

Theological Analysis and Biblical Perspective on LGBTQ+ Affirmation in the Indonesian Church

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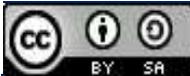
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ABSTRACT

This research aims to provide a theological and biblical analysis of the demand for LGBTQ+ affirmation within Indonesian churches. The research method applied is normative theological research based on a literature review, using exegesis, exposition, comparative analysis, as well as deductive and inductive synthesis. The findings indicate that Indonesian churches consistently reject LGBTQ+ affirmation as being contrary to the authority of Scripture, while still emphasizing the love of Christ in pastoral ministry. The study also reveals that academic discourse on LGBTQ+ affirmation in Indonesia remains limited; however, the presence of LGBTQ+ members in congregations is real and creates urgent pastoral needs. Variations in pastoral approaches across denominations demonstrate efforts to balance love and truth. The findings imply that the church must practice non-discriminatory love while firmly rejecting the normalization of practices that contradict biblical truth, and that Indonesian churches need to develop contextual theological responses and pastoral strategies that address the growing exposure of younger generations to global affirmation discourse. This study concludes that the appropriate way for the church is to practice non-discriminatory love while firmly rejecting the normalization of practices that contradict biblical truth.

KEYWORDS *Christian Theology; Biblical Perspective; LGBTQ+ Affirmation; Indonesian Churches; Love and Truth; Pastoral Ethics*



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INTRODUCTION

The issue of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) has become one of the hottest topics in social, cultural, and religious discourse in the contemporary era (Achari, 2022; Ramos et al., 2022). The tendency for a person to be emotionally or even sexually attracted to someone of the same gender is the origin of this issue, which eventually developed into the issue of gender identity. The term LGBT was first used in the early 1990s to replace gender identity (Putri 2013).

Sex is sacred in the Christian perspective. However, the sex referred to is the sacred relationship between a husband and wife who have made a sacred vow before the altar of the church, where a man and a woman become one flesh in God (Stanislaus 2018). Therefore, deviant sexual acts, including LGBTQ, are considered sinful in the eyes of God (Karimullah, 2023; Siregar et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, this phenomenon is gaining attention as awareness of human rights, gender equality, and recognition of sexual identity increases (Iswahyudi, 2025; Waluyo, 2024). Although Indonesian society still generally holds conservative views on non-heterosexual sexual orientation, globalization and social media have allowed LGBTQ+ affirmation discourse to enter the public sphere and church life (Gas-Aixendri, 2025; Okeke et al., 2025). This poses a dilemma for church institutions that adhere to traditional theology, particularly regarding the relationship between love, ethics, and the authority of Scripture (Brown, 2023; Buzguța, 2024; Elizabeth & Mikaere, 2025; Xiang & Huang, 2026; Ybyray, 2025).

In the early stages, many churches emphasized the principle of inclusion, namely the acceptance of congregants without discrimination based on identity or sexual orientation

(Ballano, 2024; Mcleay, 2025; Rivombo, 2025; Setyawan, 2022; Smith, 2022). Inclusion was seen as the embodiment of Christ's universal and comprehensive love. However, in subsequent developments, there have been demands for affirmation, namely full recognition and support for LGBTQ+ identities and practices. This shift from inclusion to affirmation has caused serious tension for conservative churches in Indonesia, because affirmation is often understood as a form of normalization of behavior that contradicts Christian ethical principles based on the Holy Scriptures (Bhanu Viktorhadi 2021).

The problem of this study lies in the tension between inclusive love and the truth of God's word. The hypothesis proposed is that affirmative acceptance of LGBTQ+ practices without theological criticism can legitimize behavior that contradicts Christian moral and ethical principles. Thus, this study emphasizes the need for in-depth analysis to affirm the difference between acceptance (inclusion) as an expression of Christ's love and legitimizing affirmation of practices that contradict the Bible.

A review of previous literature shows polarization among theologians on the issue of LGBTQ+. Progressive groups, such as Matthew Vines and James Brownson, emphasize a reinterpretation of biblical texts traditionally used to reject homosexual practices. Their argument emphasizes that Christ's love demands unconditional acceptance and recognition of the identity of the congregation, including those who are LGBTQ+. Conversely, conservative theologians such as Robert Gagnon and Kevin DeYoung assert that the entire biblical canon rejects homosexual practices, so affirmation of this behavior has no biblical basis and potentially undermines the integrity of Christian doctrine. However, most of the literature is still generally pro-con, without providing sufficient clarification between the concepts of inclusion as love and affirmation as legitimization.

The scientific novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on the integration of love and truth. This article seeks to provide a balanced theological analysis and biblical perspective: acknowledging that Christ's love demands inclusion without discrimination, but rejecting affirmations that legitimize practices contrary to God's word. This approach offers a new conceptual framework for churches in Indonesia to respond to LGBTQ+ affirmation demands while remaining faithful to biblical theological and moral principles.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the demands for LGBTQ+ affirmation in the context of the church in Indonesia theologically and biblically, and to develop a conceptual framework that affirms that true love cannot be separated from the truth of God's word. This research is expected to enrich theological discourse in Indonesia and provide practical guidance for churches to present Christ's love inclusively while maintaining biblical integrity in pastoral ministry.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a normative theological study with a qualitative approach based on library research. The main sources of research are the Old Testament and New Testament as the normative basis, as well as secondary literature in the form of books, journals, and academic writings from conservative and progressive theologians discussing LGBTQ+ issues.

Data collection techniques were carried out through literature studies on:

1. Biblical texts – verses that directly or indirectly address sexuality, gender relations, and Christian ethics.
2. Theological literature – works by progressive and conservative theologians to understand differences in interpretation and argumentation.
3. Church documents – official statements, synod documents, or pastoral policies related to LGBTQ+ issues.

The research process was conducted in several stages:

1. Exegetical Analysis: Exploring the original meaning of relevant biblical texts (e.g., Genesis 1–2, Leviticus 18, Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, 1 Timothy 1). Exegetical analysis was conducted by considering the historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts.
2. Theological Exposition: Explaining the theological principles that arise from the exegesis of the text, particularly regarding creation, human relationships, sin, and grace.
4. Comparative Analysis: Comparing the views of progressive theologians (who tend to be affirmative) and conservative theologians (who tend to reject affirmation).
5. Deductive Approach: Drawing general principles from Scripture about love and truth, then applying them to the issue of LGBTQ+ affirmation.
6. Inductive Approach: Observing social phenomena and the development of affirmation discourse in contemporary churches, then relating them to biblical principles.
7. Theological Synthesis: Developing a framework that integrates the love of Christ with biblical truth, as well as providing theological criticism of the demands of LGBTQ+ affirmation.

Data analysis was conducted by reducing findings from texts and literature, classifying pro and con arguments, and then reinterpreting them normatively within a conservative theological framework rooted in Scripture.

Using this method, the research is expected to produce consistent theological arguments and provide academic answers for the church in responding to LGBTQ+ affirmation issues while remaining faithful to the love of Christ and the truth of God's word.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Social and Historical Context of LGBTQ+ Affirmation in the Church

The phenomenon of demands for LGBTQ+ affirmation within the church did not appear suddenly, but is part of a long journey of social, cultural, and political development since the second half of the 20th century. Since the post-World War II era, there has been a huge wave of civil rights movements in America and Europe demanding equality without discrimination. At the same time, the growing wave of feminism challenged patriarchal patterns and traditional gender norms, opening up new discussions about gender roles and sexuality. These changes were further reinforced by developments in psychology and social sciences, which no longer considered homosexuality a disease or moral abnormality, but rather a variation of human identity. The forces of globalization and the media then accelerated the spread of the idea that sexual orientation is part of human dignity that must be respected, pressuring many countries and institutions, including the church, to review their positions.

Within the church, the push to affirm LGBTQ+ people has created theological, pastoral, and social tensions. The church, as a historical institution with traditional moral teachings, is directly confronted with nondiscrimination laws, congregational demands to accept everyone without exception, and the emergence of voices from within the congregation itself that identify as LGBTQ+. This tension is not only related to the interpretation of biblical texts, but also concerns pastoral ministry: how the church responds to the suffering, rejection, and stigma experienced by LGBTQ+ people in their faith lives. Some theologians and church leaders then attempted to reinterpret biblical texts using historical-critical and contextual hermeneutical approaches, to distinguish between sexual orientation as an identity and sexual behavior that was criticized in the context of ancient times.

As legal recognition of LGBTQ+ rights increases, especially in Western countries, churches are faced with a difficult choice: to reaffirm their moral traditions or to open up space for affirmation in order to respond to an ever-evolving social reality. This debate is not only happening in the West, but is also spreading to Asia, Africa, and Latin America through globalization. However, the responses vary: some churches have opened up and become “affirming churches” by fully accepting LGBTQ+ congregants, even same-sex marriages, while others maintain their traditional position of rejection. The process of globalization has made these differences more visible, triggering dialogue, internal conflicts, and even denominational divisions.

This reality shows that the demand for LGBTQ+ affirmation within the church cannot be understood solely as a theological issue, but rather as a social phenomenon with long historical roots. This struggle shows how the church as the body of Christ constantly lives in tension between tradition and modernity, between religious teachings and social reality. Even a study conducted in 2016 shows how churches, especially in Africa, often unconsciously commit symbolic and structural violence against LGBTQ+ groups, and therefore dialogue based on love and respect for human dignity is a necessity (West, van der Walt, and Kaoma 2016).

Theological Analysis of the Concepts of Creation and Sexuality

The Bible states that humans were created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27), which in classical understanding includes the relationship between men and women as two entities that complement each other in the order of creation. Within this framework, sexuality is not only viewed from a biological or reproductive perspective, but also as an integral part of human identity and relationships: gender identity, sexual orientation, marriage, and pastoral function. Marriage between men and women in the Christian tradition is often seen as a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:31-32), so that in the traditional tradition, heterosexuality in the context of marriage is considered the ideal expression of sexuality in accordance with the order of creation.

However, contemporary theological challenges arise when modern understandings of identity, gender, sexual orientation, and human experience show that sexuality itself has complexities that cannot be fully summarized within a traditional framework. For example, the article *Sex, Gender and Human Identity* argues that human identity (including sex and gender) must be understood through a dialogue between science (biology, psychology, social sciences) and theology, so as not to be trapped in a dualism that separates body and spirit or in overly rigid categories. Cook emphasizes that our identity as human beings is not only “created” but also “discovered” through life experiences, relationships, and social contexts, which has implications for how the church views individuals who experience gender or sexual orientation variations.

Biblical Exposition on Homosexual Practices

Several biblical texts are often used as primary references in discussions about homosexuality, including Genesis 19 (the story of Sodom and Gomorrah), Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:26–27, and 1 Corinthians 6:9–10.

Genesis 19 presents the sin of Sodom as a symbol of humanity's moral rebellion against God's order. Although some modern theologians interpret the sin of Sodom as a lack of

hospitality, the text and interpretive tradition throughout church history show that the sexual dimension cannot be ignored.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 explicitly prohibit same-sex sexual relations as unclean. The emphasis of the Torah law affirms that such acts are a serious violation of the holiness of God's people.

Romans 1:26–27 describes homosexuality as a result of people refusing to know God, so God gave them over to shameful lusts. Paul sees homosexual practices not only as immoral behavior, but also as a sign of deeper spiritual corruption.

1 Corinthians 6:9–10 places “arsenokoitai” (homosexual relations) alongside other sins that prevent a person from inheriting the Kingdom of God.

From this exposition, it can be concluded that the Bible consistently views homosexual practices as serious moral transgressions, while always leaving room for repentance and restoration through the grace of Christ.

Pastoral Approach: Uncompromising Love

One of the main challenges facing the church is how to respond to LGBTQ+ members within the congregation. On the one hand, the church is called to love everyone without discrimination, just as Christ accepted sinners. On the other hand, the church must not compromise the truth of the Word.

A healthy pastoral approach must emphasize a balance between love and truth. Love without truth will fall into permissiveness, while truth without love will fall into legalism. The church needs to open up space for counseling, spiritual guidance, and a community that supports restoration, so that LGBTQ+ congregants can experience the full transformation of the gospel.

Ethical and Ecclesiological Implications for the Church Today

If the church fully accepts LGBTQ+ affirmation, there will be serious implications for doctrine, ethics, and church order. The doctrine of marriage as a divine institution between a man and a woman will undergo a shift, and biblical sexual ethics will be reduced to relative cultural norms. In addition, the authority of the Bible as the sovereign word of God will also be compromised.

However, if the church totally rejects LGBTQ+ affirmation demands without providing pastoral space, then the risk of alienation and emotional wounds among struggling congregants is very high. Therefore, the church must find a middle ground in the form of an inclusive pastoral attitude while remaining faithful to the word of God.

Answers to Research Hypotheses

The hypothesis of this study is that LGBTQ+ affirmation in the church is not in accordance with biblical theological and ethical principles, but the church is still called to love and serve the LGBTQ+ congregation with a wise pastoral approach. Based on the findings of the study through biblical text analysis, theological exegesis, and contemporary literature studies, this hypothesis has been proven to be true. The Bible clearly rejects homosexual practices as sin, but Christ's love still applies to everyone without exception.

Based on the results of literature reviews, analysis of official synod documents, Indonesian theological publications, and observations of the dynamics of church life in Indonesia, a number of important findings were discovered regarding the issue of LGBTQ+ affirmation in the context of the church in Indonesia.

1. Consistency of Conservative Theological Stances in Indonesian Churches

The results of the study show that the majority of churches in Indonesia still hold conservative theological positions in responding to LGBTQ+ issues. Official documents from major denominations such as the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI), the Indonesian Bishops Conference (KWI), and mainstream Protestant synods have never expressed affirmative support for homosexual practices.

In general, biblical texts such as Genesis 1–2, Leviticus 18:22, Romans 1:26–27, and 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 continue to be used as the basis for the argument that valid sexual relations can only occur within marriage between a man and a woman. Thus, to date, there have been no institutional efforts in Indonesia to officially normalize LGBTQ+ practices in the liturgical and sacramental life of the church.

2. Limitations of Academic and Theological Discourse in Indonesia

Compared to Europe and America, academic discourse on LGBTQ+ affirmation in Indonesia is still very limited. Existing literature tends to be conservative and apologetic, emphasizing rejection based on biblical texts. Writings that attempt to explore the possibility of an affirmative approach are almost non-existent in Indonesian theological journals.

This shows that global discourse has not yet fully entered Indonesian academic circles, even though discussion in the public sphere (social media, activism, NGOs) is growing stronger.

3. Social Pressure and Pastoral Struggles of LGBTQ+ Congregations

Research has found that congregations with LGBTQ+ sexual orientations do exist within church communities in Indonesia, although many of them choose not to reveal their identities openly. They face double pressure: (a) from the wider community, which tends to stigmatize LGBTQ+ identities, and (b) from the church, which refuses to give theological recognition to their orientation.

This situation creates an urgent pastoral need. Some pastors and Christian counselors in Indonesia have begun to develop special services in the form of counseling, prayer, and spiritual guidance, but with a conservative approach: helping congregants return to God's plan for sexuality.

4. Differences in Responses among Churches and Denominations in Indonesia

Although generally conservative, research has found variations in pastoral approaches to LGBTQ+ congregations: (a) Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are generally more hostile, emphasizing deliverance and repentance; (b) Mainstream Protestant churches (e.g., GPIB, HKBP, GKJ) are more moderate, emphasizing pastoral accompaniment but still rejecting affirmation; and (c) The Catholic Church, through the Indonesian Catholic Bishops' Conference (KWI), asserts that homosexuality must be distinguished between “tendencies” and “actions,” so that congregants with homosexual orientations are still accepted, but homosexual practices are still rejected.

These findings show that although there are no affirming churches, pastoral approaches vary, from harsh to more accommodating.

5. Affirmation Issues as Future Challenges for the Church in Indonesia

Although LGBTQ+ affirmation is not yet mainstream in Indonesia, research finds that this issue is entering the discussion, especially among younger Christians who are more open to diversity. Social media and global interactions expose younger Indonesian Christians to progressive theology from abroad.

This is expected to cause tension in the future between the generation that wants to remain conservative and the younger generation that is more open-minded. Churches in Indonesia are faced with the challenge of providing clear theological answers while also providing loving pastoral care without compromising the truth of the Word.

6. The Middle Way Principle: Uncompromising Love for the Truth

The final finding of this study is that almost all of the literature and pastoral practices of churches in Indonesia agree on one principle: the love of Christ must be given to all people without discrimination, but the truth of the Bible must not be compromised. Thus, inclusion is accepted as an expression of love, but affirmation is rejected because it is considered contrary to Christian doctrine.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Bible consistently rejects homosexual practices and affirms sexual relations only within marriage between a man and a woman; therefore, the normative basis of the Christian faith in Indonesia continues to reject LGBTQ+ affirmation in church life. Indonesian churches remain largely conservative, and no official synodical or denominational documents provide theological legitimacy for affirming LGBTQ+ practices, although churches generally emphasize pastoral love without sacramental or liturgical recognition. Academic discourse on LGBTQ+ affirmation in Indonesia is still limited and is dominated by conservative apologetics, while broader academic debates—such as those seen in Western contexts—have not yet fully developed, despite the issue increasingly appearing in social media and public discussion. At the same time, the presence of LGBTQ+ individuals within congregations is a real pastoral reality that requires counseling, spiritual guidance, and the expression of Christ's love so that individuals are not alienated from the faith community. Variations in pastoral approaches across denominations reflect attempts to balance theological conviction with compassionate ministry: Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions tend to emphasize repentance, whereas many mainline Protestant and Catholic contexts stress pastoral accompaniment while maintaining traditional teaching. Looking forward, Indonesian churches face the challenge of responding to younger generations who are increasingly exposed to global affirmation discourse; therefore, future research should explore the development of contextual theological frameworks and pastoral models within Indonesian churches that faithfully uphold the authority of Scripture while addressing emerging pastoral, cultural, and generational dynamics.

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