

Analyzing Social Issues within Rock Island's Christian Communities

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How Are Social Problems Viewed within Augustana College's InterVarsity Christian Fellowship Chapter



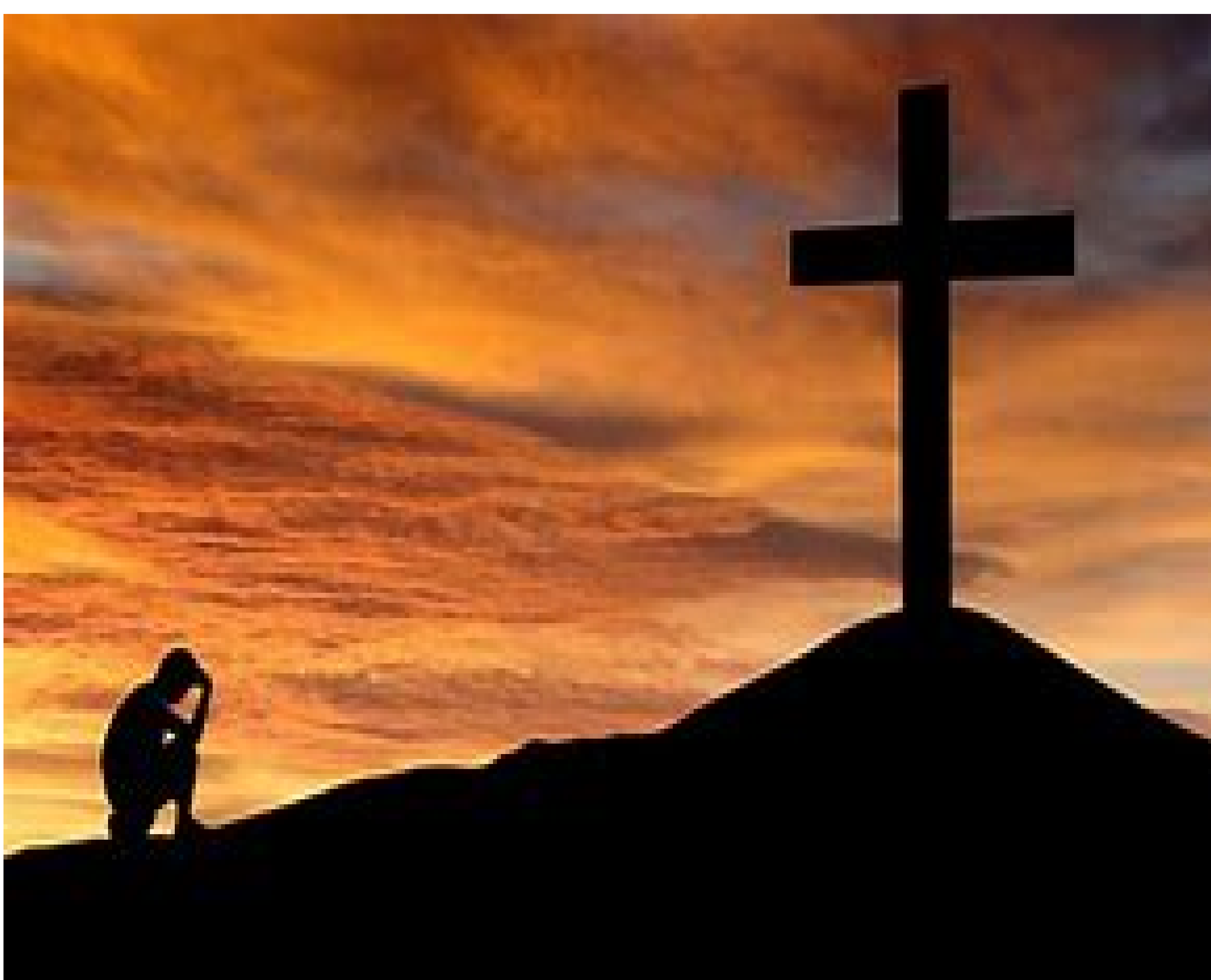
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Abstract

This research asks how Christians within the Quad Cities area understand prevalent American social issues. Through my research, I explored how homophobia, racism, and gender discrimination fit within the context of American Christianity. I conducted interviews and participant observation within the Rock Island area: InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and the Quad Cities Mainspring Ministry. My research examines several major themes: race, sexuality, gender, and socioeconomic status, and through my research I concluded that religion is a major factor in contributing to how my participants have viewed these themes.

Introduction

I explored how individuals within Augustana's InterVarsity Christian Fellowship understand their faith, and whether they view religion as a source of social issues and/or social problems. As a person who knows very little about religion, I thought it would be interesting to explore this topic further, and ultimately conduct my S.I. project on something encompassing it. What ultimately got me to delve into this topic was the various stories and forms of media I have come into contact with over the years. From hearing news stories about the Persecution of Christians in Asia, to hearing how Western Christianity in the United States is the reason the term Islamophobia even exist, it seemed to me that Christianity was a source of many problems. With that being stated, I was curious as to how my peers in InterVarsity perceived it, or if they even perceived it at all. For my research, I looked into how scholars before me have perceived the concept of religion itself, and how it fits into the conversation of social issues. It was clear to me that scholars before me found connections, but I wanted to know how exactly InterVarsity members perceived this.



Methods

- To conduct my research on this topic, I used both participant observation and the interview process in order to collect my data.
- Participant observation:**
 - I have been a member of InterVarsity for a total of two years, and have bonded with many of the individuals in the group. In doing so, I have been regularly attending the group meeting that occur every Tuesday, and have also participated in many of their retreats.
- Interviews:**
 - I conducted a total of ten different with members of the InterVarsity community, asking each of them questions pertaining to the following topics:
 - Faith and Religious Belief:** For this section I was curious as to how my interviewees perceived their religious faith, and whether or not this played a role into their understanding of social issues¹.
 - Religion and the LGBTQ+ Community:** One of the main vocal points I wished to address was the issue of sexuality and gender that seems to be present within Christian Communities.
 - Religion and Race:** For this section I was curious as to whether or not my interviewees felt racially discriminated, or if race played had a role in their religious setting.

Findings

- There were several things that I was able to gather from my research:
- The major topic that my interviewees addressed was that each of them concluded that the bible needed to be interpreted in its modern context, instead of the context it was written in².
- Religion needs to be addressed in terms of the modern cultural, thus it needs to be accepting of identities existing in modern cultural: i.e. LGBTQ+ members³.
- With that being said however, a couple of my interviews stated that they believed that homosexuality was not sanctioned by the bible³, while the other people I interviewed stated that the bible has no role in determining whether homosexuality is right or wrong⁴.
- Concerning race, the two minority individuals that I interviewed stated that they felt discriminated against within the context of the Christian faith.
- One of my interviewees felt that she was not included within her religious denomination, thus she was not accepted.
- One other participant stated that he has felt discriminated against because of his religious affiliations⁵, he identifies as both a practicing Hindu and Christian, and feels as if some of the Christians he has come into contact with are not accepting of him.

Conclusions

- From the data that have collected throughout this term, there is only two generalizations I feel comfortably making because every one of my interviewees had the same consensus:
 - The first one is that everyone seems to understand and perceive their definition of the Christian faith differently⁵. Although every one of my interviewees identified under some denomination under the Christian Faith, many had different things that they take away from their religion. For some it was that religion provided them with a set of morals that they could follow, for others it seemed to me that the Bible was used in order to establish a certain way that one should live their life, a guideline I would call it. In the end, all of my participants took away something from religion that helped in formulating their character.
 - The second thing that I took away is that the individual interpretations of the Bible are what seem to matter most to people. No one truly understands what the bible has to say because as all my participants concluded, we simply did not live during the period in which it was written. With that being said however, there is no right or wrong way that one can interpret passages. If one thinks that the lack of homosexual representation in the bible justifies that it is not sanctioned by the bible then that's what they will take away⁴. If one thinks since nowhere in the bible is homosexuality deemed a sin, and that the main takeaway is to love and treat everyone equally, then that is what they will believe⁴.
- In relation to how this is intertwined with social issues, I can say that six out of my ten participants believe that the Christian religion has had an impact on various social issues especially those involving homosexuality².
- Three out of my ten interviewees believed that religion needs to do more in addressing social issues, and that they stated that religion needed to get more involved in tackling these issues². Although no solutions were offered, those that took this stance did believe that religion needs to engage in some sort of dialogue in order to address various social issues.



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