequot Indians of Connecticut as "cursed seeds of Canaan", which justified the advancement of a "holy war" against the Natives (294). Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan themselves claim that "legitimate governments have a God-given obligation to protect their citizens from the threats within and without – to 'bear the sword' (Romans 13:1-7)" (297). The former also asserts that currently, "our warfare against Satan and his hosts has its roots in Yahweh wars in the Old Testament" (Copan 252).

It is quite evident that not only has Scriptural war text inspired and justified dispossession efforts via colonization and maintaining the right that a divinely commanded war is a just war. One may object that just because, for example, Islamic terrorists believe that God mandated suicide bombing, it doesn't follow that divine command theory should support terrorism. While I agree, this diverts from the scope of this project. It may very well be the case that merely because people are carrying out immoral actions inspired by the Scriptural text that doesn't mean that they are correctly doing so. The point is, however, that this does commit biblical Scripture to the loophole issue I presented. The Bible *can* in fact be used to justify wiping people out – Christian Churches were highly implicated in the Rwandan genocide, and many Zionist figures assert their position based on the Biblical text that affirms the Jewish's destiny is to return to the Promised Land (Goodman and Levy 53), and that is just scratching the surface.

William Lane Craig words couldn't ring truer when he argues that the only way that the biblical theist would endorse Hitler or the Rwandan genocide "if the biblical theist believes that Hitler, (...) or the Hutus were commanded by God to do what they did" (Copan and Flannagan 145). It may be discomfiting to admit that anyone would endorse these pro-ethnic cleansing views, but history shows us that people do at times support them. This is precisely where the loophole issue intrigues us: not only people have wicked ideas, but they find in Scripture a coherent basis for them. Once more, I must emphasize that the object of my claim isn't whether action X or Y did in fact take place, rather, what concerns us is that actions X and Y *are said to have happened* not by any mundane or banal literature, but by the book that is self-described to contain the words of the Savior. This fact alone is the root of the problem we have in hand.

To finalize, we shall return to the question we left on hold. How are we to distinguish a legitimate prophetic claim from an illegitimate one? How are we to tell that God did expect the Israelites to dispossess the Canaanites, but he doesn't expect, let's say, the current Israeli government to dispossess the Palestinians from the Promised Land? Copan and Flannagan argue that we can easily deny a current prophetic claim of divinely mandated war because of the "lack of prophetic and character qualifications, absence of supporting divine signs and wonders, and the like" (318). This fails, however, as a useful criterion for this distinction. Deuteronomy 7 states, "When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, (...) and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. You shall not intermarry with them, (...). But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their Asherim and burn their carved images with fire. (...) *Know*

therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations [emphasis added] (...)"'. This can very easily be understood by any modern-day Jewish Israelite that the arrangements of God's covenants are still in place, being very strong evidence even by Copan and Flannagan's standards. Can we blame Zionists for believing the word of the Savior? Regardless of how implausible or wrong individuals may find this, the sincere believer cannot be at fault for taking God's words as absolute when it comes to core of the Old Testament – God delivering his Promised Land. The hermeneutical maneuvers here presented also show the power of the loophole issue – it allows for the fact that at least once, God commanded the slaughter of certain people, and how could mere mortals like us tell whether God has or has not found another special circumstance in which he has to issue difficult commands for the sake of his loving ends? The unfalsifiable prophetic claim of modern Jews is, at minimum, at par with the biblical claims.

While rich, the discussion on a) whether God did command genocide, b) whether genocide did take place, or c) what reasons God did or did not have in commanding certain undertakings, is purposeless. What concerns us is what is *written* in the Holy Bible, and what is written, textually speaking, is that God issues the command to utterly destroy the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Moabites, the Jerichoans, and so on and so forth until the Promised Land could have been inhabited by the chosen people. I have no qualms with the objection that the exegetical method I propose may fall under the fallacy of misplaced realism – misunderstanding a hyperbolic statement for a literal one (Copan and Flannagan 171). If we are to accept that this is indeed a fallacious argument (which I don't think we can), this only shows us how easy and plausible it is for others to fall under the same fallacy. As previously stated, the majority of religion adherents that come into contact and engage with these texts are poor and uneducated.

The working class is not a body of scholars meticulously cross-analyzing Ancient Near East texts, finding the roots of Hebrew words, or critically inspecting Scriptural syntagms. The mass of people that come into contact to this text and resort to it in times of trouble are highly susceptible to falling into, if it really is such, the fallacy of misplaced realism. Failing to evade the loophole issue, people still have theological grounds for supporting genocide, the dispossession of others, or the overall categorical harm posited in Scripture.

In conclusion, first, the ‘difficult commandments argument’ fails to provide a proper and clear criterion on how to differentiate a legitimate divine mandate from an illegitimate one. If we accept that God issued *once* the command to slaughter others, then the possibility that he may do it again is still alive, and we, as mere humans who lack Divine Providence are incapable of inferring into the mind of the divinity and tell whether he has or will issue those difficult commandments again as we cannot possibly know God’s purposes to their full extent. Likewise, the historical and canonical analysis that provides a holistic exegetical method in which the totality of Scripture, Ancient Near East warfare accounts, and hyperbolic rhetoric is taken into account in order to derive truth from the Bible, also fails in being a practical and efficient method for avoiding the loophole issue. The working-class layperson cannot afford the time to question the words of salvation. Further, they don’t have the resources to even engage in such a quest or the means to analyze what Hebrew grammatical particles mean in order to decipher the meaning of the text. While it might be “evident” for certain scholars how certain passages are to be read, many laypeople simply “listen to the words of the cloud of witnesses who speak to them across millennia from its [Bible] pages” (Bergmann, et al. 134). When an entire scholarly historical analysis is required to point out that it may not be the case that God expects us, now, to violate the moral principle against destroying communities, then all that matters is history. History

shows us that people have used the text to justify atrocious acts that are coherent with the literal Scriptural text. History also shows us that people are, currently, still using the text to justify barbarity. Whichever reading is preferred, the conclusion is clear that what appears to us is that God “doesn’t so much care whether murder occurs as he cares whether the murder is *authorized*” (Bergmann, et al. 40), and precisely this high bar is impossible to be met with absolute certainty due to the unfalsifiable character of religious claims that emulate the Scriptural text, and thus, the possibility remains of the theological defense for a stance that supports any of the categorical harms exposed in this section. Hence, the Bible, as a moral guide on this matter, appears to us as flawed.

CONCLUSION

We shall return to our goals *ab ovo*. I aimed at exposing three instances that show us the lethal danger of biblical Scripture. To that end, I brought to light the fact that there is an interpretative spectrum in which individuals may fall under literal or fundamentalist interpreters, cherry-picking interpreters, or loose- or non-interpreters. What follows from this spectrum is that many biblical interpretations are plausible, but all are subject to the loophole issue. As outlined in this paper, the loophole issue is nothing other than the fact that due to there not existing an absolute biblical interpretation, but an interpretation spectrum of which the lowest bar for soundness with it it's a literal cohesion, this spectrum allows for loopholes in which individuals can and have ascribed to immoral precepts and undertook immoral and abominable acts in the name of God in a theologically defensible manner. We shall summarize our findings hitherto.

We have attempted to provide three accounts of instances in which the possibility of an individual undertaking an immoral action due to their reading of Scripture exists. That is such because, as I argue in this paper, Scripture contains passages in which, if read literally, either permit, endorse, or command people to engage in immoral actions. That is, they can be theological precedents for supporting undertakings like slavery, racism, religious intolerance, subordination of women, homophobia, colonization, dispossession, or even genocide. This paper, logically, characterizes those actions as immoral ones.

We argued that Biblical-based morality fails in two counts: epistemically and motivationally. We expect to have shown that 1) biblical theists – those that accept both that God exists, and that the Bible has his authoritative word – *as* such don't necessarily have any advantage in identifying true morality or properly disambiguating between right and wrong in comparison to the non-biblical theist, an atheist, or an individual that follows secular values

(Copan and Flannagan 141). If it were the case, the empirical data we would find wouldn't be so opaque. Instead of finding that those looking at Scripture to identify good from bad are (at best) just as susceptible to acting immorally as to those who don't look at it for these purposes, we would find that the former would be disproportionately affected by an accurate identification of true morality, or in other words, would be acting "well" in disproportionate amounts in relation to individuals in the latter condition. What we have exposed here, however, is that Scripture can be a stumbling block to those looking for moral answers – it can, quite coherently, drive people to act immorally.

Our second aim was to have shown that 2) religion's motivational aspect also fails – contrariwise, it is precisely one of the driving tools for the misidentification of morality as above-mentioned. The religious incentives that can motivate action – a policing divinity and the emotive relationship with the divine – are precisely what gives the theological justification when one engages in an immoral action based on textual reading. Religion entails this motivational factor, so how can we tell the sincere believer who is sincerely motivated to act on his beliefs and feelings towards the divinity and who may be afraid of divine backlash in the scenario where he doesn't engage in a certain action, that his belief is immoral and thus he shouldn't do so? Religion is what can motivate his immoral action, and everything that it entails allows for the problem in which it fails in having a distinct role in motivating individuals to do good or to identify what is good. The quest we promised to engage in, that of showing that Christian followers and/or biblical theists do not act exclusively in a virtuous fashion and do in fact utilize Scripture for ignoble ends, has been reached. To show that this has been established, we will summarize our findings as it pertains to the three categories this project concerned itself with.

In our account of the relationship between biblical prescriptions on slavery and its discharge in action, we showed that there has been and that still can be a correlation between religious belief – or for the sake of this project, belief in Christian Scripture as the word of God – and one’s warm feelings towards slavery or racism. We pointed out how during the Transatlantic Slave Trade, Catholic priests and Protestant pastors utilized Scripture and its precepts to justify and accept the practice. Narrowing down to the American context, we saw how Scripture was used both as a support for abolitionist as well as for segregationist and pro-slavery stances. We showed that this was due to the problem of arbitrariness that hail from the scriptural interpretation spectrum: biblical cherry-pickers use certain passages to justify one’s point of view when it is convenient to do so. Since we are concerned with coherence, we wanted to make sure that one could soundly derive the pro-slavery or segregationist stance. What we found is that there are several passages in which, if, literally read, can provide a plausible foundation for such. To summarize, Exodus 21:20-21 can be a clear justification for hitting one’s slave with a rod as long as they don’t die, and Titus 2:9 plays the same role in justifying the maintenance of one’s status as a slave. To this day, as informal as that may be, Bible apologetics call atheist shows to justify slavery using Scripture, and Protestants maintain that movements like Black Lives Matter are anti-Christian because the Gospel is clearly against racial reconciliation. Thus, we contend that the possibility that concerns us exists: one *can* derive a pro-slavery or pro-segregationist stance that is coherent with what the Bible, textually speaking, says, and thus, represents an instance in which one can have a sound theological defense for supporting slavery and racism.

In our delineation of the causal probability between the Scriptural text and action aimed at the various levels of subordination of women or the mistreatment of homosexuals, we also showed that there has been and that still can be a high correlation between one’s religious belief

in Scripture and one's prejudicial feelings towards women or members of the LGBTQ+ community. We once more cross-examined what the Scripture, textually speaking, says and some of the attitudes believers have held regarding the subject. Passages such as Genesis 3:16, or the laying out of the Ten Commandments show women's objectified status. Passages such as Numbers 30:5-13 shows women's lesser status in comparison to men/her husband or father. Timothy 3 delineates the kinds of jobs women cannot have, emphasizing how they must be, hierarchically, below men. Scripture also lays out the precepts against menstruation, or better saying, for its characterization as an uncleanness or a curse. Another matter of contention for us was the fact that women's consent is never mentioned either in sexual relations or for marriage, whereas her husband's or father's is required.

In the subject of homosexuality, passages like Leviticus 18 or Romans 1:26 are explicit about the inordinate nature of homosexual inclinations and the earthly and divine punishment that would result from it. Textually speaking, the Bible can be coherently read as a guide on how to treat both of these groups. Stances against the participation of women in the workforce, or contrary to the belief that sexual assault is possible, or even of considering women inferior to men are not at all far from what the biblical text says, in fact, they are strikingly indistinguishable from it. The same is true for anti-LGBTQ+ stances. Once more, the possibility that concerns us holds true. In the case of women and homosexuality, one can coherently derive the attitude that both groups as less-than or even that homosexuality should be met with the death penalty, in high coherence with the text we have exposed in this project. One can, consistently, derive a theological defensible stance for the lesser status of women (commodification, objectification, sexual assault...) and against homosexual practices or inclinations.

Lastly, we analyzed whether the possibility we were looking for exists for certain instances of categorical harm. First, can believers coherently derive a religious intolerant or an anti-atheist stance? Second, can pro-child abuse be coherently derived from the Scriptural text? Has the witch-hunt brutality had a coherent justification in Scripture? Can one derive the stance that some people should be dispossessed based on the Bible? Can one justify the extermination of a group of people based on the same grounds? The textual clarity in these topics aids our investigation. Across history, apologetics and believers have justified the repression against so-called heretics with biblical mandates from the books of Leviticus to Psalms. Idolaters and worshippers of other gods are also to be met with suppression and death. The anti-atheist sentiments that are found to this day can be easily traced to the Bible. The rules on disciplining children as stated in Proverbs have been directly related to how certain denominations preach the permissibility of certain actions, and these views have been so widely observed that countries have had to pass laws banning these religious-based practices. Women seen as witches have been tortured and burned to death, as is famously known, millennia ago. Surprisingly to some, the practice still currently takes place in non-Western nations in the name of God.

Modern day Zionism shows how Scripture can be used to achieve theologically defensible ends via evil means. The passages exposed in this project show 1- that the dispossession of certain people was documented in the bible as mandated by god, and 2- that this very precedent is still used to this day. Current Zionists have the biblical text on their side in that the Promised Land is, according to Scripture, rightfully of Israelites, and that its demarcations include current Palestinian territory. Considering that, arguably, one of the Old Testament's *main* if not *the* purpose is to show God's covenant with Abraham and the articulation of the Promise that this covenant involved, the use of Scripture for Zionists' claims of Palestinian territory based

on divine authority is not, by any means, unwarranted. Lastly, we have argued that when it comes to the language that, at best, is seemingly endorsing genocide, and at worse, is commanding genocide, the possibility of it being used for these ends nowadays is not implausible. We have fully accepted that a) it could be the case that the seemingly genocidal language is merely hyperbolic, or the claim b) that genocide didn't in fact take place, or c) that it wouldn't make sense for someone else to claim divine warrant for genocide because the text is very specific to a context that involves God's covenant with Abraham in which God had justification to issue these commandments—they were done in congruence with God's just and loving ends for humanity.

We see, however, that there's no point in disputing any of these claims as they are unfalsifiable. What we concluded was that neither claim a) nor claim b) are useful. Their true or false character don't change what the text says, and what we are concerned here is what has been posited. Claim c) may circumvent the possibility of just any nation claiming divinely mandated genocide, but it certainly doesn't get around Zionists' claims for the dispossession of Palestinians, *au contraire*, it reinforces it. And even though claim c) may be sound, it doesn't change the fact that people can misuse the text – the way it is written allows for this. The Rwandan genocide itself had its religious roots, and millions of Tutsis were killed by Hutu hands, and one of the justifications for this ethnic cleansing came from the Church influences in the country that saw its justified precedent in Scripture and was one of the most influential proponents of the Tutsi genocide (Longman 2). Either way, the text is clear, and any layperson can coherently derive that from the Scriptural text.

This discussion engenders the objection that there is a difference between a commandment that God actually commanded and a commandment someone says they believe or

claim that God commanded (Copan and Flannagan 185). This difference is utterly unfalsifiable. The epistemic position required for one “knowing that God *actually* commanded something” is the same in which the person is just believing or claiming that God commanded something (when he didn’t), they are both still faith-based, one is just affirming that they know an unfalsifiable position, which they just don’t, and the other thinks that they know, which is also unfalsifiable, but neither *actually* know, as it’s impossible and any evaluation of truth-value is merely inferential. This, nonetheless, still opens room for fanatics to act in the name of God. The difference between the epistemic position of someone that holds a correct belief and someone that holds a wrong belief is virtually non-existent. If I wholeheartedly believe that I am correct in that e.g. the world is flat, I am on the same epistemic ground as someone that believes that e.g. the world is elliptical. The former believes in his wrong belief the same way the latter believes in his belief that is, objectively speaking, the correct one. Being wrong and knowing you are wrong are completely different things, and when people are wrong they mostly think that they are right, and the belief in something that is, objectively speaking, false, for the believer, is, on the grounds of conscience, the same belief in something that is, objectively speaking, true. When one believes they are right about something, regardless of whether they are wrong, they don’t know that they are wrong, so they “know” something in the same way that the one who thinks they are right and they are actually right “knows” that thing. Thus, distinguishing between someone’s claim that God commanded them to do something from God actually have commanded them to do it is inconceivable. This shows the problem we are open to due to the existence of the interpretation spectrum and our allowing the Bible to be marketed as a moral guide.

Elucidating this issue further, we didn’t just want to show that the possibility for harm existed, but that people have engaged, still engage, and still are susceptible to engage in these

actions. An objection may be raised that in our contemporary times, society won't accept a religious stance that comes from a literal reading of the Bible, especially if it is so blatantly immoral. But even the highest court of the United States has accepted literal exegeses as legitimate grounds for civil claims. The Amish are famously insulated from mandatory-schooling state legislation because of a Supreme Court ruling that upheld their literal exegesis of the Scriptural text. The Amish have a "a fundamental belief that salvation requires life in a church community separate and apart from the world and worldly influence ["intellectual and scientific accomplishments, self-distinction, competitiveness, worldly success, and social life with other students])]" (Muñoz 196), which is derived from several biblical passages that emphasize non-conformity and separation from the world. This illustration doesn't aim at framing this schooling exemption as immoral, but it aims at portraying one example that sheds light on the danger that we are vulnerable to – one's sincerely-held belief in the Scriptural text can, in civil society, be legitimate grounds for granting exemptions on the basis of religious conscience. The logical conclusion is that this also has the effect of potentially allowing for one's immoral stance to be recognized as acceptable because it is a religious belief that is coherent with Scripture and is thus, central to one's religious claims of conscience—the door is certainly open for this possibility, and if one already renders the Amish claim for children to be separated from, *inter alia*, intellectual and scientific accomplishments as an immoral demand, we have already proven that the potential for harm we are trying to avoid is not only a potential, but an actuality.

Our goal has been to show that religious beliefs have been and can be the cause of hatred and conflict. Some argue that just because a belief has been causal to atrocities, this character doesn't require its jettisoning, and that we must not discard something that can have positive effects just (!) because it also has negative ones (Copan and Flannagan 209, 267). Reiterating the

special character of religion, mainly, the categoricity of commands that creates a duty to the divine despite of earthly (dis)incentives, of which the effect may only be seen in the afterlife and is insulated from evidence, I have argued contrarily to that notion. I contend that *because* religion *qua* religion has had abusive effects, and it can still have dangerous effects to this day, we must not look at such a belief as a moral guide. If it not only poses the threat of being used for evil ends, but it *has* been and *is* used for evil ends, then I dispute the claim that we shouldn't abandon it. If it can be, has been, and is used for evil ends, then this belief can be harmful, and thus, we should not propagate it as a moral guide. The very possibility for harm, or what I have called the loophole issue, is the reason why I argue for the obsolescence of Scriptural morality.

I must underscore that this possibility is already recognized as real – it is not highly contested that atrocities have been made in the name of God, or that religiously inspired actions can be abominable (Copan 60, 316). All that we assert is that that that possibility is sufficient for that we do away with it as a moral guide. If there is something being marketed as a tool for moral action and that tool can be soundly used for evil, then that tool is a useless moral guide.

I think it is important to emphasize that this project is very concerned with the facts of reality. We know that the overwhelming majority of religious adherents, and in here I am focusing on the religion that concerns this project, are the poor and the uneducated. Of course, not all believers are uneducated or poor, but the bulk of them are. The layperson that comes into contact with this text has a specific standpoint that is often ignored in the vast literature on Scripture and the morality it prescribes. It is easy for scholars to claim that the Bible must be read in X or Y way and that you must only (!) go through a historical, canonical, and cross-linguistic holistic analysis to find out that passage A is to be binding to this day, and passage B is only metaphorical, and passage C is literal, and passage D is not binding to this day... We could

go on *ad nauseam* along this train of thought. This is nothing but another one of the several subjective interpretations that can be just as easily and coherently with the Scriptural text be subjectively refuted – whereas I refuse it can be objectively refuted, however. In addition, and most importantly, this is unrealistic. This strategy doesn't come close to reaching the average layperson whose heart is sincerely geared to the Lord's words for his salvation from this painful earthly life. If we look at the aggregate, most of the religious of the world are poor. It is not surprising that in the poorest countries we find the highest rates of religiosity (Gallup, Inc.). You need only to experience the life in a Third World nation to see the hegemony and pervasiveness of Christianity among the poorest. Again, it is obviously not only the poor that are religious, but it is an overwhelming majority of the poor that are religious. Do they have the time or the means to cross-analyze Ancient Near East war texts? Those who have never even heard the word 'syntagm' certainly don't have the resources for such a thorough and critical analysis. What is realistic is that many take the words in the book for granted and take it as their guide to salvation in the afterlife – in the United States alone, almost 30% of Americans believe that the Bible is the actual word of God to be taken literally (Gallup, Inc.). No amount of cross-text analysis can change the sincere believer's opinion on what their duties are to their divinity.

Truth be told, religious people have killed and bombed others or themselves in the name of God, thinking they will go to heaven. Again, it doesn't interest us whether they will or not go to heaven because of their actions, what matters to us is that they think they will. Some individuals are inspired by religion and risk death, injury, or incarceration for the sake of their religious conscience (Leiter 36). The fact that they can, at times, coherently do so is precisely what we have termed the loophole issue derived from the scriptural interpretation spectrum.

But if not the Bible, then what? Many argue that society needs some type of moral guide or standard to follow and here I am jettisoning one of the, if not, the main one. Which moral standard we ought to follow, however, is out of the scope of this project. We certainly point out that the standard must not be a religious one, which at least narrows down future investigations on this matter. We contend that focusing on a secular, rather than religious, moral standard will allow, precisely, for society to have a moral compass that has no exemptions to an absolute divinity's categorical commands. This non-exemptionist approach would enable for a moral standard to arise that doesn't include the loophole issue we exposed – it won't allow for subjective undertakings that can be coherently justified if they are highly immoral. By erasing the divine aspect within morality, we hope that it will allow for the possibility for harm causation to decrease exponentially. Yet, this investigation must find itself in a different work. Here, we conclude that that standard must not be Scriptural and must not allow for the loophole issue to arise.

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