

40 MYTHS IN THE SEVEN “COBBLER” TEXTS

Tom Hanks

Unmasked with Exegetical Studies

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Other Sheep**

Foreword

It is with profound honor and deep conviction that I introduce this pivotal work by the Rev. Dr. Tom Hanks a scholar, pastor, and tireless advocate whose life’s mission has been to bridge faith and justice for sexual minorities around the world. As the newly appointed Global Coordinator of Other Sheep, I am humbled to help bring this essential resource to churches, academia, faith-based organizations, and activists globally.

For over six decades, Dr. Hanks has served as a missionary, professor, and biblical exegete across Latin America. His academic rigor, pastoral sensitivity, and unwavering commitment to inclusion have shaped a generation of theologians, clergy, and LGBTQ+ believers. Alongside John P. Doner, Hanks co-founded Other Sheep in 1992 the only worldwide ecumenical ministry dedicated to supporting sexual minorities through education, advocacy, and biblical reclamation. This book is the fruit of that lifelong labor.

Unmasked with Exegetical Studies is more than a scholarly commentary; it is a pastoral and prophetic tool. With meticulous care, Hanks dismantles the so-called “clobber texts” the seven biblical passages historically weaponized to condemn same-sex relationships. Through rigorous exegesis, historical context, and linguistic analysis, he exposes how translation biases, cultural prejudices, and homophobic interpretations have distorted Scripture’s true message.

The book is structured around 40 pervasive myths from the misuse of Sodom’s story in Genesis 19 to the mistranslation of Pauline epistles each systematically debunked with evidence from original languages, ancient Near Eastern contexts, and the broader biblical witness. Hanks demonstrates that the Bible, when read faithfully, does not condemn loving, consensual same-sex relationships. Instead, it consistently champions hospitality, justice, compassion, and the inherent dignity of every person.

In an era when LGBTQ+ individuals continue to face exclusion, violence, and theological harm, this work is urgently needed. It equips pastors to preach with courage, scholars to teach with integrity, and believers to engage Scripture with both heart and mind. For activists and allies, it provides a robust theological foundation for advocacy and inclusion.

Other Sheep is proud to publish this volume as part of our ongoing mission to foster a faith that embraces all. We believe the gospel is good news for everyone especially those on the margins. Dr. Hanks’ work is a beacon of that good news, illuminating a path toward a more compassionate, biblically grounded, and inclusive Christianity.

May this book be a resource for transformation in our churches, our communities, and our hearts.

In solidarity and hope,

Vinod Shemron S
Global Coordinator, Other Sheep
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Chapter 1

Eight *Myths* in the Interpretation of Genesis 19:1-29 (Sodom)

Myth #1 “The story of Sodom’s destruction in Genesis 19:1-29 demonstrates that homosexuality is a grave sin that God condemns.”

Virtually all Biblicists now recognize that the story in Genesis 19 does *not* condemn “homosexuality” (which refers to a sexual orientation of certain persons and includes lesbians) but rather describes *the intent by Sodom’s males to rape the two visiting angels*, instead of offering them hospitality as Abraham had done in Genesis 18, in accordance with fundamental ancient norms.¹ Thus even Richard Hays, who seeks to establish a biblical basis for condemning homosexuality, admits: “The notorious story of Sodom and Gomorrah – often cited in connection with homosexuality – is actually irrelevant to the topic.”² As in the case of → **Romans**, where interpreters traditionally have ignored the fact that the context concludes with a rhetorical trap in 2:1-16, in the case of Sodom, traditionally we begin with Genesis 19 and ignore the previous context that recounts Abraham’s hospitality (thus Genesis 18 + 19 constitutes a diptych like two twin paintings). Thus, we misinterpret Gen. 19:1-29 as a condemnation of “homosexuality” when actually it describes a refusal to offer hospitality and an attempt to rape the visitors.

Nevertheless, Robert Gagnon concludes that God destroyed Sodom not only for attempting to rape the visiting angels instead of offering them hospitality, but also for failure to respect the norm of “gender complementarity.”³ Gagnon insists that in Genesis 1–2 God created two sexes that ought to always complement each other in sexual relations, a modern concept which Gagnon always uses to trump opposing arguments.⁴ Of course, Gagnon never explains why, if Yahweh’s intention were to cure homosexuals of their vice, a couple of sexually attractive male angels were sent to sleep together in Lot’s tent, instead of a heterosexual couple who might reflect the complementary diversity of two sexes. Nor does Gagnon explain why Yahweh punishes all the women and children of Sodom for the sin of the city’s males, leaving the impression that God abuses women and children with the same ferocity that the males of Sodom sought to manifest against the two angel visitors.⁵

Myth #2 “In addition to Genesis 19, Deuteronomy 23:17-18, the law condemning sodomites, makes clear that sodomy is a sin.”

However, older versions had *mistranslated qadesh* as “sodomite” (Deut. 23:17-18, KJV):

¹⁷There shall be no **whore (qedeshah)** of the daughters of Israel, nor a **sodomite (qadesh)** of the sons of Israel. ¹⁸Thou shalt not bring the hire of a **whore (zonah)**, or the price of a **dog (keleb)**, into the house of the Lord thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the Lord thy God.

This same translation error of *qadesh* as “sodomite” was repeated in **1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7 and Job 36:14** (cf. the feminine *qadeshah* in Hosea 4:14). Thus, for centuries, persons who read the older translations concluded that the Hebrew Scriptures contain six condemnations of “sodomites”, which were used to bolster their misinterpretation of Genesis 19. However, the Hebrew word *qadesh/ah* literally means “holy, consecrated, set aside for God”:

¹⁷None of the daughters of Israel shall be a **temple prostitute (*qedeshah*)**; none of the sons of Israel shall be a **temple prostitute (*qadesh*)**. ¹⁸You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute (*zonah*) or the wages of a male prostitute (*keleb*, literally “dog”) into the house of the LORD your God in payment for any vow, for both of these are abhorrent to the LORD your God (Deut. 23:17-18, NRSV; similarly, NIV, ESV and NLT).

The NJB in its note “f” on Deut. 23:18 [19 in the NJB] explains: “‘Dog’ is an opprobrious term for male prostitute” – without importing the modern concept of sexual orientation (cf. “homosexual men” in NLT note 23:18). The Hebrew Scriptures often warn Israelite males to abstain from sexual relations with female prostitutes (→ **Proverbs**). However, no one is so perverse as to interpret such texts as a condemnation of “heterosexuality” – although this is precisely the error of those who seek to condemn “homosexuality” on the basis of the six texts that refer to (cultic?) prostitutes (mistranslated as “sodomites”). We can be grateful to God that virtually all modern translations correct this grave error and

make clear that the texts speak specifically of prostitutes – not of “sodomites,” “homosexuals,” or “heterosexuals” (“temple prostitute,” NRSV, NIV, NLT; “cult prostitute,” ESV; “sacred prostitute,” NJB). Modern studies do frequently question whether the prostitution referred to was cultic or rather secular⁶ (→ **Joshua**, Rahab).

Myth #3 “The 48 references to Sodom in the Bible emphasize the fact that God always condemns homosexuality” (Hebrew Bible, 39 times; New Testament, nine times).

To the contrary, *all* 39 references condemning Sodom in the Hebrew Bible avoid any reference to same-sex activity but refer rather to other sins: oppression, injustice, violence; → **Ezekiel**. Scholars commonly point out that none of the 39 references to Sodom in the Hebrew Bible refer to any sexual sin, but the word “sexual” does not exist in the Bible, which refers to sexual matters with euphemisms and dimensions of other terms (“know, take, oppress, lie, bed,” etc.; see “rape” in English, expressed in Spanish simply as “violation”). The first person who interpreted the Sodom story in Genesis 19 as a condemnation of homoeroticism was the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C. – 50 A.D.).⁷ Most debated of the Hebrew Bible references to Sodom is Ezekiel 16, that says of Jerusalem:

49 This was the guilt of your sister Sodom:

- (1) *arrogance*
- (2) *gluttony [excess of food]*
- (3) *she and her sisters [nearby villages] had prosperous ease and were apathetic*

(4) but did not aid the poor and the needy

[50] but were haughty

(5) and did **abomination** [*to'eba*, singular] before me; therefore, I removed them when I saw it.

51 Samaria has not committed half your sins; you have committed more [*to'eboth*, plural] than they, and have made your sisters appear righteous by all the **abominations** [*to'eboth*, plural] that you have committed.

Robert Gagnon, forgetting the primary hermeneutical rule of context (Ezekiel's!), leaped to the conclusion that “abomination” in Ezekiel refers to the male-male anal sex condemned as abomination in Leviticus 18 and 20 (which make no reference to Sodom).⁸ However, as George Edwards points out, “abomination” (*to'eba*) in Ezekiel refers mainly to *idolatry* and twice to the *heterosexual* sin of adultery⁹ (→ **Ezekiel** 22:11; 33:26), but *never* to male-male (anal) sex (→ **Leviticus** 18:22; 20:13; see chart in Appendix 3 below).

Myth #4 “Jesus’ references to Sodom show that he accepted the Hebrew Bible’s condemnation of homosexuality.”

On the contrary, Jesus not only avoided any condemnation of homoerotic relations but even corrected whatever homophobic misinterpretations of the Sodom story were current (Josephus?). On sending out his twelve disciples in mission, Jesus made clear that Sodom was condemned for its *refusal of hospitality*:

¹¹Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay

there until you leave. ¹²As you enter the house, greet it. ¹³If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴If anyone will **not welcome you** or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. ¹⁵Truly I tell you; it will be more tolerable for the land of **Sodom and Gomorrah** on the day of judgment than for that town. (Matt. 10:11-15 // Luke 10:8-12 = Q).

Obviously, Jesus recognized that Sodom’s sin had not been “homosexuality” but the refusal of *hospitality*, and thus in effect he corrected the homophobic misinterpretation popularized by Philo of Alexandria. Another story preserved in the earliest source “Q” (material absent from Mark but common to Matthew and Luke), Jesus’ healing of the beloved slave of the Roman centurion (→ **Matthew** 8 and **Luke** 7), manifested the same attitude, as did also his own intimate relation with the Beloved Disciple (→ **John** 13–21).¹⁰

Myth #5 “In Jude 7 Jesus’ own brother makes clear that he shares the Bible’s condemnation of homosexuality as ‘unnatural lust’.”

As noted above, of the 48 references to Sodom in the Bible, none of the 39 Hebrew Bible texts interprets the sin as sexual and Jude 7 is the only one of the nine New Testament texts that does so. However, Jude 7, although recognizing a sexual element in Sodom’s sin, makes explicit that the sexual offense was that of *seeking to rape the two visiting angels* (“different/strange flesh” in the original Greek):

⁶And those angels who did not maintain their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, God has maintained in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great Day. ⁷Similarly, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which in the same manner as the angels, indulged in prostitution/ sexual immorality (*ekporneúsasai*;) and went in pursuit of **different/other/strange flesh** (*sarkós hetéras*) serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire (→ **Jude 6-7**).

However, in our modern versions Jude 7 almost always is mistranslated as a reference to "unnatural" lust/s/desire (NRSV; NJB; ESV) or "perversion" (NIV; NLT) to suggest/imply homosexuality (explicit in NLT Study Bible, note 7), instead of faithfully reflecting the reference in the Greek (*sarkós hetéras*, "flesh other"; see "*heterosexual*" in English!). More literally, older versions referred to pursuing the "other/strange flesh" of the two angels (KJV). ESV note ("Greek *other flesh*") and NRSV note g (GK *went after other flesh*) make clear their misleading translation. Undoubtedly the homophobic translators recalled that Romans 1:26-27 speaks of sexual practices "against nature" (*pará phúsin*, which includes but is not limited to same-sex relations). Nevertheless, nothing in the Greek original supports such a translation of Jude 7. Instead of appreciating how Jude follows his brother Jesus and avoids the homophobic interpretation of Genesis 19 (as a condemnation of homosexual males), the reader is obliged to fall precisely into the same error that Jesus and Jude avoided! Although not offering us our favorite/familiar theology (due to common

ignorance of Jewish apocryphal literature), the original Greek of Jude is quite clear:

- **Jude 6** refers to the fallen angels of **Genesis 6:1-4**, who before the flood descended to earth, took women for themselves from among the daughters of men and procreated giants. As the NJB points out in its note g, "the subject is elaborated in the *Book of Enoch*."
- Note h then explains the reference to the males of Sodom in **Jude 7**: "They lusted not after human beings, but after the strangers who were angels, **Gen. 19:1-11**. The apocryphal *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, like Jude 6-7, also compares the sin of the angels with the sin of the Sodomites."
- Jude continues with a third reference to angels in **v. 8** with his reference to the "glorious ones" and his citation of material about a dispute over Moses' corpse from *1 Enoch* and the *Testament of Moses*, two pseudepigraphal Jewish works.

Obviously, in Jude 6-8 the author is concentrating on traditions regarding angels, not homosexuals, however strange his comments may appear to modern readers. According to Hebrews, angels are "spirits/winds" (Heb. 1:7, 14) and according to Jesus they do not marry (Mark 12:25), although he does not deny them a body capable of sexual relations. Jude, however, appears closer to certain traditions (mythological?) in the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 6:1-4; 19:1-11) and Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphal books of the

intertestamental period, where angels are portrayed as capable of sexual relations with humans.

Myth #6 "Not only the Bible but also the Church throughout its history has always condemned the grave sin of 'sodomy'."

On the contrary, in the Bible "Sodom" is simply a place-name, a city, not a sin. After a millennium a medieval monk, Peter Damian (1007-1072 A.D.) invented the term "sodomy" to designate sexual sins considered "unmentionable" which thus were always left without clear and explicit definition.¹¹ Thereafter legal codes began to include prohibitions of ill-defined "sodomy" as a crime to be punished with tortures and the death penalty.¹² The Napoleonic Code (1810), with the conservative aim of limiting state power to invade the home and private life, eliminated the laws against "sodomy" (often applied even to non-procreative "unnatural" marital sex, anal or oral). Due to French imperial influence, the Code affected not only France but also continental Europe and Latin America (exceptions to this change were countries not conquered by Napoleon such as Prussia, England, the United States and Canada).¹³ In the nineteenth century, affected by the greater tolerance of the Enlightenment (except regarding masturbation/"onanism", → **Genesis 38**) and the scientific discovery of the sexual orientations that affect distinct sexual behaviors, even England and the United States eliminated the death penalty for the crime of "sodomy" (despite much fervent church opposition claiming Bible support from Lev. 20:13). In the last four decades of the twentieth century, many states in the USA eliminated their laws against "sodomy", and finally in 2003 the Supreme Court declared them all

unconstitutional. In Latin America, after Ecuador's Supreme Court decision in 1997, laws punishing sodomy remained only in Nicaragua (having been introduced in 1992 by Violeta Chamorro but eliminated in 2008) and in Chile (introduced by Adolfo Pinochet but eliminated in 1998).

Myth #7 "In the nineteenth century the Church committed a grave error when it abandoned the Bible-based term 'sodomy' and substituted the new scientific term 'homosexuality'."

The term "sodomy" never occurs in the Bible, but was a medieval invention based on Peter Damian's misinterpretation of Genesis 19, which reflected the typical prejudices of patriarchal societies against women (considered inferior), sexual minorities (considered sinners) and foreigners (considered guilty of importing variant sexual behaviors into supposedly pure national cultures). The term "homosexuality" (*Homosexualität*) was coined by an obscure closeted gay Austro-Hungarian writer and translator, Karl Maria Benkert, in 1869, and used in his two pro-gay political pamphlets. In succeeding decades "homosexuality" increasingly replaced traditional references to "sodomy" as scientists came to recognize that homoerotic behaviors commonly resulted from distinct sexual orientations, not to willful sinful rebellion (similar to the growing recognition that left-handedness was a minority inborn trait, and not to be blamed on perverse, rebellious children). Increasingly from around 1900 to 1972, however, both scientists and societies commonly considered homosexuality to represent a perversion of normal heterosexuality, due to psychological factors (arrested development, psychopathology,

some kind of mental illness). The pioneering studies of Evelyn Hooker (1957) and her successors led the American Psychiatric Association (1973-74) and American Psychological Association (1975) to recognize that a homosexual orientation is simply a minority psychological variant like left-handedness or eye color and in no way represents any pathology, mental illness or threat to society. Other scientific organizations, both European and international, soon confirmed similar conclusions. This reversal of scientific prejudice, coupled with the growing recognition by biblical scholars that the Sodom narrative (Genesis 19) describes an attempted gang rape of visiting angels (a sin of violence and failure of hospitality, not a condemnation of “sodomy”), has led informed scientists and biblical interpreters to abandon the term. Efforts to resuscitate the medieval term “sodomy” (along with its tortures and death penalty), only reflect the scientific and historical ignorance, biblical illiteracy and intolerance of its advocates and hinder efforts to share Jesus’ Good News of God’s inclusive love for oppressed minorities.

Myth #8 “In Romans 1:27 (cf. 9:29) Paul alludes to the sin of Sodomy and condemns it as ‘against nature.’”

When Paul refers to idolatrous, abusive male-male anal sex acts (Rom. 1:27) he omits any reference to Sodom; his only reference to Sodom in his letters (Rom. 9:29) says nothing about same-sex acts. Thus, for Paul (as for Jesus) the tradition of Sodom appears to have nothing to do with same-sex acts, even though homophobia had become common amongst Jews in the intertestamental period (see Philo). In fact, the references to Sodom and male-male

anal sex seem to have been *intentionally separated* by a gap of eight chapters that protect readers from the temptation to confuse, relate, or equate them. Paul’s only reference to Sodom (Rom. 9:29) in a letter that promotes hospitality (15:1-13) follows the common pattern of the Hebrew Bible and says nothing about same-sex acts but simply cites Isaiah’s reference to Sodom (1:9) as a paradigm of severe divine judgment.

Summary: We have seen that the traditional interpretations of the biblical references to Sodom:

- **ignore the context** (Abraham’s elaborate hospitality to the angels in Genesis 18) and **misinterpret** Gen. 19:1-29 anachronistically as a reference to homosexuality instead of a refusal of hospitality coupled with an attempt to rape the two angel visitors;
- **mistranslate** *qadesh/im* in six texts in Deuteronomy, 1-2 Kings and Job as references to “sodomite/s” instead of “cultic prostitutes”;
- **ignore** the 39 references to Sodom in the Hebrew Bible itself as an example of divine judgment (against oppression and violence) and prefer the later homophobic interpretation invented by the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria;
- **ignore** Jesus’ reference to Sodom’s sin as a refusal of hospitality (Mat. 10:15 // Luke 10:12 = Q) or misinterpret the texts as a condemnation of homosexuality;

- **mistranslate** Jude 7 as a reference to “unnatural” lust/s/desire (NRSV; NJB; ESV) or “perversion” (NIV; NLT), suggesting homosexuality (NLT Study Bible, note 7), instead of faithfully reflecting the reference in the Greek original (*sarkós hetéras*, flesh other; see “heterosexual” in English!) to pursuing the “other/strange flesh” of the two angels (KJV; ESV note and NRSV note g make clear the misleading translation);
- **ignore** the reference to Sodom (as paradigmatic divine judgment) in Romans 9:29; and
- **misinterpret** Rom. 1:18-27 as an allusion to Sodom in a letter aimed at encouraging hospitality (15:1-13).

Obviously, strong prejudices (homophobic, xenophobic, misogynous) have led translators and biblical scholars to seriously misguide the churches in the interpretation of the Sodom texts. Such prejudices, so blatant in the translations and interpretations of the Sodom texts, alert us to the danger that they may also affect the translation and interpretation of related texts where the evidence may be less obvious.

Appendix 1 – "Sodom" in the Bible:

Hebrew Bible, 39 times; New Testament, 9 times; Total, 48 times in the Bible

(* = general judgment, without specifying the sin; + = with "Gomorrah")

Sodom in the Hebrew Bible 39 times; with Gomorrah 19 times)	
Genesis	
1	10:19+ (J) Table of the Nations, home of the Canaanite clans
2	13:10+ (J, Lot) Prosperous region, like Eden
3	13:12 (P, Lot) Put his tent near Sodom
4	13:13 (J) People of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord
5-12	14:2+, 8+, 10+, 11+, 12, 17, 21, 22 King of Sodom (Bera), 7 times; Lot lives in Sodom, v.12
13-16	(J) 18:16,20+,22,26 (J) Abraham's hospitality (vv.1-15), intercedes for Sodom (16-33); v. 21 "cry" (<i>za'aq</i>) against Sodom's <i>injustice</i>
17-18	(J) 19:1, 1Two angels arrive at Sodom; Lot seated at Sodom's gate
19	(J) 19:4 Sin: inhospitality, attempt to rape visiting angels

20-21	(J) 19:24+, 28+ Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah
Deuteronomy	
22	29:23+ (D) Destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim (vv.16-18, idolatry)
23	32:32+ (E) Sodom and Israel's idolatry (vv. 15-21)
Isaiah	
24-25	1:9+, 10+ Jerusalem destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah (oppression, 17-23)
26	3:9 Jerusalem and Judah destroyed, display their oppression (vv.5,12) like Sodom
27	13:19+ Babylon destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah (arrogance, v. 19)
Jeremiah	
28	23:14+ Jerusalem destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah (adultery = idolatry, v. 14)
29	49:18+ Edom destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah (arrogance, v.16)
30	50:40+ Babylon destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah (oppression, v. 33)
Lamentations	

31	4:6 Jerusalem destroyed like Sodom
Ezekiel	
32	16:46 Sodom, younger sister of Jerusalem (abominations, v. 47)
33	16:48 Jerusalem more sinful than Sodom
34	16:49(-50) This was the guilt of your sister Sodom and her daughters [other villages in their region]:
	(1) arrogance
	(2) excess of food
	(3) they were prosperous but apathetic,
	(4) did not aid the poor,
	(5) were haughty, and
	(6) did abomination [<i>to`eba</i> , singular] before me; therefore, I removed them when I saw it. Cf. <i>to`eba</i> ("abomination") in Ezek. 16:2, 22, 25 (verb); 36 (idols), 50-51; 43 (+ <i>zimmah</i> , "infamy"); 47, 50 (singular); 51, 52 (verb); 58 (+ <i>zimmah</i>)
35	16:53 Sodom, Samaria and Jerusalem will be restored
36	16:55 Sodom, Samaria and Jerusalem will be restored

37	16:56 Jerusalem, in its day of arrogance, mocked Sodom
Amos	
38	4:11+ Israel destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah (oppression, v. 1)
Zephaniah	
39	2:9+ Moab destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah (arrogance, v. 10) (cf. *Hosea 11:8, other cities, Admah and Zeboiim, destroyed like Sodom, see Deut. 29:23)
	Note: In six texts of the King James Version and other older versions, <i>qedeshim</i> ("consecrated / male prostitutes") is badly translated as "sodomites" (Deut. 23:17; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:22; 22:46; 1 Kings 13:7; Job 36:14).

Sodom in the New Testament 9 times; with Gomorrah 4 times	
Matthew	
1	10:15+ Luke 10:12 = Q, lack of hospitality
2	11:23 Woes about the unrepentant cities, Sodom should have repented
3	11:24 On day of judgment more tolerable for Sodom than for Chorazin and Bethsaida
Luke	
4	10:12 // Matthew 10:15 = Q, lack of hospitality
5	17:29 The day Lot left Sodom...destruction
Romans	
6	9:29+ Cites Isaiah 1:9 – "...we would have fared like Sodom...Gomorrah" (total destruction)
Jude	
7	7+ Sodom and Gomorrah: rape of angels ("other flesh")
2 Peter	
8	2: 6+ Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah
Revelation	
9	11: 8 "...of the great city [Jerusalem] that is

	prophetically called Sodom and Egypt"
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Sodom in the Bible (48 times) – Conclusions:

1. In the Bible, Sodom is always and only *a place* (city), never a sin ("sodomy").
2. The sin of "sodomy" was invented by a medieval monk, Pedro Damian (ca. 1050 A.D.), but it never received a clear definition (anal sex, anal sex between men, bestiality, any unapproved sexual practice).¹⁴ Thus there has always been much confusion with laws against "sodomy".
3. Usually, the Bible refers to the destruction of Sodom simply as an example of divine justice against evil, without specifying the sin (= *; 12 times Hebrew Bible; 6 times New Testament).¹⁵
4. When the Hebrew Bible refers to the specific sins of Sodom, it never refers to sexual sins, but to arrogance, idolatry, oppression and violence (11 times; the only possible exception would be Ezekiel 16:49-50, where the emphasis is also on sins of pride and oppression). The "abomination" of Sodom in Ezekiel 16:50 probably refers to idolatry, according to the dominant use in Ezekiel.¹⁶
5. In the NT, Sodom also mostly serves as a symbol of divine justice, without being related to any sexual sin (see

divine justice in Romans 9:29, not associated with Romans 1:24-27).

6. Notably, the only text of Jesus that speaks of a sin of Sodom specifies the lack of hospitality, not a sexual sin (Luke 10 // Matthew 10, from the primitive source Q).
7. The only text in the Bible that explicitly relates Sodom with a sexual sin (Judas 7) says that the sexual sin concerned the attempt to rape “other flesh”, meaning, of angels.
8. The apocryphal and pseudo epigraphic literature (ca. 200 B.C. – 100 A.D.) reflects more the homophobic prejudices of the Judaic culture (against the dominant Greco-Roman cultures) and begins to relate Sodom with sexual sins, especially anal sexual relations between men.¹⁷

Appendix 2: Genesis 19 and Judges 19

In its note on → **Judges 19** (“The Crime of Gibeah”) concerning the rape attack that killed the Levite’s concubine, *La Biblia de Nuestro Pueblo* (L.A. Schökel), a Spanish translation of the Bible, points out:

Many people have wanted to find a condemnation of ‘homosexuality’ both in the story of Sodom [Genesis 19] and in this story [Judges 19]. We should avoid anachronisms when interpreting the Bible. The word ‘homosexual’ appeared recently in the nineteenth century. In these two narratives the true crime is **inhospitality, violence and phallic aggression** against foreigners. In both narratives the phallus serves as a weapon of aggression that establishes the relationship of domination

and submission, practices frequently used in wars.

This note even corrects the homophobic note concerning Sodom (Gen. 19:1-11) in the same Spanish translation (although not the notes on Leviticus 18 and 20 and the New Testament texts)! But the BNP note on Judges 19 for the first time in Spanish initiates the struggle to educate and warn against homophobic prejudices in our Bible translations. (Good notes are increasingly common in English translations, as well as German and French.) We would consider it outrageous to use the rape and murder of the Levite’s concubine in Judges 19 as a basis for condemning “heterosexuality”. So why have we been so slow to recognize how outrageous it is to use the attempted rape of angels in Gen. 19:1-11 as a basis for condemning “homosexuality”? (*Note*: Many thanks to Esther Baruja y Kathryn Gries, formerly IFES staff in Paraguay and Chile, respectively, for calling my attention to this important note in the BNP.)

Genesis 19:1-11 (Sodom) and Judges 19: Inductive Study in Context

Introduction

The destruction of Sodom forms part of the "J" narrative (from the Yahwistic Pentateuchal source), perhaps dating as early as Solomon (around 900 BC), although often now dated later. For text, see especially the NIV or NRSV, with the notes below.

1. How had Abraham received his three celestial visitors in the preceding chapter (18:1-8)?
2. How did Lot receive the two visiting angels in 19:1-3? Who was the third visitor in 18:1-2 who does not visit Lot in 19:1? What had happened to the third visitor (18:22)?
3. Who surrounded Lot's house and how did they want to treat the angels (18:4-5)? Note: "know" (*yada'*, Hebrew), in 19:5 probably has the sense here of "have sex with" which in this context would be "rape" (see "Adam *knew* his wife Eve, and she conceived," Gen. 4:1 literally).
4. How does Lot respond to the threat to rape the visiting angels (19:6-8)? Does he (and the narrator) view the men of Sodom as "homosexuals" or just as delinquents' intent on humiliating the visitors by gang rape? Note: "know" (*yada'*, Hebrew) in 19:8 again has the sense "have sex with" but here in reference to Lot's daughters as virgins who had

now "known" men. What does Lot's offer of his daughters to the would-be rapists indicate about the place of women and children in his patriarchal society and about the importance of hospitality to visitors? See Hebrews 13:1-2; 3 John 5:5-10; Matthew 25:35, 43.

5. What does the story of the rape of the Levite's concubine (Judges 19:1-30) have in common with the story of Sodom? Note: "know" (*yada'*, Hebrew), in Judges 19:25 is translated "raped" in both the NIV and NRSV. Would you consider it legitimate to conclude from the gruesome story of the gang rape of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19 that the text condemns all heterosexual relations? Would you think it legitimate to conclude from the attempted gang rape of the two visiting angels in Genesis 19 that the text condemns all male homosexual relations? Why do you think so many readers have used the story of the attempted gang rape of two angels in Genesis 19 as a basis for condemning even loving committed same-sex relations but do not so distort the meaning of Judges 19?

Note: Of the 39 references to Sodom in Hebrew Bible texts, none refers to the sin as sexual, but as arrogant injustice/oppression, neglect of the poor and needy, etc. (see Ezekiel 16:49-50). In the New Testament, with its nine references to Sodom, Jesus uses the city as an example of inhospitality (Mat 10:11-15 // Luke 10:8-12 = Q). The first to refer to the sexual dimension of

Sodom's sin was the New Testament book of Jude, but he makes it explicit that the sexual sin involved "going after different [angel] flesh" (v. 7; see above and NJB literal translation and note). The Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria (20 BC-50 AD), was the first to interpret the Sodom story as a condemnation of same-sex relations. His misinterpretation evidently was influenced by his acceptance of neo/platonic and stoic philosophical views that any sexual relations that were not procreative were condemned as "unnatural". Philo's revisionist view that the Sodom story sought to condemn male same-sex practices was not accepted by any Christian writer until Augustine and John Chrysostom (around 400 AD). For historical details, see Theodore Jennings, *Plato or Paul? The Origins of Western Homophobia* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2009), 88-108.

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Chapter 2

Seven Myths in the Homophobic Interpretations of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

18:22 And with a free male (*zakar*) you shall not lie the lying down of a woman (*mishkebe 'ishah*),

[= like one who lies with a woman (penetrator, active)

=like a woman who lies down (penetrated, passive)?]

that is an abomination (*to'ebah*)...

20:13 And a man (*'ish*) who lies with a free male (*zakar*) the lying down of a woman (*mishkebe 'ishah*)

[= like one who lies with a woman (penetrator, active)

= like a woman who lies down (penetrated, passive)?]

they did an abomination (*to'ebah*);

the two of them must surely die; *their* blood is upon *them*.

[the change to the plural "they...the two of them" (20:13b) may be a later expansion].

Myth #1 "Leviticus condemns all homosexuals."

The prohibitions refer only to sexual *acts*, not to sexual *orientations*: "homosexuality" refers to an orientation that may exist without being expressed in acts and same-sex acts often are committed by persons of heterosexual orientation.

Myth #2 "Leviticus condemns all homosexual acts."

If Lev. 18:22 addressed women, it would prohibit all *heterosexual* relations!¹⁸ But the texts do not refer to women or lesbians; cf. the condemnation of bestiality in Lev. 18:23b and 20:16, which does explicitly include women. This silence regarding women is another reason to avoid the term "homosexuality," which not only refers to sexual orientations but also *includes lesbians*; → Romans 1:26 similarly does *not* refer to lesbians (but only to a change to "unnatural" anal sex with males to avoid procreation.

Myth #3 "Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 condemn all same-sex acts between males."

The prohibitions address only free males, as is the case with virtually all the laws in the Pentateuch, and prohibit a certain conduct involving such males. The laws do not address *slaves*, since they had no option in the use/abuse of their bodies, nor are relations between a free male and his slave prohibited.¹⁹

Myth #4 "Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 condemn all types of same-sex acts between free males."

The *only* act prohibited is male-male *anal* sex.²⁰ If the prohibition were general, the phrase "like one who lies with a woman"

would have been omitted: “You shall not lie with a free male” – period! In his philological analysis, Olyan shows that the Hebrew phrase indicates “being sexually *penetrated* by a male in such a way that a woman ceases to be virgin” (Num. 31:17-18, 35; Judges 21:11-12); therefore, the prohibition does *not* include other expressions of homoeroticism (mutual masturbation, oral and intercrural sex, etc.

Note: Robert Gagnon responds.²¹

Gagnon accepts Olyan’s linguistic evidence that Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 do not refer to sexual orientations, nor to women (much less “lesbians”) and that the only act explicitly condemned in Leviticus is male-male anal sex [without condoms, we would add]. Nevertheless, Gagnon seeks to negate the significance of these exegetical conclusions, arguing that when the Bible condemns certain sexual *acts* (adultery, incest, rape), the Bible by no means approves caresses, kisses or mutual masturbation in such relations. Gagnon’s argument, however, overlooks the fact that the condemnations of adultery, incest and rape express continuous norms in many texts throughout the Bible, since they represent abuses of power that *harm the neighbor* (Rom. 13:8-10). The prohibition of anal sex between two free males, however, occurs only in the Leviticus Holiness Code and appears to reflect a specific historical context, motivated by the association with idolatrous cults, being thus a matter of cultic uncleanness, not a transcendent norm for conduct.

Gagnon begins with the explanation that any mixing/confusion of the two sexes is the abomination (see above), but defends the texts as normative for today. He insists that God created only two sexes (Genesis 1–2), which must always *complement each other* in sexual relations and only within the framework of marriage.²² Gagnon thus treats the Leviticus texts as condemnations of “homosexuality” and always plays his trump card, insisting that the motive for divine condemnation in Leviticus is not the urgency (in the postexilic community) to procreate, nor because of the association with pagan idolatry, nor for any cultic uncleanness (that would result from mixing semen with feces), but for the principle that the two sexes ought always maintain a pure identity without mixture or confusion, and that the two sexes ought always complement each other in sexual relations within heterosexual marriage. *How male and female manage to become “one flesh” in marital sex without any “mixing” is never clarified in this argument and Gagnon’s concept of “complementarity” is modern, not biblical* (→ Galatians 3:28; Romans 1).

Myth #5 “Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 indicate the gravity of the sin of same-sex acts by referring to them as an ‘abomination’ (to’ebah).”

Although many translations disguise the truth, *all* the practices condemned in Leviticus 18 and 20 are described as an “abomination,” in Lev. 18:29, even sexual relations with a wife during her “menstrual impurity” (Lev. 18:19; 20:18). Such relations receive *equal condemnation* but such condemnation is almost never considered normative today (although see Seventh Day Adventist Davidson!).²³

Myth #6 “Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 provide a strong biblical basis for modern church crusades promoting laws that punish sexual minorities.”

Citing a law that punishes two *males* with the *death penalty* as the basis for punishing two *lesbians* with *prison* sentences is totally incoherent and hypocritical. Moreover, in the case of two males practicing anal sex, *both* are to suffer the death penalty (20:13), even if one had been raped or was an abused minor (Brooten 1996:290). But how many churches today would seek to impose the death penalty on a youth sexually abused by his priest or pastor? In the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries, more coherently, many churches cited Leviticus in their campaigns to maintain the *death penalty* for “sodomites.” Gagnon and Davidson claim to defend the “historical-traditional-conservative” position of the church, but forget that for a millennium, until the beginning of the twentieth century, all churches supported the death penalty for “sodomites,” a cruelty now limited to certain fundamentalist Islamic countries.

Myth #7 “Biblical scholars understand why Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 condemn sex acts involving anal penetration (without condoms) between males and agree that this prohibition should be normative for the churches today.”

To the contrary, although most recognize that the condemnation is limited to anal penetration between free males, regarding the *motive* for this prohibition no consensus exists. Studies of legal codes in antiquity make clear (1) the difficulty of establishing precise motives and purposes for many laws; (2) that *a law may endure without changes for centuries, while the motives and purposes may be multiple and changeable.*

Currently scholars offer four interpretations that may explain the motive/s and purpose/s of the prohibition and any of the four proposals may be present in variable combinations for centuries. **The condemnation of free males engaging in anal sex may be due to:**

7.1 The association with pagan idolatry:

A prohibition of idolatry frames both chapters (Lev. 18:1-5, 24-30; 20:1-6, 22-27). Moreover, the term “abomination” almost always describes idolatrous practices.²⁴ (→ **Ezekiel**); cf. an expression of xenophobia in → **1 Corinthians 8**.²⁵ Also, the association with idolatry explains the absence of the prohibition in Deuteronomy, since → **Deuteronomy** includes a similar prohibition against cultic prostitutes (23:17-18).²⁶

7.2 The urgent need in the decimated post-exilic Jewish community to maximize procreation and not waste semen: (*zera'*)

The Hebrew *zera'* means “semen, seed, descendent.” Translations thus commonly obscure the relations in the text between the prohibition of not offering *zera'* (descendants, children) to Moloch (Lev. 20:2-4; 18:20-21) and other ways of wasting semen and not producing sons and legitimate heirs.²⁷

Note: Robert Gagnon’s attempted refutation of Jacob Milgrom.²⁸ Robert Gagnon attempts to refute Jacob Milgrom’s explanation of the *main motive* for the sexual prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20 as the **failure to procreate** but fails to take into consideration the two characteristics of biblical laws mentioned above: (1) the difficulty of establishing their motives and purposes; and (2) that *a law may last for*

centuries without a change, while the motives and purposes may be multiple and changeable. That is, motives may be present in *variable combinations* through the centuries. Other basic weaknesses in Gagnon's critique:

- When Gagnon refers to Milgrom's position as "Proscribed *Merely* Because of Wasted Seed and Lack of Progeny,"²⁹ he oversimplifies Milgrom's interpretation and sets up a straw man, since Milgrom in fact only emphasizes lack of progeny as the basic rationale, not the only one.
- The sexual prohibitions of Leviticus 18 and 20 are best understood as reflecting the *multiple* concerns of avoiding idolatry and the mixing of elements that should be kept separate to avoid impurity, as well as the basic procreation factor. However, as Sarah Melchor points out, the concern of texts such as Leviticus 18 and 20 is not simply *quantitative* procreation of the maximum number of humans, but includes *qualitative* concerns for the procreation of legitimate *heirs to the land* to be nurtured in stable Israelite families.³⁰
- Gagnon's own basic explanation, his imagined divine plan to have human sexual relations that always manifest male-female complementarity, of course, is totally absent from the texts and imposes an eighteenth-century romantic concept on the biblical texts, which commonly depict male-female relations as

reflecting patriarchal hierarchy, not complementarity (→ Romans).

- Gagnon repeatedly has tried to prove that the reference to Sodom's "abomination" (→ Ez 16:49-51) refers to homoerotic relations.³¹ However, the golden rule of hermeneutics (the context) demands that we first consider the significance of "abomination" *in Ezekiel itself* (43 times plus two of the verb), before resorting to any other source such as the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26, with its references to anal sex between free males as an "abomination" (18:22; 20:13). And "abomination" (*to'eba*) *in the book of Ezekiel* mainly refers to *idolatry* and twice to the heterosexual sin of adultery, but never to male-male anal sex (→ Ezekiel, Appendix 1 for details).

7.3 Cultic *uncleanness* that results from prohibited *mixtures*:

- a. **of semen with feces**; this would explain the absence of any prohibition of relations between two women;³²
- b. **of the two sexes**: the sexual ideology that God created two sexes, male and female, which ought to be kept distinct and pure without any "mixing," especially the male, considered "superior;"³³ this also explains the absence of any prohibition of female homoeroticism, since a woman would not lose status thereby.

7.4 To avoid incest between father and son. Lev. 18:6, 14, 22 and 20:13 prohibit only male-male *incest*, according to **David Stewart**.³⁴ Gen. 49:4 shows that when "lying(s) of X" is plural it refers specifically to incest.³⁵ Stewart's radically new interpretation *solves five traditional problems*:

- a. The total absence of any prohibition of male-male anal sex anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible. Were all homoerotic relations contrary to the will of a Creator who demands only male-female "complementarity," as revealed in the creation narratives in Genesis 1–2, why were related prohibitions not included in the earlier codes? Why were male homoerotic relations acceptable from Moses (1300 B.C.) thru Deuteronomy (seventh century B.C.), only to be punished with the death penalty in Lev. 20:13 (post/exilic, sixth-fifth century B.C.)? (See → **Ruth** and Naomi ca. 1100 B.C.; David and Jonathan ca. 1000 B.C., → **1-2 Samuel**).
- b. The context in both Leviticus 18 and 20 emphasizes almost exclusively what we categorize as "incest" prohibitions (18:6-18; 20:11-12,17,19-21). However, according to traditional heterosexual readings, Leviticus 18 and 20 refer only to male incestuous abuse of females, but do not prohibit male incestuous abuse of other males, even though this is the first kind of incestuous abuse described in the Bible (Ham and Noah in Gen. 9:21-22). Understood as prohibiting male-male incest abuse, 18:22 and 20:13 simply extend the chapters' prohibition to all related males, to the same degree as 18:6-18 did for females (but see c. and f. below).
- c. The Ancient Near East Hittite Law 189 forbids a man from sexually violating his son.³⁶ Similarly Gen. 9:21-22 probably refers to Ham incestuously raping his father Noah, who lay drunk with genitals exposed.³⁷ Unless we count Cain, who apparently took his sister as wife (Genesis 4), this is the first case of incest abuse in the Bible and corresponds to the first example in Lev. 18:7a, "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father nor [Hebrew "waw"] the nakedness of your mother (NJB; LXX; cf. NRSV, NIV, Jewish Study Bible!). The Hebrew conjunction *waw* is here best translated "and" or "or," not "which is" (NRSV), which would equate rather

than distinguish the objects of incest abuse. Similarly, Lev. 18:14a and b should be translated so as to distinguish male (14a, paternal uncle) and female (14b) objects of incest abuse (as in NJB). Thus, the inclusion of male objects of incest abuse in Leviticus 18 and 20 is not surprising and fits both the Ancient Near East and biblical patterns (see also the drunken Lot abused by his daughters in Gen. 19:32-35).

- d. For centuries commentators were perplexed by the apparent absence of any prohibition of a father abusing his daughter, the most common incest offense in both ancient and modern times. Susan Rattray solved the problem, citing Lev. 21:2, where the reference to “near relations” (“your flesh”) includes mother, daughter, and sister of marriageable age.³⁸ Due to internalized heterosexism, Rattray failed to note that male subjects are included in Lev. 21:2 and so also in 18:6-7a and 14 (father, son, brother, uncle).
- e. No other text in the Hebrew Bible repeats or refers to the prohibitions of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, so the earliest Jewish homophobic interpretations surfaced in the intertestamental

deuterocanonical and apocryphal works, reflecting resentment against the oppression and violence of Greek and Roman overlords. For incest prohibitions in the NT, see Paul in 1 Corinthians 5, John the Baptist in Mark 6:18.

Nevertheless, in the case of Lev, 18:22, the prohibition of male-male anal sex occurs in a context of prohibited sexual acts apparently unrelated to incest (18:19-21, 23). The chapter appears to be organized around the principle of distinguishing between the fourteen prohibitions of incest (18:6-18) and five non-incestuous acts (18:19-23): sex during menstruation, adultery, child sacrifice, male-male anal sex, bestiality.³⁹ Such diversity may well reflect the continuity of legal prohibitions with shifting diversity of motives and purposes.

In addition to the lack of consensus about the four possible motives for the prohibitions, the phrase “**the lying down of a woman**” (*mishkebe 'ishah*) is *ambiguous* in Hebrew and may refer to the active male who penetrates⁴⁰ or to the passive male who is penetrated.⁴¹

- a. “*as a woman one who lies down (passive male, penetrated).*”

According to Jerome Walsh,⁴² Lev. 18:22 and 20:13a (singular) reflects a *patriarchal* sexual ideology: the sin in both texts consists in not maintaining the purity of the masculine gender, with its *superior* dignity and honor, and of “mixing” the masculine and the feminine (*inferior*) in a repugnant way (abomination). The texts thus condemn the

passive male who offers himself to another male to be penetrated: who knows/experiences being penetrated like a woman (confusion/mixture of the two sexes), while 20:13b (plural) extends the condemnation to include the active male (both with the death penalty). Walsh contends that his interpretation explains better the consistent use of “free male” (*zakar*) for the penetrator in both Leviticus texts and also the references to the “lying of (a) woman (*mishkebe ‘ishah*)” as something that the woman “knows = knows through the experience of being penetrated” in Num. 31:17-18, 35 and Judges 21:11-12.⁴³ Walsh’s interpretation thus implies that the Israelite norms *reflect* the common macho attitudes concerning the male’s supposed superiority and dignity, an interpretation more consistent with the traditional priestly theology (patriarchal) and with the concept of impurity in Leviticus 1–16.

John Habgood, in his review (*Times Literary Supplement*, July 18, 2007) of *An Acceptable Sacrifice: Homosexuality and the Church* (Duncan Dormor and Jeremy Morris, eds., London: SPCK, 2007), also supports Walsh’s interpretation that the true offense consists in the idea that a male lying with another male implies “a violation of the [supposed] superiority of the male” and that the preoccupation of Leviticus, therefore, is patriarchal: it has to do with gender relations, not with sexual orientation.

b. “*as one who lies with a woman (active male who penetrates).*”

According to Saul Olyan, however,⁴⁴ Lev. 18:22 and 20:13a (singular) condemns only the *active* male who penetrates (oppression,

abuse of power); while 20:13b (plural) extends the condemnation to include the passive male who is penetrated like a woman (both with the death penalty). This interpretation is more consistent with the Exodus paradigm (Ex. 18:3; see Yahweh’s name, Lev. 18:1-2, 4, 6, 21, 30) and Holiness Code theology (Leviticus 17–26, especially Leviticus 19). The abrupt change to the *plural* in 20:13b would indicate a later expansion to condemn the passive male.

Olyan’s interpretation implies that **Israel’s norms differed** from the norms in other cultures, since elsewhere legal codes made distinctions according to class or age:

- The **Greeks** accepted intergenerational sex, for example between a professor (active) and a student (free youth, passive), but disapproved relations between owners and slaves;
- **Rome** accepted relations between owners (active) and slaves (passive) or with male prostitutes, but punished older males who abused free youths.

Conclusion For those who use the Bible as a source for norms, it might appear important to establish a principal motive in order to decide if this motive and the law itself have literal validity today. In this case, however, the Bible (especially the **New Testament**) **deconstructs** the four motives proposed for the laws:

- Although **idolatry** is condemned (Rom. 1:18-25), certain related practices must be evaluated with discernment (e.g. eating meat offered to idols, either in pagan

temples or in the homes of unbelievers, 1 Corinthians 8–10; Romans 14).

- In the New Testament celibacy is exalted and **procreation** is notably *absent* when discipleship and sexuality are treated (Mat. 19:12; Luke 14:26; 18:29; Rev. 14:4; 1 Corinthians 7; see also **Song of Songs**);
- **Uncleanness** (→ Mark 7:21-23; Rom. 1:24-27; 14:14,20; Titus 1:15). Paul declares that all *things* are clean; married couples are to abstain from sex in order to pray, not to avoid menstrual impurity (1 Cor. 7:1-5);
- **Rigid distinctions** between male and female, slave and free, Jews and pagans, disappear (Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 10–11; Eph. 2:11-20); like all believers, women are priests and may even be apostles (1 Peter 2:4-5; Rom. 16:7). It would be an anachronism to import the modern concept of complementarity into the Bible.

Moreover, the New Testament cites and exalts the command to **love your neighbor** (Lev. 19:18; Jesus in the synoptic gospels, Mark 12:31; Paul in Rom. 13:8-10; see James 2:8), but the NT never cites Lev. 18:22 and 20:13. Probably Paul’s vocabulary (*arsenokoitai*, → 1 Corinthians 6:9; cf. 1 Tim. 1:10) alludes to Leviticus (cf. → Rom. 1:24-32). Nevertheless, the use of *arsenokoitai* in these two texts limits the acts to anal sex between free males and in the later chapters of Romans, Paul deconstructs the pejorative rhetoric of Romans 1.

Homophobia in post-Constantinian Christendom maintained the death penalty for acts of sodomy from the fourth century until the eighteenth (in Europe) and the nineteenth (in Great Britain). How, therefore, can so many churches today, in their condemnation of sexual minorities, pretend to submit to the authority of the Bible, but ignore the death penalty that Lev. 20:13 so clearly commands? Undoubtedly, this is but another example of the *selective, arbitrary literalism* that always characterizes fundamentalist ideologies.

Even the majority of fundamentalist theologians recognize that, given the vast number of biblical commands that no one dreams of taking literally today, we cannot cite such texts as Lev. 20:13 and 18:22 as normative for modern communities of faith. In fact, in the entire book of Leviticus, Christians can find not a single command in chapters 1–17 and 21–27 that they would seek to obey today (nor would they obey everything in Leviticus 18–20; see outline, p. 1). Even for most orthodox Jews, the situation is similar, since the Temple with its sacrifices and priesthood has disappeared (replaced by synagogues with rabbis). Therefore, those who turn to the Bible as a source of norms seek to demonstrate *continuity* with other biblical texts and a certain *theological coherence*.⁴⁵

Hence the importance of recognizing that the two texts in Leviticus commonly cited to condemn “homosexuals” represent a quite isolated phenomenon: such prohibitions are absent from the ancient “Book of the Covenant” (Exodus 21–23), from the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20 //

Deuteronomy 5), and from Deuteronomy. Even in Leviticus, from the late sacerdotal source (“P”, exilic or post-exilic), they appear only in the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26), the latest element in the priestly materials. Thus, during the first eight centuries, from Moses (ca. 1300 B.C.) until the post-exilic period (538 B.C.), Israel’s legal codes contained no prohibition of anal sex between free males (see the misuse of → **Romans** 1:26 to condemn lesbians only after 400 A.D.). Similarly in Church history the use of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 did not enter the homophobic discourse until late in the Middle Ages⁴⁶ and thus the Church, like Israel, for many centuries never cited Leviticus 18 and 20 to justify discrimination and violence against sexual minorities.

Since the Pentateuch contains memorable accounts of sexual violations (Noah, violated by his son Ham, → **Genesis** 9; the men of Sodom trying to rape the two angel visitors, → **Genesis** 19), many suggest that the prohibitions of male-male anal sex resulted as a reaction to the similar sexual violations Israelite males suffered as prisoners of war and slaves during the Exile (587/86-538 B.C.). Moreover, with the population decimated by war and exile, the urgency to “multiply” (Gen. 1:26-28, also “P”) would have created great pressure against all non-procreative sexual practices. The priestly version (P) of the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17) had stressed the promises of *land* and numerous *descendants* (“seed/semen”) and such precisely is the emphasis of Leviticus 18 and 20: the good use of *semen* in order to remain in the *land*.⁴⁷ In fact, Jacob Milgrom concludes that Leviticus prohibits only male-male anal sex by *Jewish males* and other *inhabitants of the Holy Land*. He adds that today in Israel,

gays may fulfill the intention of the commands by adopting children.⁴⁸

Were we to read Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 as addressing *women*, they might take it as a prohibition of *heterosexuality* and an encouragement of lesbian relations, rather than a prohibition of “homosexuality”: “Don’t lie with a male as one lies with a woman. That’s an abomination”! (Lev. 18:22).⁴⁹ At any rate, obviously two gay males who live in a modern world suffering from demographic explosion, enjoying a loving relationship that is consensual and exclusive (or open, but practicing safer sex in other relations), do not harm anyone – and even more obvious is the case of two lesbians, who need not be so concerned with all the same measures of safer sex.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 Inductive Study**in Context****Introduction**

Although traditionally ascribed to Moses (around 1300 BC), most biblical scholars today conclude that Leviticus 16–26 constitutes a “Holiness Code,” the latest part of Leviticus, dating from Exilic (586-539 BC) or Post-exilic times (539 and following).

Translation

18:22 And with a free male (*zacar*) you shall not lie **the lying down of a woman** (*mishkebe ‘ishah*)

= like one who lies with a woman (penetrator, active)

= like a woman who lies down (penetrated, passive);

that is an abomination (*to’ebah*)...

20:13 And a man (*‘ish*) who lies with a free male (*zacar*)

the lying down of a woman (*mishkebe ‘ishah*)

= like one who lies with a woman (penetrator, active)

= like a woman who lies down (penetrated, passive);

they did an abomination (*to’ebah*);

the two of them must surely die; *their* blood is upon *them*.

1. Is either prohibition directed to women? Why do you think only free males are the subject? Can we be sure that the intent is also to prohibit all female-female sexual relations when this is not specified?

2. Does either prohibition refer to the sexual orientation of the free male involved? Why do you think the prohibition focuses exclusively on sexual acts and does not refer to sexual orientations?

3. If the prohibitions refer only to sexual acts, not sexual orientations, and only to free males, not to females, would it be an error to say that they condemn “homosexuality”?

4. Why do you think the prohibitions are directed only to free males and not slaves? Would slaves have had any choice or were their bodies the property of their owners (male or female)?

Note: Biblical scholars now generally recognize that the texts use a euphemism (“the lying down”) to specify sexual penetration, first referring to a woman (“the lying down of a woman” = penis in vagina) and second prohibiting a free male from “lying” with another male (anal sex). If the texts thus specifically prohibit only free males from practicing male-male anal sex, can we be sure that the intent is also to prohibit all male-male sexual intimacy (mutual masturbation, oral sex, kisses, caresses, etc.)?

What does Leviticus mean when it designates certain acts as an abomination (*to’ebah*)? Which of the sexual acts in Leviticus 18 and 20 are designated as an abomination? See 18:26 and 20:23. Do churches today consider it an abomination

for a man to have intercourse with his wife during her menstrual period (Lev. 18:19; 20:18)?

What penalty does Lev. 20:13 prescribe and for whom? Would you think this an appropriate penalty for a male who was gang raped (as the men of Sodom attempted with the angels)? What about cases where a youth is sexually abused by a priest or other clergy? Do you think the churches did well when, more than a century ago, most supported the move to abandon the death penalty for "sodomites" and prison terms were substituted (recall the case of Oscar Wilde)?

Why do you think Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 sought to prohibit free males from practicing male-male anal sex? Do the other prohibitions (sex with a woman menstruating, sex with animals, child sacrifice) suggest that the concern was to maximize procreation? Note: The decimated population in post/exilic period would have made procreation almost as urgent as it was for Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28). Today, when rapid population growth is the problem, should we continue to insist on the prohibitions of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13?

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Chapter 3

Seven Myths in the Homophobic

Translations of 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10

Translation

⁹Do you not know that the unjust [oppressors, *adikoi*] will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor softies/cowards [*malakoi*, soft males], nor males who sexually abuse other males [*arsenokoitai*, male/s + bed/s], ¹⁰nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians. 6:9-11).

⁹Now we know that the law is good, if anyone uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, ¹⁰for the sexually immoral/adulterers, and males who sexually abuse other males [*arsenokoitai*, male/s + bed/s], for slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching (1 Timothy 1:9-10).

1 Cor. 6:9: *malakoi* ("soft") + '*arsenokoitai* ("male/s + bed/s"); 1 Tim. 1:10: '*arsenokoitai* ("male/s + bed/s")

malakos, (1) "soft;" (2) "pertinent to being passive in a same-sex relationship, effeminate esp. of catamites, of men and boys who are sodomized by other males in such a relationship, opp. *Arsenokoites*" (Danker, Frederick William BDAG, 2000:613).

arsenokoites, "(*arsen* 'male' + *koite* 'bed') a male who engages in sexual activity with a person of his own sex, pederast" (Danker, BDAG 2000:135).

1 Corinthians 6:9: *malakoi* + '*arsenokoitai*

1 Timothy 1:10: '*arsenokoitai*

effeminate..abusers of themselves with mankind (AV/KJV) defile themselves with mankind (AV/KJV)

homosexuals (RSV 1952) sodomites (RSV 1952)

the self-indulgent... sodomites (NJB) homosexuals (NJB)

male prostitutes...homosexual offenders (NIV) perverts (NIV)

men who have sex with men (NIV2011) men who have sex with men (NIV2011)

male prostitutes...sodomites (NRSV) sodomites (NRSV)

male prostitutes...practice homosexuality (NLT) practice homosexuality (NLT)

men who practice homosexuality (ESV) men who practice homosexuality (ESV)

are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality (NLT) who practice homosexuality (NLT)

Myth #1 "In 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 Paul condemns lesbians."

The Greek term "bed-males" is explicitly limited to males, while *malakoi*, "soft" in Mat. 11:8 // Luke 7:25 refers to clothes and at times was used as a metaphor for *males* who were undisciplined or "effeminate." However, in antiquity "effeminate" could be used to describe an undisciplined male who had frequent sexual relations with women or who spent too much time in their company (see David, seeking out Bathsheba instead of leading his troops in war). Moreover, throughout church history, until quite recently, *malakoi* has been misinterpreted as condemning masturbation.⁵⁰ Neither the Hebrew Bible (the "Old Testament"), nor the New Testament, nor the Koran make any reference to sexual relations between women ("lesbianism"). Romans 1:26 does not refer to lesbians but to females who offer themselves to males "against nature," that is, for anal sex, in order to avoid pregnancy.⁵¹

Myth #2 "In 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 Paul condemns 'homosexuals'."

The approval of masturbation and the invention of a new "mental illness" (homosexuality) by nineteenth century psychologists, together with the sudden disappearance of the sin of "sodomy" in twentieth century biblical studies motivated a desperate search for new texts to condemn homosexuality (48 texts in the Hebrew Bible referred to Sodom, but as a city, not a sin). Therefore, beginning with the Revised Standard Version (RSV NT in 1946; Bible in 1952) and soon supported by the standard Greek lexicon,⁵² Biblicists everywhere began to introduce "homosexuals" as the translation of *malakoi*

+ *arsenokoitai* in 1 Cor. 6:9 and of *arsenokoitai* [without *malakoi*] in 1 Tim. 1:9. Thus, with an incredible anachronism, two Greek words (*malakoi*, "soft" males + '*arsenokoitai*, "bed-males", from *koite*, "bed", a euphemism for sexual intercourse, and '*arsen*, male[s]) acquired a new sense and frequently were mistranslated with the modern scientific term "homosexuals." Finally, however, in the new edition of the standard Greek lexicon (now BDAG), editor and reviser Frederick Danker recognized the grave error of the previous edition and of the RSV in proposing "homosexuals" as the translation of *arsenokoitai* with or without *malakoi*.⁵³ Nevertheless, precisely when the newer versions in English began to correct the erroneous translation "homosexuals," translators began to introduce the term "homosexuals" in the Spanish versions (in Spanish see DHH, BJ, NVI; NTLH; cf. RV95 "sodomites"; BP "inverts").

Although '*arsenokoitai* is a rare word (perhaps coined by Paul) whose precise meaning has been disputed for centuries, it is formed from two very common words: male(s) + bed. In this term "bed" is not literal but has a metaphorical sense indicating some kind of sexual activity (see the negative use of the word "beds" in Romans 13:13 to signify acts of adultery and promiscuity and compare the positive reference to the marriage "bed" in Hebrews 13:4). In the vice list in 1 Timothy (1:9-10), the Seventh of the Ten Commandments, the prohibition of adultery, appears as the prohibition of prostitution/ unjust sexual relations (Greek: *pornois*) and also of "bed-male[s]". This occurrence of "bed-male[s]" in 1 Tim. 1:10 enables us to define the meaning more precisely, since it occurs between a reference to sexual relations that

are unjust and oppressive (Greek: *pórnois*) and another term that refers to “slave traders.” Thus, according to the most recent studies, *arsenokoítai* appears to signify sexual relations that are *abusive* (male-male rape without condoms) in contexts of exploitation and oppression, and related to the purchase or kidnapping of youths to be slaves and work as male prostitutes.⁵⁴

The translation of *arsenokoítai* (“bed-males,” with or without *malakoi*, “softies”) as “homosexuals” is totally erroneous, since:

- “homosexual” includes women (lesbians) and “bed-males” is explicitly limited to males;
- “homosexual” is a German word invented in 1869 (in Austria) to designate a person’s “sexual orientation” (a modern scientific concept), while “bed-males” refers only to sexual acts in which a male sexually abuses another male (whatever the sexual orientation of the two males involved);
- “homosexual” does not specifically indicate any sexual *practice*: males and females, heterosexuals and bisexuals, also may engage in slave traffic and resort to male prostitutes, condemned in 1 Timothy as vices. However, many persons of homosexual orientation abstain from all sexual activity, especially the prostitution and sexual abuse of young slaves condemned in 1 Tim. 1:10.

Myth #3 “According to 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10, homosexuality is an abomination, the gravest sin.”

The absence of the terms “soft/effeminate” and “bed-male/s” in the two preceding lists (1 Cor. 5:10 and 11; see Gal. 5:19-20 and NJB note Rom. 1:29) suggests that these two terms in the list of ten vices (1 Cor. 6:9-10) do not have the same importance as those vices repeated in the other lists⁵⁵ (see sexual immorality, 1 Corinthians 5; 6:12-20; coveting, 1 Cor. 6:1-11; idolatry in 1 Cor. 8:1-11:1):

1 Cor. 5:10 (masc. *plural*) 1 Cor. 5:11 (masc. *singular*) 1 Cor. 6:9-10 (masculine *plural*)

pornois (prostitutes/immoral) *pornos pornois*

covetous/greedy

covetous/greedy *idolaters*

robbers - *idolater* adulterers

idolater’s reviler *malakoi* (suaves)

drunkard *arsenokoítai* (bed-males)

robber thieves, drunkards, revilers, robbers

The situation is similar to the prohibitions of male-male anal sex (abusive, incestuous?) in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, which only occur in this latest of the Pentateuchal legal codes (the Holiness Code, Leviticus 17-26), but which are absent in the earlier codes (the Book of the Covenant, Exodus 21-23; Deuteronomy).

Myth #4 “In 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10, Paul condemns all homoerotic acts as immoral.”

The terms “im/moral” and “ethical” never occur in the Bible, since they are categories of Greek philosophy. In 1 Cor. 6:9 Paul

treats sexual acts and passions under the category of “injustice/ oppression (*adikia*)” (cf. the “unjust judges” in 6:1 and → **Romans** 1:18, 29; 2:8). In 1 Tim. 1:9-10 the “bed-males” sexually abuse enslaved youths. Since the Kingdom of God is characterized above all by divine liberating justice (Mat. 5:6, 10, 20; 6:10, 33; 25:31-46), the unjust/ oppressors cannot enter (1 Cor. 6:9).

That the condemnation in 1 Cor. 6:9 of male-male anal sex is not general or universal, but rather limited to certain acts of sexual abuse, exploitation, etc., is indicated by six factors:

- A reference to the *unjust/oppressors* (*adikoi*, 6:9) initiates the vice-list, indicating that all the terms that follow are examples of such abuse of power to oppress and exploit persons who are socially weaker;
- In the only other use of *'arsenokoítai* in the NT (the vice-list in 1 Tim. 1:9), the term is preceded by a reference to males who use prostitutes and followed by a reference to “slave traders,” which indicates that the *'arsenokoítai* are the clients of the young male prostitutes who had been kidnapped and kept as slaves (acts of exploitation and oppression);
- In Paul’s patriarchal historical-cultural context, sexual acts were understood to be relations between an active, superior penetrator (free male) and a passive, penetrated inferior (female, youth, slave), not as expressions of mutual committed love between social equals;⁵⁶
- The reference to the *idolatry* of the oppressors (1 Cor. 6:9) also constitutes the context of the unjust acts condemned in Leviticus 18 and 20 and Rom. 1:18-23, 25;
- The earliest uses of *'arsenokoítai* after Paul (who may have coined the word) occur in contexts of sins of economic injustice and exploitation, not of sexual sins.⁵⁷
- Those who translate “male/s + bed/s” as referring to any male or male-male sexual activity have fallen prey to the old “etymological fallacy” (James Barr, 1961), assuming that the meaning of a word can be determined simply by referring to its etymology, while ignoring usage (see “lady-killer” and “wise guy”). However, both contexts in the Pauline usage of *arsenokoítai* indicate abuse of power that harms the other, as do the other post-Pauline uses. The only act of male-male sex envisioned is anal penetration in which a “superior” penetrates and thus degrades and harms an “inferior,” not the loving, consensual homoerotic relations common between modern gays (and lesbians).

Myth #5 “In 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 Paul condemns all acts of male-male sexual love.”

In 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 Paul never speaks of love and what he condemns is *injustice/oppression* expressed in male-male anal sex acts, where coveting motivates the exploitation that harms the neighbor, especially the weak, slaves, youths, and

prostitutes.⁵⁸ Notably, 1 Corinthians is the New Testament book that most treats human sexuality (1 Corinthians 5–7) and that most emphasizes the preeminence of love (1 Corinthians 13), but when writing about sex, Paul never explicitly refers to love (1 Corinthians 5–7) and when expounding about love, he never says anything explicit about sexuality (1 Corinthians 13; but see 16:14).

Myth #6 “In 1 Cor. 6:9 Paul indicates that certain individuals had ceased being homosexual.”

In 1 Cor. 6:9 Paul does not refer to “homosexuals” (persons of a certain sexual orientation), but of male-male sexual acts characterized by injustice/oppression and exploitation. When the Apostle refers to the transformation of such persons (“and such *were* some of you,” 6:11), he indicates that they had ceased practicing such acts of injustice/oppression and sexual exploitation, not of having changed their sexual orientation, which according to modern psychology is as impossible as changing the preference of handedness (cease being left-handed) or of eye color (from blue to brown). Leaders and counselors in the so-called “ex-gay” ministries who claim such results are self-deceived, prisoners of fundamentalist ideologies, or quacks. Hence, they have been condemned by associations of authentic scientists, since often such “ex-gay” therapies eventually result in depression, addictions, divorces, and suicides.

Myth #7 “In 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 Paul demonstrates a scientific comprehension of homosexuality that surpasses that of modern unbelieving scientists (who support the ‘gay agenda’).”

The vice-lists in 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 make no claims to any scientific comprehension of human sexuality (nor of alcoholism; see “drunkards,” 1 Cor. 1:10), but rather utilize traditional vice-lists to denounce acts of injustice/oppression that (1) harm the neighbor (Rom. 13:8-10) and (2) destroy Christian communities (1 Corinthians 12–14). The notion of a “gay agenda” is another myth created by homophobic propaganda, which ignores the incredible diversity of the gay population (not a “community”), where many are pacifists, while others seek to serve openly in the military, some seek the right to traditional marriage, while others (like many heterosexuals today) seek to subvert/transform traditional forms of marriage. It is as absurd to speak of a single “gay agenda” as it would be to refer to some sinister “heterosexual agenda.”

Excursus 1

1 Cor. 6:9 in David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 211-218. ECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.

Translation (p. 194): *malakoi* [soft] = “males who are penetrated sexually by males”

'arsenokoítai [male/s + bed/s] = “males who sexually penetrate males”

The translation of David Garland, a conservative evangelical Baptist scholar, in effect recognizes that “homosexuals” is not

a correct translation of the Greek terms in 1 Cor. 6:9 (and 1 Tim. 1:10), since

- (1) *'arsenokoítai* does not refer to women/lesbians, but only and explicitly to males;
- (2) the terms do not refer to sexual orientations, but to a sexual act (male-male anal penetration), which males of any sexual orientation might do (active) or permit (passive); and
- (3) the terms do not describe just any kind of male-male sexual relations, but refer only to anal penetration in which one partner is active and the other passive.

Garland recognizes that Paul’s use of *malakoi* + *'arsenokoítai* probably derives from the LXX (Greek) translation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.⁵⁹ Saul Olyan has demonstrated that Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 refer only to males in acts of anal penetration and hence does not condemn sexual acts involving only mutual masturbation, oral sex or intercrural sex. If in 1 Cor. 6:9 *'arsenokoítai* [male/s + bed/s] refers only to the penetrator, we cannot interpret 1 Tim. 1:10, which has only *'arsenokoítai*, without *malakoi*, as condemning also the penetrated male (a kidnapped youth enslaved, probably forced into prostitution).

The only question where no consensus yet exists, therefore, is whether Paul intends to condemn all acts of male-male anal sex (Garland, Thistleton, Gagnon), or if the context suggests some limitation (Boswell, Scroggs, Martin, Elliott). That the condemnation of male-male anal sex in 1

Cor. 6:9 is not universal, but limited to unjust acts (exploitation, sexual abuse of youths, slaves, prostitutes, etc.), is indicated by five factors (see **Myth #4** above). Therefore, Garland’s ideological prejudice is plain when he concludes that 1 Cor. 6:9 constitutes a universal condemnation of “every kind of homosexual intercourse,” which he then suggests would be “good news to any slaves who were subject to unwanted sexual advances from their masters.”⁶⁰ Quite to the contrary, although Garland reminds us that perhaps the majority of the recipients of 1 Corinthians were slaves, they did not enjoy the luxury of being able to reject the sexual *demands* (not “advances”) of their owners –they had to obey or be subject to punishment and torture even unto death. For such slaves, interpretations such as Garland’s that they would be “excluded from the Kingdom of God” and life eternal for having obeyed sexual demands they could not reject, would be the worst news imaginable. (Cf. Bernadette Brooten on the death penalty prescribed in Lev. 20:13 for both partners, even when the “homosexuality” involved a child or youth who had been sexually violated.)⁶¹ Although Garland evidences no familiarity with the literature showing that Rom. 1:26 does not refer to lesbians but to women offering themselves to males for anal sex “against nature” (to avoid pregnancy),⁶² he does not repeat the error of Robert Gagnon, who continually misinterprets the texts with his importation of the modern concept of “complementarity” of the sexes. Nor does he recommend any “ex-gay” therapies with their false claims to “cure” homosexuals (another Gagnon error). Regarding Garland’s references to acts “against

nature”⁶³ (Rom. 1:26 and 11:24) and “shameful,” see → Hanks 2006, **Romans**.

Moreover, in their studies on the sexual lives of slaves in antiquity, Jennifer Glancy and Albert Harrill pointed out a basic problem in traditional interpretations of Paul that conclude that the Apostle condemned all persons involved in sexual relations outside of marriage.⁶⁴ Such an interpretation fails to take into account that the majority of members in many Pauline churches were domestic slaves and that such slaves could not marry but were obligated to sexually serve their owners.

Garland recognizes that traditionally the churches interpreted *malakoi* as a condemnation of masturbation,⁶⁵ although he fails to reveal how universal this interpretation was for almost 1500 years. Writers like Garland presuppose that Paul shared and reflected the homophobic prejudice expressed in the texts of Hellenistic Judaism.⁶⁶ Undoubtedly the vocabulary of Paul, as a Jew from the dispersion, often reflects the influence of his own culture. However, modern studies, although emphasizing the influence of this culture (in contrast with the earlier emphasis of classical Greek culture), also point out how Paul often transcends and even contradicts the culture of his formative years (Rom. 12:1-2), thus provoking continual persecution by fellow Jews during his years of apostolic labor in the dispersion. As a follower of Jesus, the subversive, crucified Messiah, Paul manifests the same commitment to all the oppressed (poor, women, sexual minorities). Neither Jesus and his apostles, nor Paul and his co-workers, conformed themselves to the sexual ideology of nuclear “family values”

with its patriarchal emphasis on procreating heirs. Therefore, Pauline theology in general and the concrete contents of his writings are our best guides to the meaning of the terms and theology in question. To reduce the great “Apostle to the Gentiles” to a mere reflection of the ignorance and prejudice of his contemporaries is neither wise nor just.

We do well to recall how texts that for centuries were believed written by Paul (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:9-15; Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18) were cited (1) to insist that women ought to remain silent in the churches and always submit to male authority, considered superior; (2) to maintain a cruel system of racial slavery (Col. 3:22–4:1; Eph. 6:5-9; cf. Philemon); and (3) to maintain absolute monarchies (1 Tim. 2:1-2) and oppose the rise of modern democracies. In recent decades, however, Biblicists increasingly recognize Paul as an Apostle of liberty, a pioneer in the liberation from oppression of women, slaves, and oppressed peoples. Many now also see Paul as a pioneer in the liberation of sexual minorities, although some still defend traditional ideologies, citing a few texts of doubtful interpretation. In his treatment of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7 Garland himself provides abundant examples of the way Paul transcended the patriarchal sexual ideologies of his culture (Greek as well as Jewish) – although the author continually forgets that many persons *who are not heterosexual* have no gift for sexual abstention and require regular expression of sexual love for their spiritual and emotional welfare.⁶⁷

The Presbyterian biblical scholar Robert Gagnon also recognizes that in the vice lists

in 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 the Greek term *arsenokoitai* does not refer to women (lesbians) nor to the sexual orientation of males, but rather is limited to a sexual act (which males of any sexual orientation may perform).⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Gagnon defends the translation “homosexuals,” ignoring the fact that the most recent edition of the standard Greek lexicon⁶⁹ abandons this translation as erroneous.

Excursus 2

Anthony C. Thistleton (2001). *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, especially 440-53. NIGTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Anthony C. Thistleton (2003/1997). “Can Hermeneutics Ease the Deadlock?” *The Way Forward: Christian Voices on Homosexuality and the Church*, ed. Timothy Bradshaw, 145-196. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Anthony C. Thistleton. (2006). *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*, 91. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Anthony Thistleton’s writings, especially the extended note in his larger commentary,⁷⁰ provide us with one of the most learned and thoroughly documented overviews of the various translations and interpretations of the relevant terms in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10.⁷¹ The lack of scholarly consensus regarding the meaning of the relevant terms in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 is infamous. Thistleton refers to “the astonishing array of English translations in our versions”⁷² and in note 148 adds: “For example, *male sodomites* (NRSV); *male prostitutes*, *homosexual*

offenders (NIV); *catamites*, *sodomites* (JB, Moffatt, Barrett); *sexual perverts* (REB); *malekoi* as *effeminate* (AV/KJV, RV); *pederasts* (Scroggs); *Knabenschänder* (Luther).” This astonishing diversity of translations reflects the parallel diversity of scholarly interpretations.⁷³

The most notorious and intensive debate concerns whether *oute malakoi oute arsenokoitai* refers to

- Homosexual relations in general [Thistleton, Gagnon, Robert Jewett], or more narrowly to
- Male prostitution [Boswell, Gordon Fee, NIV],⁷⁴
- Economic exploitation of slaves/prostitutes [Martin],⁷⁵
- *Sacred* male prostitution [Robert Geiss],⁷⁶
- Pederastic practices [Robin Scroggs],⁷⁷ or
- Hierarchical concepts of maleness and effeminacy in the Greek or Jewish world of the day [Martin, Swancutt].⁷⁸

The great diversity of translations and interpretations, however, does not keep Thistleton from concluding in this earlier commentary: “The catechetical setting of 6:9-11 makes this an even more important and foundational passage than Romans 1, which contains its own problems, for an evaluation of the ethical contrasts contained.”⁷⁹ However, significantly, in his later brief commentary Thistleton even admits that “It is possible that the terms

apply to men who have relations with call boys since the general emphasis is on *exploiting*, or taking advantage of people for selfish desire” but he then adds “But the Greek term does not specify this and it would be an ‘over translation’ of words.”⁸⁰ However, since usage, not etymology, determines meaning and Thistleton grants that the rare uses of *arsenokoitai* support the meaning of economic exploitation, it is difficult to see why he concludes that including economic exploitation would over translate the words when no usage clearly supports such a broad general usage as he proposes: “[men] who practice sexual relations with men.”⁸¹

Had Thistleton reformulated the question about the traditional debate over “homosexuality” in the Bible⁸² and instead inquired how historically “homophobia” has horribly distorted biblical interpretation, his writings would have been even more helpful and perhaps have arrived at quite different conclusions. For instance, he might have paused to wonder why the 48 biblical references to the *city* of Sodom, for centuries the irrefutable staple proof texts for condemning the *sin* of “sodomy” (invented in the eleventh century), suddenly disappeared from the debate in the mid-twentieth century,⁸³ leaving people like him to labor so hard in their efforts to squeeze the required conclusion out of such admittedly highly problematic NT texts as 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10 and Rom. 1:26-27.⁸⁴ American Presbyterian Robert Gagnon and his many followers, recognizing that the three remaining post-“sodomy” NT texts constitute a very weak reed, have turned in desperation to Genesis 1–2, naively misinterpreted with reference to the nineteenth century concept of gender

“complementarity.” Presumably, Thistleton knows better (and hence ignores Gagnon’s detailed, ideological blast).

“Over attention to lexicographical, contextual, and historical detail should not blind us to Vasey’s reminder that in the society of imperial Rome Jews and Christians saw a ‘form of homosexuality [which] was strongly associated with idolatry, slavery and social dominance. It was often the assertion of the strong over the bodies of the weak.’⁸⁵ This no doubt-colored Paul’s perception, and coheres with certain attitudes related to wealth, status, manipulation, and power at Corinth.”⁸⁶

“A more substantial problem arises from whether undue attention to the Levitical and Deuteronomic codes would signify a ‘Judaizing’ obsession with law as against gospel. It is a valid observation that Lev. 18:22; 19:19, 27, 28; 20:13; and 21:5 include prohibitions against cross-breeding animals, sowing two kinds of seed in a field, and wearing garments made of two different materials, which virtually everyone does today. But some of these passages relate to issues beneath the surface. The prohibitions about reshaping beards and hair (Lev. 19:26-28), e.g., probably relate to practices designed to avoid recognition by evil spirits who supposedly hover around a dead body and operate only in the context of such beliefs. Whether principles of differentiation between gender roles belong merely to ancient worldviews or form part of God’s design for his holy covenant people must be judged in the light of patient exegesis and theological reflection. (See on 11:2-16).”⁸⁷

According to Robert Gagnon, “To argue that Philo or Paul was only concerned with exploitative same-sex relationships is to argue from an oxymoron, because for both Philo and Paul same-sex relationships were inherently exploitative. The moment a man takes another male to bed he distorts and diminishes the other male’s sexual identity as created and ordained by God, regardless of whether the relationship is fully consensual and non-commercial.”⁸⁸ Gagnon raises a significant question but his argument is more convincing in Philo’s case than in Paul’s (whose three relevant texts are ambiguous). The fact that Paul heads his vice list with the term “oppression/injustice” indicates that his targets are those who abuse their power to oppress and harm the weak (see similarly Rom. 1:18-32).

Moreover, Ken Bailey points out “that of the ten ‘vices’ listed in 6:9-10, five allude to sexual issues, which directly relate to 5:1-13 and 6:12-20; while a further five relate to issues of greed and grasping, eating and being drunk, which are taken up explicitly in 11:17-23.”⁸⁹ Although Thistleton commends Bailey for the “masterly way” he expounds the text, his own contention⁹⁰ that Paul refers to “homosexual relations in general” can only be sustained if he holds that homosexual relations in general, in contrast to heterosexual relations in general, are characterized by egotistical coveting and grasping, rather than love, a conclusion that reflects homophobic prejudice.

Finally, throughout his commentaries Thistleton makes clear Paul’s concern to emphasize love (1 Corinthians 13), and thus combat the arrogant, selfish, grasping egotism characteristic of Corinth and keep it from infecting attitudes in the church.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:10

Inductive Study

Introduction

Paul himself wrote 1 Corinthians around 54 CE, probably from Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia (16:19). 1 Timothy, however (along with 2 Timothy and Titus), probably was penned by a disciple after the Apostle’s death (around 63 CE), perhaps as early as 75 CE, but more likely a decade or more later.

Translation – 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10

⁹Do you not know that the unjust/oppressors [*adikoi*] will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor softies/cowards [*malakoi*, soft males], nor males who sexually abuse other males [*arsenokoitai*, male/s + bed/s], ¹⁰nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. **11** And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (**1 Cor. 6:9-11**)

⁹Now we know that the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers,

¹⁰for the sexually immoral/adulterers, and **males who sexually abuse other males** [*arsenokoitai*, male/s + bed/s], for **slave traders**, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching (1 Tim. 1:9-10).

1. Paul introduces the “vice list” of 1 Cor. 6:9b-10 with a general principle in 6:9a. What kind of person does the Apostle say will not inherit God’s kingdom? Note: “unrighteous,” the term commonly found in English translations (Greek: *adikoi*) is best translated “unjust” or “oppressors,” those who abuse their power to harm persons in a weaker position (the poor, slaves, women, immigrants, etc.).
2. Why would Paul repeat the terminology about inheriting the Kingdom of God in 1 Cor 10b (9a → 10b, thus creating a kind of envelop for the vice list in 9b-10a)? Should we, then, understand the specific ten terms of the vice list within this “envelop” as examples of oppressors who abuse their power to harm others? ¿How will this affect our interpretation of the sexual offenders in the vice list (#1, 3, 4, 5)? Note the variety of translations for the fourth and fifth terms (literally, “softies” and “bed-males”—a euphemism for some kind of male sexual activity).
3. Which of the terms in the vice list of 1 Cor. 6:9 is repeated in 1 Tim. 1:10? Why would 1 Tim. 1:10 link “slave traders” with the preceding two sexual vices? Since slave traders commonly acquired young slaves and then sold

their services as male prostitutes, would this context support the interpretation of “bed-males” as those who sexually oppress and abuse others who are in a weaker position socially (slave prostitutes)?

4. Does condemnation of “adulterers” in the vice lists (1 Cor. 6:9b and 1 Tim. 1:10) provide a basis for an ethical absolute condemning all heterosexual sexual acts? See the prophet Nathan’s denunciation (employing a rhetorical trap) of David’s adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:1-14). Does the condemnation of slave traders and the “bed-males” who abused the young slave prostitutes constitute a basis for condemning all consensual adults in a loving, committed same-sex relationship?

Note: Ed Palmer, head of the original NIV translation executive committee has explained that “*malakoi* was taken to mean ‘male prostitutes’ and, with ‘offenders’ added to ‘homosexual’, *arsenokoitai* was meant to refer to abusers like ‘rapists and child molesters’ (Dr. Ralph Blair, Review, a Quarterly of Evangelicals Concerned, Inc. 36/3; Summer 2011). See the significant changes in the successive NIV translations above.

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For further documentation, see the chapters on **1 Corinthians** and **1 Timothy** at www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar/ingles/ingles.html, “Books on line”, with their extensive bibliographies.

Chapter 5

Three Myths in the Homophobic

Interpretations of Jude 7

Jude, Jesus and Sodom: Homosexuality in Animals, Homophobia in Humans.

⁶And those **angels** who did not maintain their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling [Gen. 6:1-4], God has maintained in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great Day.

⁷Similarly, Sodom and Gomorrah [Genesis 19] and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner indulged in sexual immorality/prostitution (*ekporneúsasai*) and went in pursuit of *different flesh* (*sarkós hetéras* [that of the two **angel** visitors, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

⁸*In the same way* (Greek *homoios*) these men in their dreaming defile the flesh, reject **lordship** and blaspheme the **glorious ones** [“lordship” and “glorious ones” are Hebrew terms for orders and types of angels⁹¹].

⁹But when the **archangel Michael**, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses.... [Jude here cites the Jewish Apocryphal book, *The Assumption of Moses*].

Myth #1 “Jude 7 condemns homosexuals for their ‘unnatural’ vices.”

Among our common English translations, only the Authorized (King James) Version preserves something of the literal meaning of the Greek, referring to the flesh of angels as “strange flesh.” Homophobic translation of Jude 7 is exemplified in the NRSV, which even drags in the concept of “unnatural” lust (imported from Romans 1; similarly, ESV “unnatural desire,” with note: “Greek *other flesh*”; cf. “perversion” in the NIV and NLT). The NRSV recognizes in a textual note that the original Greek of Jude 7 really says “went after other flesh” and in an interpretive note correctly explains: “**6** The *angels who...left their proper dwelling*. In the story of the ‘sons of God’ (Gen 6:1-4), as interpreted in 1 Enoch 6-19, the angels left heaven to mate with women. **7** The Sodomites attempted sexual relations with angels (Gen 19:4-11).” The Jerusalem Bible in both French and Spanish (but not English) has long reflected these insights in its translation and notes on Jude 7 (see note below).

In verses 6-9 Jude links three references to **angels**. **V. 6** refers to the “Sons of God” (angels) who, before the flood, came down to earth and sired children (“giants”) with human women (Gen. 6:1-4). Then in **v. 7** Jude speaks of a similar account (Genesis 19), where the men of Sodom sought to rape the two *angel* visitors. Jude describes these angels as literally “different/other flesh” [AV “strange flesh”]. **Ironically**, homophobic prejudice is evidenced by the fact that so many who promote violence against sexual minorities cite this text of Jude as a condemnation of “homosexuality” as “unnatural” – although the original Greek actually has the word *hetéras*, from which

the modern term *heterosexual* is derived! Both the word and concept of “homosexuality” are of modern origin, dating only from the late nineteenth century. However, neither medieval laws that condemned “sodomy” nor modern propaganda that attacks “homosexuals” for being “unnatural” have ever referred to males attempting sexual violation of angels! Finally, in **Jude 8-9** he refers to the angels as “glorious ones” and to the archangel Michael, all examples of God’s just judgments (as also the Exodus reference in v. 5).

The Epistle to the Hebrews refers to angels as “spirits” (1:7, 14) and Jesus said that the angels “do not marry” (Mark 12:25), although they do have bodies capable of sexual relations (see note below). Jude, however, cites traditions from the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 6:1-4; 19:1-11) and the inter-testamental Jewish Pseudepigrapha (including myths, comparable to Jesus’ parables). In these writings angels often are portrayed as capable, even desirous, of sexual relations with humans (see especially 1 Enoch 6-36, a work which Jude 14-15 cites as Scripture;⁹² (cf. also Paul exhorting head coverings for women “because of the angels,” 1 Cor. 11:10).

Myth #2 “Jude teaches that our sexuality should always be ‘natural’ like that of the animals.”

Quite to the contrary! Although Jude teaches that “natural” behavior is characteristic of animals, he insists that humans ought to *transcend* natural animal-like behavior and act *against* nature (v. 10)! Jude refers both to actions done “naturally” (v. 10, *phusikos*), and of instincts that are “natural” (v. 19, *psuchikoi*, *soulish*).

However, our translations commonly avoid the concepts of nature in these texts (v. 10, “by instinct,” NRSV, NIV), where acting according to “nature” is condemned as sinful and “irrational.” Neither the Hebrew Bible nor Jesus ever speak of “nature” (a Greek philosophical concept), but rather of creation and God as creator. When Paul and Judas appropriate the Greek philosophical vocabulary of “nature,” modern readers easily get confused by the contradictory senses – and all the more when translators (with apparent homophobic bias) introduce the term “unnatural” when it is *not* in the original Greek (v. 6), but avoid the term “nature” when it *is* present in the Greek (vv. 10, 19; see → **Romans** 1:26-27; 11:24). Confusion is created by the fact that in Romans Paul refers to anal sex as “against nature” (*para phusin*, nonprocreative) both when females offer themselves to males (Rom. 1:26) and similarly, when males penetrate other males (1:27). Thus, in Romans 1, Paul’s rhetoric implies that to act “naturally” is good, while for Jude, to act “naturally” is characteristic of irrational animals and sinful, so humans ought to transcend the natural and act against their natural, animal instincts. In → **Romans** 11:24, however, Paul himself celebrates the fact that God acts “against nature” (again, *para phusin*) by engrafting pagans into the olive tree (Israel; and see all of Jesus’ miracles).

As John Boswell’s classic study made clear (1980), observation of same-sex erotic behavior and pair-bonding in animals goes back at least to Aristotle. Nevertheless, heterosexist bigotry has so darkened minds that ever since we find brilliant philosophers and theologians continually contradicting themselves about whether such behavior

actually occurs in animals and the "moral/ethical" conclusions to be purportedly deduced from such occurrences. Bruce Bagemihl's careful study documented homosexual behavior in more than 450 species of mammals, birds, reptiles and insects (1999; more recent reports refer to more than 1500 species).

German scientist and theologian Volker Sommer⁹³ helpfully diagrams the two contradictory affirmations about animals commonly made and the two *illogical* conclusions theologians have leaped to:

- 1 "Homosexuality is against nature – – – → ? (does not occur among animals)" "Homosexuality should be rejected"
- 2 "Homosexuality is natural – – – – → ? (does occur among animals)" "Homosexuality should be accepted"

The Apostle Paul traditionally has been misinterpreted as arguing from affirmation #1 to #3 (Romans 1:26-27), even though later in the same Epistle he celebrates God's acts "against nature" (→ Romans 11:24). Although Jude does not qualify the attempted gang rape of angels as "against nature," (v. 7), his later conclusion that humans should avoid imitating the "natural" behavior of irrational animals (v. 10) logically would make him the church father of later theologians who admitted the occurrence of same-gender erotic behavior in animals, but still leaped to conclusion #3. In this ridiculous history that Boswell and Sommer have traced on these questions, homophobic prejudice has swamped sound science, coherent philosophy and coherent theology. Bagemihl's documentation involving 450 species hardly makes any leap

from #2 to #4 any more compelling than the traditional spurious arguments that leap from 1 to 3. But the very diversity of meaning and rhetoric in the New Testament involving the term "nature" (Romans 1 vs. Romans 11 and Jude, v. 10) ought to warn us against repeating the common simplistic errors of the past.

Fundamentalists like to argue that God created only Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve, and permitted only heterosexual animal pairs to enter Noah's ark (→ Genesis). We may now respond by inquiring where Bagemihl's 450 species came from. Undoubtedly from that same place over/under Noah's rainbow where Cain found his wife! Here, then, we discover a second **irony** concerning the homophobic appeal to Jude, since he (like Paul in → Rom. 11:24), carries out a kind of deconstruction of the confused, irrational philosophical concept of "against nature," while translators commonly betray Jesus' brother and eliminate this subversive element from his letter with sloppy homophobic mistranslations that do not even qualify as "paraphrases."

Myth #3 "Jude 7 condemns homosexuals because they are 'sodomites'."

The Bible contains 48 references to Sodom, but Jude 7 is the *only* biblical text that interprets Sodom's sin in sexual terms. When the other 47 biblical texts elaborate on the sins of Sodom that provoked such awful divine judgment, they refer to the arrogance of the city, its oppression, violence, neglect of the poor, refusal to show hospitality, etc. (→ Genesis 19; Ezekiel 16:49). However, although Jude 7 recognizes the sexual dimension of Sodom's sin, at the same time he carefully makes

clear that the sexual failure was that of attempting to *rape two visiting angels* ("different/ other flesh" in the Greek). Obviously, what links Jude 6 and 7 is the common theme of angels. Although the concept may conflict with our traditional notions about angels and sexuality, the original Greek of Jude 6-7 is quite clear. Jude 6 refers to the Sons of God (angels) of Genesis 6:1-4, who before the Flood, descended to earth and procreated "giants" with the daughters of men. Jude 7 then refers to Genesis 19, where the males from Sodom sought to rape the two visiting angels. Jude 6 thus refers to heterosexual relations (angels violating women), while Jude 7 implies homoerotic relations in which the males of Sodom sought to rape the two visiting angels.

Thus, when translated literally Jude faithfully follows the teaching of his brother Jesus, who never suggested that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed for "homosexual" acts (Genesis 19). Jewish literature popular in Jude's day, however, commonly cited God's judgment against Sodom as a condemnation of sexual acts between persons of the same gender. In this way certain Jewish authors sought to create propaganda against the Greek and Roman Empires which oppressed them for so many centuries. They claimed that such same-sex practices were common among their oppressors but not among Jews. Jesus broke with this popular xenophobic and homophobic tradition and returned to the original meaning of Genesis, where Sodom is punished for refusing hospitality and attempting violence (gang rape) instead (Matthew 10:15; Luke 10:12). Thus, the **third irony** in the homophobic misinterpretation of Jude is that when Jude

7 supplies us with the only biblical text that refers to the *sexual* dimension of the Sodom story, modern translators so botch their job that Jude's understanding of Sodom (as a story of attempted gang rape of angels) disappears behind terms ("unnatural," "perversion") that for the ordinary readers suggest "homosexuality" instead of "attempted gang rape of angels"!

According to William Countryman (2006), Jude denounces itinerant teachers who had infiltrated the Jewish-Christian communities, "insisting that true access to God can be attained only through sexual intimacy with (and domination of) angels."⁹⁴ The link between Jude 6 and 7 ("similarly") is sexual relations with angels: the fallen angels took the daughters of men as sexual objects (Gen. 6:1-4; → **Jude 6**) and the males of Sodom attempted to rape the two angel visitors (Genesis 19; → **Jude 7**). Jude would seem to imply that in Genesis 19 the males of Sodom recognized that the visitors were angels. Countryman thinks such recognition possible, since "man" in the Bible may also refer to angels.⁹⁵ Jude 6 thus refers to heterosexual relations (angels violating women), while Jude 7 implies homoerotic relations in which the males of Sodom sought to sexually violate the two visiting angels. Countryman points out that the theme of sexual relations with angels continues in Jude 8:

In the same way (Greek *homoios*) these men in their dreaming defile the flesh, reject lordship and blaspheme the glorious ones ["lordship" and "glorious ones" are Hebrew terms for orders and types of angels].⁹⁶

“In the same way” indicates that the same theme of sexual relations between humans and angels continues in Jude 8, a fact confirmed by the two references to angels (“lordship” and “glorious ones”; see “celestial beings” NIV). The theme of angels continues with the reference to the archangel Michael (v. 9). According to Countryman, the references to dreamers who “defile the flesh” (8) and “soil garments” (23) “suggest a religious praxis that involved males who had visions or dreams of intercourse with angelic beings, presumably resulting in ejaculation, which would cause impurity.”⁹⁷ Countryman explains that the false teachers thought that such practices demonstrated their power to command sexual relations with angels, an act of domination that would have humiliated the angels and created an elite in the church consisting of followers who pretended to have had sex with angels.⁹⁸ We may also assume that the act of anal penetration in itself would indicate a humiliation of the angels. Jude’s preoccupation with the theme of sexual relations with angels appears again in the reference to “shameful foam” (semen, v. 13) and finally in v. 23, where Jude commands “hating even the garment spotted by the flesh,” referring to ejaculation of semen during dreams or visions of sexual relations with angels.⁹⁹ (See Col. 2:8-23 and “because of the angels,” which in → **1 Corinthians** 11:10 could refer to women’s fear of being sexually violated by offended angels.)¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

Jude’s tiny letter has been despised for its imagined faults and described as irrelevant for the modern church, as well as for the debates over sexual minorities. Nevertheless, in the efforts to “contend for

the faith” (Jude 3) against the infiltration of heterosexual and homophobic propaganda, the potential importance of Jude for sexual minorities becomes clear, since it reminds us of the urgent need to first *change the question* in the debate. If we rush into a debate where the question posed to us is “Does the Bible (anywhere) condemn homosexuality?”, if our adversary then manages to cleverly misinterpret a single verse, we lose the debate. Therefore, we must first insist on reformulating the question thus: “*Is there any evidence of heterosexual and homophobic prejudice in the translations and interpretations of the biblical texts commonly employed against sexual minorities?*” When the question is posed that way, if we produce a single example, we win the debate – and it is not difficult to produce abundant examples. In such a debate, the text of Jude 7, almost always grossly mistranslated, is one of the most obvious cases of homophobic prejudice. The mistranslation of 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 with the modern term “homosexuals” and the misinterpretation of Genesis 19 as condemning “homosexuality” rather than attempted gang rape of angels provide other obvious examples of prejudice. Evidence from such obvious cases helps sow doubts regarding the three texts where the prejudice is less obvious (Leviticus 18 and 20; Romans 1).

Note 1: Jude 7 in the Jerusalem Bibles: Via Paris (1973/79/98), Bilbao, Spain (1955/73/98), Freiburg, Germany, (1968/83) and New York, USA (1985).

Traditionally theology in the twentieth century was said to have been “created in Germany, corrected in France and corrupted in the USA,” but probably few have noticed how the Jerusalem Bible’s translation and

interpretation of Jude 7 has suffered the same fate. Through half a century of editions in French, German and Spanish, the illustrious Jerusalem Bible steadfastly maintained its virginity with a correct literal translation of the text ("Sodom and Gomorrah...prostituted themselves and went after *other/different flesh*") with a clarifying note ("flesh that was not human, since their sin was desiring to *abuse angels*"). This was changed in the American translation, however, to "pursued *unnatural* lust," although the note "h" corrected the translation: "They lusted not after human beings, but after the strangers who were angels, Gen. 19:1-11." However, by thus dragging in the concept of "unnatural" sex from Romans 1:26-27 (totally absent from the Greek in Jude 7, as faithfully reflected even in the old Authorized/King James Version), the homophobic American corrupters thus created *ex nihilo* a clobber text for promoting violence against sexual minorities. The pristine virtue of the Jerusalem Bible tradition on Jude 7 in three languages (at least), almost unique amongst twentieth century versions, was corrupted into another vice.

Note 2: Angels/Spirits.

Since the Hebrew term *malak* means both messenger and angel, often we cannot be sure whether the biblical author intended to specify a non-human messenger or simply a human led by God to deliver a message. In the New Testament also, in many texts human messengers and angels cannot be distinguished (see the figures at Jesus' empty tomb).

In only two texts in Hebrews (1:7, 14) have theologians thought to find evidence to

deny that angels have a corporal body comparable to humans.

Of the angels he says,

"Who makes his angels winds/spirits (*pneuma*; NRSV translates "winds")

And his servants, flames of fire (Heb. 1:7)

However, Hebrews 1:7 is a citation of Psalm 104, where the contrast clearly is between wind and fire (Hebrew *ruah*, like the Greek *pneuma*, can mean either wind or spirit) and the Psalm clearly intends to contrast wind and fire. Hebrews 1:14 says:

Are not they [angels] all ministering spirits/winds sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?

Here the NRSV translates *pneuma* as "spirits," but in the light of the previous context we might well take it as a poetic, metaphorical use of the winds of 1:7, rather than an unprecedented attempt to deny corporality to angels and redefine them as non-material beings (which would be more Neoplatonic than biblical).

If the systematic theologian in us demands coherent ontology, we might refer to what Paul says of the saints as having a resurrected "spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:42-50; for Neoplatonists, a "spiritual body" would be comparable to a round square). Paul, however, could refer to Jesus as "the last Adam, a life-giving *spirit*" without denying Jesus' bodily resurrection, so Hebrews might well intend something similar in referring to the angels as "ministering spirits/winds." While Neoplatonism posits a dichotomy between

material bodies and non-material spirits, for Paul the spiritual dimension of the resurrection body is rather described in terms of four powerful positive qualities: imperishability-immortality, glory, power, spiritual (1 Cor. 15:42-50).

Traditional systematic theologies, Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias commonly affirm uncritically that angels are incorporeal/immaterial "spirits" (NBD; EDB). Since angels are capable of inter-planetary travel (Dan. 9:21-23), their bodies must be similar to Jesus' glorified body, which had special capabilities.

Homophobia in church and society is evidenced by the fact that many have sought to promote violence against sexual minorities, citing Jude 7 as condemning "homosexuality" (a word and concept originating in the late nineteenth century). However, the medieval laws that condemned "sodomy" and all the modern propaganda attacking "homosexuals" hardly intend to condemn sexual relations between men and angels!

Note 3: Thomas R. Schreiner on Jude 7 (2003).

The BNP (*Biblia de Nuestro Pueblo*) phrase explaining the sin of Sodom as similar to the rape of the Levite's concubine and involving not "homosexuality" but "**inhospitality, violence and phallic aggression**" (→ **Genesis 19 and Judges 19**) enables us to discern the error in Thomas Schreiner's treatment of Jude 7¹⁰¹ (see following excursus). He, like so many, imagines that the angels in Gen. 6:1-4 and 19:1-11 are involved (as object or subject) in sins of homo/sexual desires, passions and lusts, whereas a careful reading makes clear that the texts basically

treat of power struggles. The fallen angels of Gen. 6:1-4 seek to accumulate women and giant descendants as their allies against God (see Solomon collecting his 700 wives and 300 concubines). And all the males of Sodom are not "homosexual" but rather fearful of strangers and determined to humiliate them into submission. Thus, when Schreiner writes, "The most important evidence against the proposed [non-homophobic] interpretation is that the men of Sodom who **had a sexual desire for the angels did not know they were angels**,"¹⁰² he is reading homosexual desire into a text that rather describes a power struggle. He then concludes that the "*other flesh*" in Jude 7 refers to "a desire for those of the *same sex*; they desired flesh *other than that of women*"!¹⁰³ But if Jude's intention had been to condemn homosexual (*same-sex*) lust, why does he refer to the males of Sodom as going after "*other flesh*"? Scholarly commentators thus commonly recognize that the reference to *other flesh* is a reference to angel flesh, not to flesh "other than women,"¹⁰⁴ since according to biblical anthropology women share the same fleshly nature as males. (See Adam's reference to Eve as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh", Gen. 2:23; and Paul says "not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish," 1 Cor. 15:39 NRSV). Schreiner's notion that women are comparable to animals, birds and fish with a fleshly nature different from men is a desperate recourse to avoid the clear teaching of Jude about angels. The fact that the males of Sodom did not know that their visitors were angels¹⁰⁵ is irrelevant when we recognize that these were not "homosexual males" desiring sex with other males, but the entire male population of the city (Gen.

19:4) intent on “phallic aggression” to protect themselves and humiliate the strangers.

Excursus

Thomas R. Schreiner (2003). *1, 2 Peter, Jude*. NAC 37. Nashville: Broadman. Southern Baptist Thomas R. Schreiner’s commentary on Jude provides excellent examples of the kinds of concessions commonly made in scholarly evangelical scholarship, which increasingly document and unmask the blatant homophobic prejudice in traditional translations – and sometimes still even in less tradition-bound works (see the ecumenical NRSV in the case of Jude 7).

1. First, Schreiner grants that (although it messes up popular fundamentalist notions about angels, sexuality and biblical inspiration), **Genesis 6:1-4 speaks of angels when it refers to “Sons of God” who found human women sexually attractive and descended to earth to sire offspring who were “giants.”** Schreiner writes:

We have already noted¹⁰⁶ that Jewish tradition linked together the sin of angels in Gen. 6:1-4, the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the punishment of the wilderness generation. We can be almost certain that Jude referred her to the sin of the angels in Gen. 6:1-4. The sin the angels committed, according to the Jewish tradition, was sexual intercourse with the daughters of men.¹⁰⁷

Schreiner, of course, is not the first evangelical to recognize this meaning. Gordon Wenham in his *Word Commentary* on Genesis 1–15 similarly made clear to

readers the extensive evidence supporting this view of the “Sons of God” in Gen. 6:1-4:

The “angel” interpretation is at once the oldest [“conservative”!] view and that of most modern commentators. It is assumed in the earliest Jewish exegesis (e.g., the books of 1 Enoch 6:2ff; Jubilees 5:1), LXX, Philo (*De Gigant* 2:358), Josephus (*Ant* 1.31) and the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QapGen2:1; CD 2:17-29). The NT (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6, 7), and the earliest Christian writers (e.g. Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen) also take this line.¹⁰⁸

2. Schreiner then concedes that Jude 6 takes for granted this understanding of Gen. 6:1-4:

Apparently, Jude also understood Gen. 6:1-4 in the same way. Three reasons support such a conclusion. First, Jewish tradition consistently understood Gen. 6:1-4 in this way [Schreiner then cites 14 texts from eight Jewish works – see below]....Second, we know from vv. 14-15 that Jude was influenced by 1 Enoch, and 1 Enoch goes into great detail about the sin and punishment of these angels....Third, the text forges a parallel between the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah and the angels (“In a similar way,” v. 7...). The implication is that sexual sin was prominent in both instances.¹⁰⁹

Knowing that his evangelical readers will not easily be convinced, Schreiner cites extensively the unanimous Jewish tradition, extending over some three centuries (200 B.C.–100 A.D.), which shows that the understanding of the “Sons of God” in Genesis 6:1-4 involved (fallen) angels who descended to earth to have sex with “the daughters of men,” and thus siring “giants.” The Jewish texts cited commonly refer to

the angels as the "Watchers," a term Daniel used to refer to angels (Dan. 4:13, 17, 23, NRSV and ESV). The NRSV note adds that "it is commonly found in the pseudepigraphical texts and the Dead Sea Scrolls; see e.g. 1 Enoch 1:5; 20:1...."; similarly, NIV Study Bible note). John Collins points out that in 1 Enoch the term refers to angels "who watch" or "who sleep not" (→ Daniel).¹¹⁰

Schreiner thus explains: At this juncture I want to sketch in briefly the Jewish tradition, so that we sense how pervasive it was.

- In *Testament of Naphtali* 3:4-5 the angels of Gen. 6:1-4 are designated as "Watchers", and they are said to have "departed from nature's order" and hence are cursed with the flood.
- According to *T. Reu* 5:6-7 women charmed the Watchers with their beauty, so that the Watchers lusted after them. They transformed themselves into males and gave birth to giants (cf. 1QapGen 2:1).
- *Jubilees* also teaches that the Watchers sinned with the daughters of men by mingling with them sexually (*Job*. 4:22). The angels of the Lord saw the beauty of the daughters, took them to be their wives, the offspring were giants, and because of such wickedness the Lord brought the flood (*Job* 5:1-11).
- The **Damascus Document** is quite brief.... The Watchers fell because they did not keep God's commands. The tradition of giants as offspring is preserved since their sons are said to be like cedar trees

and their bodies are comparable to mountains (CD2:17-19). God sent the flood as a result of such sin.

- The tradition...is most extensive in **1 Enoch**. The angels desired the daughters of men (6:1-2) and took them as wives, who in turn gave birth to giants (7:1-2; 9:7-9; 106:14-15, 17). As a result of their sin, God threatened to send a flood (10:2). The evil of the angels is quite clear when the author said they "fornicated" with women (10:11). Some of the language used bears remarkable parallels to Jude... (10:4-6). Jude also taught that the angels who sinned were bound in darkness and await the day of judgment.... (1 Enoch 10:12-13.... cf. 13:2). That those who sinned will experience a temporary judgment before the final judgment is clearly communicated in *1 Enoch* 10:12-13.... (cf. 13:2) (14:5; cf. 21:1-4, 10; 88:1,3). The idea that the Watchers abandoned their proper sphere, emphasized in Jude, is communicated in *1 Enoch* as well...: "For what reason have you abandoned the high, holy, and eternal heaven; and slept with women and defiled yourselves with the daughters of the people, taking wives, acting like the children of the earth, and begetting giant sons?" (15:3). Jude followed the tradition in pronouncing judgment on angels who violated their proper sphere.¹¹¹

After thus carefully citing the relevant texts from Jewish tradition, Schreiner continues:

We must be careful...to avoid saying that Jude necessarily agreed with everything found in 1 Enoch or Jewish tradition in general. We must beware of reading more into Jude than is warranted. **Still, I think it is clear that Jude believed angels had sexual relations with women and that God judged the angels for violating their ordained sphere.**

The story is certainly bizarre to modern readers, stemming from Gen. 6:1-4...I would only like to register my opinion that Jude interpreted Gen. 6:1-4 correctly. In my judgment the "sons of god" (*bene elohim*) of Gen. 6:1-4 are most plausibly identified as angels. The "sons of God" are clearly angels in Job (1:6; 2:1; 38:7). One of the Qumran manuscripts of Deut. 32:8, following the Septuagint, also reads "sons of god" (*bene elohim*), which the Septuagint renders *angelon theou* ("angels of God").¹¹²

3. Schreiner, however, insists that recognition of the references to sexual relations between humans and angels in Jude 6 and 7 in no way eliminates the element of homosexual intent from the sin condemned in Genesis 19 and Jude 7:

The most important evidence against the proposed interpretation is that the men in Sodom who had sexual desire for the angels *did not know they were angels*. Their sin consisted in their homosexual intentions and their brutal disregard for the rights of visitors to the city.¹¹³

Regarding this point he says in a footnote (30): "Rightly Moo, 2 *Peter, Jude*, 242."¹¹⁴ Robert Gagnon similarly says: "Since Gen. 19:1-11 nowhere intimates that the men of Sodom were aware that the visitors were angels, or that the men desired to have sex

with angels, this interpretation [eliminating homosexual desire/lust from the sin] appears strained."¹¹⁵

This argument of Moo, Gagnon and Schreiner, however, will only assure and comfort the already convinced:

- In the first place nothing in Genesis 19 or Jude 7 indicates that the males of Sodom had "sexual desire" for the angels, since commonly in the violent act of gang rape the desire is simply to humiliate. Genesis 19:4 indicates that "all the males from every part of the city of Sodom – both young and old" surrounded Lot's house, and even extreme social constructionists will hesitate to conclude that for some weird reason 100% of the male population of Sodom had lost interest in women and become homosexual.
- Second, even if Jude 7 be interpreted to imply that in Genesis 19 the males of Sodom recognized that the visitors were angels, William Countryman points out that such recognition is possible, since "man" in the Bible may also refer to angels.¹¹⁶
- Third, if we read a condemnation of *homosexual* lust into Jude 7, we might equally read a condemnation of *heterosexual* lust into Jude 6, but of course in neither case would a condemnation of egotistical, unloving lust imply a condemnation of heterosexual or homosexual desires and relations that express consensual, committed love. Neither the biblical narrative of the rape of

the Levite’s concubine (Judges 19) nor David’s adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11) provides any basis for condemning the “heterosexual desire” of the perpetrators; so similarly, texts that recount attempted gang rape provide no basis whatsoever for condemning the sexual orientation or desire of the persons involved.

offering themselves “against nature” to males to avoid pregnancy), a single text out of some 55 (48 plus seven) hardly constitutes “unanimity” (whether we include the Bible’s 48 references to Sodom or limit ourselves to the current count of seven “clobber texts”).

4. Even more obtuse is Schreiner’s final argument:

It would be strange to designate a desire for angels as a desire for “other flesh” (*sarkos heteras*). The term more naturally refers to a desire for those of the same sex; they desire *flesh other than that of women*.¹¹⁷

To the contrary, it would be more natural to conclude that males who desire relations with those of the “same flesh” would refer to *same-sex* desire (*homosexual*), while the desire for “other flesh” would refer to desire for relations with the *other/opposite* sex (*heterosexual*)! As Richard Bauckham points out, “*sarkós hetéras*, ‘strange flesh,’ cannot...refer to homosexual practice, in which the flesh is not ‘different’ (*hetéras*); it must mean the flesh of angels.”¹¹⁸

In this section Schreiner’s uncharacteristic sloppiness with terminology is again evident in his conclusion: “The biblical writers and the Jewish tradition unanimously condemned homosexuality as evil” – even though all serious studies in recent years recognize that the biblical texts nowhere employ the nineteenth century term and concept of “homosexuality” (referring to orientation and including lesbians). Even if → **Romans** 1:26 be misinterpreted as condemning lesbians (rather than females

Jude 7 Inductive Study

Introduction

Jude (Greek: "*Judas*") probably was written between 50-60 AD by Jesus' brother (Mark 6:3; Mat. 13:55), a prominent leader and missionary (1 Cor. 9:5), thus reflecting early Palestinian Jewish Christianity (as does James, from Jesus' other brother; see Jude 1). This would explain why Jude refers to Jewish works that are not in the Old Testament canon (1 Enoch, cited in Jude 6, 14-15; and in v. 9 an apocryphal story about Moses' burial that he may have read in the now lost ending of the *Testament of Moses*). Such apocryphal literature was popular and valued in Judaism at that time.

Translation: Jude 6-9

⁶And those **angels** who did not maintain their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling [Gen 6:1-4], God has maintained in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great Day.

⁷Similarly, Sodom and Gomorrah [Genesis 19] and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner indulged in sexual immorality/prostitution (*ekporneúsasai*) and went in pursuit of *different flesh* (*sarkós hetéras* [that of the visiting **angels**], serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. ⁸*In the same way* (Greek *homoios*) these men in their dreaming defile the flesh, reject **lordship** and blaspheme the **glorious ones** ["lordship" and "glorious ones" are Hebrew terms for orders and types of angels].¹¹⁹

⁹But when the **archangel Michael**, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses [Jude here cites the Jewish Apocryphal book, *The Assumption of Moses*].

1. What three stories about angels does Jude refer to in 6-7 and 9 (note: the angels are referred to as "Sons of God" in Gen. 6:1-4, as in Job 1:6; 2:1 and other texts). What other terms does Jude use to describe angels in v. 8?
2. Why would Jude describe angels as having "different flesh" (v. 7; see King James: "strange flesh")? What did the men of Sodom try to do to the two visiting angels and how did the angels respond (Gen. 19:1-11)?
3. Note: The translation above reflects the literal Greek, followed by the Jerusalem Bible and well explained in its note on the text. How do other translations render v. 7? Why do you think they avoid the literal sense? Why would they interpret non-literally with phrases like "unnatural lust" (NRSV), even when they acknowledge in notes that the Greek literally says "went after other flesh"?
4. What had the men of Sodom tried to do to the angels in Gen. 19:1-11? Does the Sodom story seek to condemn "homosexuality" or is it rather the lack of hospitality (see Abraham's hospitality to the angels in Genesis 18) and attempted gang rape of the visiting angels?

5. Some Study Bibles refer to the sin Jude 7 condemns as "homosexuality." Do you think the common understanding today of the term "homosexuality" refers to attempts to rape angels? Had the men of Sodom denied hospitality and attempted to rape angels who were female, would you think that provided a basis for condemning all heterosexual relations?

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Chapter 6

Fifteen Myths in the Homophobic

Misinterpretations of Romans 1:24-27

See Rev. Dr. Tom Hanks
www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar/ingles/ingles.html,
 "Books on line", "Romans".

Translation – Romans 1:16–2:16

1:16-17 *Jesus' Good News for the oppressed* ¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the Good News [to the oppressed], for it is God's power for integral liberation to everyone believing, both to the Jew first and to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it, God's liberating justice is revealed from faith to faith, as it has been written: "Now the just *man* by faith will live" [Hab 2:4]

1:18-32 Rhetorical trap prepared: *Bad news for idolatrous oppressors.*

18-23 *Idolatry* ¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all idolatry and oppression of *men*, who with their oppression even suppress the truth, ¹⁹because what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For ever since the creation of the world, his eternal power and divinity, though invisible, have been understood and clearly perceived in the things that have been made, so they are without excuse, ²¹because although they knew God, they did not glorify nor thank him, but became futile in their reasonings, and their undiscerning heart was darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools ²³and *changed* the glory of the immortal God into a likeness of an

image of corruptible man and birds and quadrupeds and reptiles;

1:24-27 *Covetous desires and unclean sexual acts* ²⁴wherefore, God gave them up in the covetous desires of their hearts to uncleanness, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵who *exchanged* the truth about God for the lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed unto the ages! Amen. ²⁶For this reason, God gave them up to dishonorable passions, for even *their* females *exchanged* the natural/procreative use (*chresis*) for the unnatural/nonprocreative (*para phusin*); ²⁷and similarly also the males, *leaving* the natural/procreative use (*chresis*) of females, were inflamed with their lust for one another, males in males working up their shameful member ¹²⁰ [alternatively: "committing shameful acts"] and receiving back in their own persons the recompense due their error.

1:28-32 *Catalogue of 21 evils (vices and persons): Injustice, oppression, violence [nothing sexual]*

²⁸And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what is not proper, ²⁹having been *filled* with all

1-4 *oppression / injustice*, wickedness, *covetousness*, malice,

5-9 *full of* envy, of murder, of strife, of guile, of malignity,

- 10 gossipers,
 11 ³⁰slanderers,
 12 haters of God,
 13 insolent/bullies,
 14 arrogant,
 15 boasters/braggarts,
 16 inventors of evil projects,
 17 disobeyers of parents,
 18 ³¹*undiscerning*,
 19 *unfaithful*, 20 *unaffectionate*, 21
unmerciful;

³²who know God's just ordinance that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them.

2:1-16 The Rhetorical Trap Sprung: *God's just judgment of hypocritical judges*

¹Wherefore, O man, you are inexcusable, every one of you who judges; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, since you who judge practice the same things. ²Now we know that God's judgment is according to truth against those who do such things. ³So do you suppose, O man – you who judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself – that you will escape God's judgment? ⁴Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and longsuffering, not

realizing that God's kindness should lead you to repentance?

⁵But by your stubbornness and your impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's just judgment will be revealed.

⁶He will repay according to each one's deeds: ⁷on the one hand, to those who by manly perseverance in doing good work seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give life in the age to come;⁸ on the other hand, to those who are self-seeking and disobeying the truth, but practicing oppression, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹Affliction and poverty on every soul of man working evil, the Jew first and also the Greek;¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace to everyone working good, the Jew first and also the Greek.¹¹ For God shows no partiality.

¹²For as many as have sinned without Torah also will perish without Torah; and as many as have sinned in Torah will be judged by Torah;¹³ for it is not the hearers of Torah who are just with God, but rather the doers of Torah will be justified [at the future final judgment]. ¹⁴For whenever pagans who do not possess Torah by nature the things of the Torah do, these, though not having the Torah, are a law to themselves,¹⁵ who show the work of the Torah to be written in their hearts, to which their own conscience bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them ¹⁶on the day when, according to my good news, God,

through Messiah Jesus, will judge men’s secret thoughts.

The Fifteen Myths

Myth #1 “In Romans 1 Paul teaches that homosexuals chose this vice and that God will punish them for their abomination.”

Rather, Paul seeks to explain how the *entire human race* (originally monotheistic and apparently heterosexual) at some early time rejected the one true God and *chose idolatry* (1:18-23, 25, 28). All humanity therefore suffered the divine punishment of being abandoned to sexual “impurity” (1:24, 26-27) and injustice (1:18, 28-32). Thus, according to Paul, the acts of sexual uncleanness in 1:24, 26-27 do not constitute the sin but rather God’s punishment for the sin of idolatry.

Myth #2 “In Romans 1 Paul demonstrates how certain individuals, because of their idolatry, become homosexual.”

In Rom 1:18-32 Paul never speaks of “homosexuals,” nor does he refer to individuals. Rather, he employs the common literary genre of a “decline of civilization” narrative to explain how *the entire human race*, at some unspecified past time, (1) rejected the true God and opted for idolatry (1:18-23, 25, 28) and (2) suffered the divine punishment of being abandoned to injustice (1:18, 28-32) and sexual “uncleanness” (1:24, 26-27).

Myth #3 “In Romans 1–2 Paul demonstrates why, among the pagans (idolaters), homosexuality became common but remained (virtually) unknown among the Jews and Christians.”

Both ancient literature and modern scientific studies demonstrate that no correlation

whatsoever exists between monotheistic faith (Jewish, Christian or Muslim) and heterosexual orientation, nor between an “idolatrous” religion (with images of its god or gods) and a homosexual or bisexual orientation. Paul recognizes that the Jews and others who condemn the idolatrous pagans “practice *the same things*” (Rom. 2:1) and even confesses that in his own adolescent sexual awakening he experienced temptations of “*every kind of covetous desire*” (Rom. 7:8; the same Greek word that describes sexual uncleanness in 1:24). Thus Israelite (Benjamite) males sought to rape the visiting Levite (Judges 19:12-22; see all the men of Sodom, Genesis 19).

Myth #4 “Although Romans 1:18-23 condemns pagan idolatry, in 1:24-27 Paul proceeds to condemn their acts of sexual uncleanness as intrinsically sinful, whether practiced in a context of idolatry or not.”

First, we must ask why, then, Rom. 1:25 again echoes the condemnation of idolatry in the very midst of the references to sexual uncleanness (1:24...26-27)! Second, we should recall that elsewhere Paul teaches readers to discern between acts that are not sinful in themselves and the same acts as sinful when practiced in a context of idolatrous worship (1 Cor. 10:23–11:1, regarding meat sacrificed to idols). Thus, Kathy Gaca concludes that in Romans 1:26-27 Paul describes the pagans as “burning with desire to comply with their devotion to alien gods such as Aphrodite, Dionysus, Hera, and Zeus”¹²¹ (with reference to gods and goddesses of erotic love). Gaca also demonstrates that the terms related to *porneia*/prostitution, significantly absent from Romans but prominent elsewhere in Paul, only refer to heterosexual relations

and also imply a context of idolatrous religion and worship; see below, Excursus 1 on Kathy Gaca (2003).

Myth #5 “In Romans 1:26 Paul condemns lesbians.” In Romans 1:26 Paul does not speak of women who “abandoned” their husbands or “exchanged” their sexual *partners* (cf. the males in 1:27), but rather of females who exchanged their sexual *practices* (procreative) for something “unnatural” – offering themselves to men for anal sex, thus avoiding pregnancy. Until around 400 A.D. the church fathers – including the two greatest sexual theologians, Clement of Alexandria and Augustine – recognized that Romans 1:26 referred to women offering themselves for anal sex with their male partners. Thus, Clement (ca. 250 AD), the church’s first significant theologian of sexuality, followed his citation of Romans 1:26-27 with this comment: “Nature has not even permitted the most unclean animals to procreate by means of *the passage of evacuation!*” (*Paidagogus*, II, 87.1). Clement thus reveals that he viewed *both* verses to refer to anal sex (women with men, 1:26; men with men, 1:27). Therefore, what links *both* verses (1:27, *homoios*, “similarly”), is not our modern *concept* of “homosexuality” but the ancient *practice* of anal sex. The ancient tendency was to compare similar sexual *practices* (anal sex, avoiding pregnancy: females with males in 1:26, males with males in 1:27). *Each* of the other six biblical texts referring to same-sex practices (always abusive) refer *explicitly only to males*: Genesis 19 (Sodom); Lev. 18:22 and 20:13; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10; Jude 7. Paul, who triumphantly proclaimed Christ as the “end” of the Law (Rom. 10:4), would hardly have invented a new law, an ethical absolute

prohibition of lesbianism, to add to Moses’ 613. Thus, neither the Hebrew Bible (“Old Testament”), nor the New Testament, nor the Koran condemn sexual relations between women (“lesbianism”). The historic, orthodox “conservative” view never *misinterpreted* Romans 1:26 to refer to lesbians. Rather, the “liberal revisionist” misinterpretation of Romans 1:26 as a condemnation of lesbians was first introduced only around 400 A.D., then popularized by John of Chrysostom, becoming a popular heresy in the Middle Ages and thereafter.

Myth #6 “In Romans 1:24-27 Paul condemns all sexual acts of love between men.”

In Rom. 1:24-27 Paul *never refers to love*. What he refers to is the egotistical *coveting*, *greed* and *lust* (excessive, irrational “passion”; 1:24, 26-27) of the idolatrous pagan world (1:25, 18-23) expressed in sexual *acts* of oppression and exploitation (1:18, 29). These acts included: (1) lustful procreative sex between men and women (1:24); (2) women offering themselves to men for anal sex, thus avoiding procreation (1:26), and (3) acts of male-male anal sex commonly used to corrupt youths and exploit slaves and prostitutes (1:27; not exclusive categories – see the slave traders in 1 Tim. 1:10). Such practices were especially common in the promiscuity of pagan fertility cults and all were harmful to the weaker “penetrated” partners (who, if slaves, had no choice).

Myth #7 “In Romans 1:24-27 Paul explicitly condemns all homoerotic acts as sin.”

In Romans 1:24-27 Paul never refers to “sin,” but speaks rather of passions and sexual acts which he describes as

“uncleanness” (Rom. 1:24), a category that describes “things which are *outside of their proper place*” (according to anthropological studies of the Bible). When coffee that is “clean” is spilled on a shirt, the shirt becomes “dirty.” Similarly, when semen or blood flows *out* of the body, people become “unclean/ dirty/ impure” and unable to participate in Temple worship until cleansed by prescribed rituals and sacrifices. Much more so did semen deposited “outside of its proper place” during anal sex make a person “unclean.” Later in Romans, however, Paul first redefines “uncleanness” as injustice/ oppression (6:12-13,19), then carries out a type of “deconstruction” of this traditional concept of “uncleanness” when he insists that for Christians “*nothing* is unclean of itself” (14:40, 20; see also Titus 1:15 and Jesus in Mark 7:19).

Myth #8 “In Romans Paul shows that homosexuality is an abomination, the most serious sin.”

Paul never speaks of “homosexuality” nor of “sin” in Rom. 1:24-27. Rather, the sexual “uncleanness” that he describes is itself the divine *punishment* on idolatrous people whom God had abandoned. When Paul describes various sins in Rom. 1:18-23, he emphasizes idolatry and injustice/ oppression (1:18, 23; cf. 25, 29), and concludes his vice list by referring to people “without mercy” (28-31; cf. Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46, where no one is excluded from His kingdom for sins committed, but rather for lack of mercy and brotherly love towards the poor, weak, and oppressed). In Rom. 1:24-27, when Paul describes the sexual uncleanness of the idolaters, he indicates that their sexual acts were motivated by greed/lust (prohibited by the Tenth Commandment). The **rhetorical**

trap Paul springs in Rom. 2:1-16 makes clear that the arrogant hypocrisy of those who think they can judge the pagans (mainly referred to in 1:18-32) is much worse than the sins referred to (in 1:18-23, 28-32) or the idolatry and sexual uncleanness (of 1:24-27). In his *magnum opus* Douglas Campbell (2009) even argues that in the very laying of his rhetorical trap in 1:18-32, rather than representing his own teaching, Paul already reflects more that of the false Jewish “Christian” teacher whom he will then seek to refute in the rest of the letter. This false teacher (perhaps the leader of a group) is finally identified only in 2:17-24 (see the false teachers in → **Galatians** who came down from Jerusalem and sought to impose circumcision and the Law on the pagan converts to Paul’s Law-free gospel). Campbell reminds us of the common difficulty in Paul’s letters of distinguishing the Apostle’s own views from those of his opponent/s, whose views he cites (without quotation marks in the original Greek) before proceeding to his own qualification or refutation. Thus, from 1 Corinthians Campbell provides a lengthy list of texts where commentators commonly affirm (eight cases) or debate (five cases) possible citations that do not represent Paul’s own views¹²² (see 1:12; 3:4; 6:12-13; 7:1; 8:1, 4, 8; 10:23; cf. 4:6b; 8:5a; 12:3; 15:12; 15:35).

Note: Robert Jewett’s commentary on Romans 2:1-15:¹²³

Paul’s formulation depicts a censorious bigot who condemns everybody beyond himself... He is building a rhetorical argument here whose full relevance will emerge later [the verb *krinein*, to judge, recurs in 14:2,3,5,10,13,22] The peculiarities of this passage can be explained by Paul’s rhetorical goal of creating an argument that

provides the premises for an ethic of mutual tolerance between the competitive house and tenement churches in Rome, which should enable them to participate with integrity in the Spanish mission [15:28-29; p. 197] [In 2:2] Paul provides immediate rhetorical reinforcement of his entrapment by placing his audience among the "we," converted believers who know about God's judgment against such wicked hypocrites [p. 198] [In 2:3], certain that he has now ensured the entrapment of his audience, Paul returns to the second person style of Dia tribal harangue to pose a rhetorical question [p. 199] When Paul reaches chap. 14... the verb *krinein* ("judge") is again employed with reference to bigotry between the weak and the strong, but there is no hint at this point that the target might include the audience of believers in Rome, for good rhetorical reasons.... The objector doubtless did suppose [that] the visible handing over to reprobate mind and behavior (1:24, 26, 28) which was the token of God's wrath upon Gentile sinners did not apply to him. Thus, the rhetorical question is meant to be answered by the imaginary conversation partner in the affirmative, while the audience says to themselves "those hypocrites think they are exempt from wrath, but we know better!" It is a brilliant rhetorical trap [p. 200] The elaborate rhetorical trap for both the weak and the strong in Rome being prepared in these verses cannot function unless the audience's resentment against the arrogant bigot is fully developed and the thesis of impartial righteousness is driven home [2:5, p. 203] The elaborate rhetorical trap entangles both sides, sentence by sentence, ever more effectively, but its persuasive energy must first be gathered by its seeming critique of the straw man who appears to

stand outside the circle of the converted, that is, the bigot who "passes judgment" and yet does the very same things him/herself [2:12, p. 211]. Paul knows that he cannot achieve his rhetorical purpose by attacking either camp in a direct manner, so he constructs a rhetorical trap that by the end of the letter will "wound from behind," to employ Kierkegaard's famous expression [2:15, p. 217].¹²⁴

Myth #9 "In Romans 1:26-27 Paul condemns all homoerotic acts as being 'against nature'."

"Nature" is not a category of biblical theology (it does not occur in the Hebrew Bible nor in the Gospels), but is rather a Greek philosophical concept (especially Stoic) that Paul used in a variety of senses. Jesus and the Hebrew Bible, rather, always spoke of the "Creator" and "creation" (Genesis 1-2; Psalm 104, etc.). In Romans 1:26 Paul describes anal sex between females and males (to avoid pregnancy) as "against nature." Then in 1:27 he characterizes abusive anal sex between males (also non-procreative) as similarly "against nature." However, just as the Jewish concept of "uncleanness" undergoes a kind of "deconstruction" in Romans, Paul also indicates that Jews are circumcised against "nature" (Rom. 2:27), that the pagans do not have the Torah "by nature/birth" (2:14) and that even God continually acts "against nature" (11:24, the conversion of the pagans; cf. all the miracles of Jesus and the apostles; women have long hair "by nature/ custom", 1 Cor. 11:14-15). Moreover, biologists have repeatedly observed homoerotic acts in more than 1500 species of animals, so among human beings what is "natural" for some is "against

nature” for others (just as in the case of left-handedness).

Myth #10 “In Romans 1:24-27 Paul condemns homoerotic acts as being ‘shameful.’”

In Rom. 1:24 and 26-27 Paul describes lustful non-procreative sexual acts as “dishonorable/ shameful” within ancient patriarchal societies (with their preoccupation with the procreation of legitimate sons as heirs). However, the concepts of “shame” and dishonor, just like those of “uncleanness” and “against nature,” undergo deconstruction as the letter unfolds. Thus, the key paragraph of the letter (Romans 3:21-26) reveals how God’s liberating justice is displayed for the redemption of humanity by means of Jesus’ death, whose crucifixion represents the most shameful possible experience of His times. Paul thus insists that of this gospel, of a crucified messiah, “I am not ashamed!” (Romans 1:16-17). He even affirms twice that no one who believes in this crucified messiah should be ashamed (Romans 9:33, 10:11) but rather “boast” (three times: 5:2-3, 11), even when they suffer oppression and persecution that normally would shame its victims. That is to say, Paul teaches his readers to “*discern*” (12:1-2) when a *deserved* shame exists, among people who are guilty of lust and sexual exploitation of the weak, and when the believers of a crucified messiah should “despise” the *undeserved* shame which an oppressive society instills in the weak and oppressed (Hebrews 12:2).

Myth #11 “Paul condemns the ‘changes’ in sexual behavior (Rom. 1:26-27) as comparable to the act of exchanging the worship of the true God for idols

(described in 1:23, 25) and hence equally sinful.”

When Paul repeats the vocabulary of “change/leaving” in the rhetoric of 1:23-27, his purpose is not to establish ethical absolutes, but rather *to trap the reader* who boasts of his moral superiority and condemns others (2:1). Moreover, in this rhetorical trap, the “change” vocabulary (1:23, 25, 26-27) is another element that undergoes deconstruction later in the letter, where Paul declares that “transformation” (radical change) is the essence of sanctification (“be ye *transformed*,” totally changed, 12:1-2). Thus, the reader who leaps to the conclusion that 1:26-27 implies a universal absolute prohibition of all homoerotic activity only lands more quickly in the rhetorical trap Paul prepared for arrogant judges who condemn others (2:1-16). In fact, of course, Paul is the great Theologian of Change, who sought the continual transformation of the Christian mind and praxis (Romans 12:1-2) and even hoped for a total renovation of the cosmos (Romans 8:18-25; see 2 Corinthians 5:17). The changes denounced in Romans 1:23-27, however, are changes that dishonor God and harm the neighbor (1:23, 25), changes in practices (v. 26) and of sexual partners (27) that manifest the sin of “coveting” (24, cf. 26-27), which Colossians and Ephesians identify as a kind of idolatry (Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:5). Therefore, to evaluate different changes requires *discernment*: a woman who *changes* husbands while the first one is still alive is “adulterous,” but if she remarries after the death of the first husband, she is not adulterous (Rom. 7:1-6); similarly, when it involved an act of love that did not harm the neighbor (as in the levirate law of Deut. 25:5-10), a woman might “change” sexual partners seven times (Mark 12:18-27).

Myth #12 “Although in Romans 1:26-27 Paul never explicitly refers to homosexual acts as ‘sinful,’ we know that he considered them so because in Genesis 1–2 God created only two sexes, male and female, designed to complement each other not only biologically in sexual relations but also in the interpersonal marriage relationship.”

Aside from the anatomical fit for procreation (now usually thwarted “against nature” by birth control devices), gender “complementarity” is only the new politically-correct patriarchal jargon used to promote female inferiority and passive submission and thus “complement” supposed male superiority. In fact, this concept of gender “complementarity” is a product of eighteenth-nineteenth century romanticism but now often anachronistically read back into ancient biblical texts, where gender relations commonly were hierarchical, not complementary.

Myth #13 “In Romans 1:18-32 Paul demonstrates a scientific understanding of homosexuality that surpasses that of modern unbelieving scientists (who support the ‘gay agenda’).”

The Apostle’s discourse in Rom. 1:18-32 never pretends to expound a scientific comprehension of human sexuality, but rather lays a rhetorical trap in which he denounces the impiety and injustice/oppression, as well as the greed and sexual uncleanness, which the human race has suffered since its original fall into idolatry. Paul thus appears to employ the common literary genre of a “decline of civilization” narrative to explain how *the entire human race*, at some unspecified past time, (1) rejected the true God and opted for idolatry (1:18-23, 25, 28) and (2) suffered

the divine punishment of being abandoned to injustice (1:18, 28-32) and sexual “uncleanness” (1:24-27). However, neither the Hebrew Bible nor secular history records such an event as this “fall” of the human race (all originally heterosexual monotheists, according to Paul’s version). Scholars therefore commonly conclude that in Romans 1:18-32 Paul utilizes some popular Jewish “myth” or “legend” in the construction of his rhetorical trap (see Jesus’ use of the literary genre of parables). But even if relating an actual event, Paul speaks of a “prehistoric” experience of the entire race – he makes no reference to the psychological development of specific modern individuals.

However, when Paul refers to the prehistoric (mythological/legendary?) “fall” of our ancestors into idolatry and sexual uncleanness (Rom. 1:18-23), he says nothing about modern youths who recognize their homosexual orientation from adolescence onward *without ever having had any sexual relations with women* (cf. 1:27). If an “exchange” in and of itself were sinful, then an informed and coherent Paul should encourage such youths to remain faithful with their same-sex partner. Thus, when the Apostle denounces disastrous “changes” (Rom. 1:23-27) this provides no basis for condemning a Christian homosexual man who, *never having had sexual relations with a woman*, forms a permanent and exclusive relationship with another man to live faithfully in love, for Paul says nothing about sexual acts “against nature” (non-procreative) in relationships of committed love. In such cases the exchange that harms would be that proposed by the pseudo-scientific “ex-gay” ministries, which – in an era devastated by AIDS – seek to break such

stable relationships in order to impose heterosexual "marriages" – cruel pseudo-scientific experiments that commonly end in divorce, depression, addictions and suicides.

Myth #14 "In Romans 1:18-32 Paul seeks to provide the house and tenement churches in Rome with clear sexual ethical absolutes."

Paul's instructions to the churches in Rome regarding their behavior, sexual and otherwise, comes much later in the letter (Rom. 12:1–15:13), where he cites the Ten Commandments and prohibits the heterosexual sin of adultery (13:9), drunken orgies ("beds") and other egotistical, covetous sexual "excesses" (13:13-14). Obviously, even there the Apostle includes some terms typical of the euphemistic, ambiguous language common to all cultures when sexual matters are discussed ("beds... excesses"). How much more must we be prepared for ambiguity in sexual matters when the literary genre involved is a parable or rhetorical trap. The purpose of the trap that Paul sets and springs at the beginning of Romans (1:18-32; 2:1-16) is not to provide clear ethical absolutes on sexuality but to prepare churches to hear his later teaching about refraining from judging one another and offering mutual hospitality (14:1–15:13). As Jewett has demonstrated (see **Jewett note** below), Paul's real goal in the rhetorical trap is not unveiled until 14:1–15:13, where he addresses the intolerance, divisions and inhospitality characteristic of the house/tenement churches in Rome. With his concluding and climactic emphasis on hospitality (15:1-13) Paul, in fact, has created a kind of inclusion with the pejorative reference to abusive male-male anal sex in 1:27, since that practice would echo the failure of the males in Sodom to

imitate Abraham's hospitality (Genesis 18) and their attempt to gang rape the visiting angels instead (Gen. 19:1-29). This inclusion, of course, also echoes Jesus' reference to the sin of Sodomite males as a failure to practice a hospitality that welcomes visiting divine messengers (Luke 10:8-12; Mat. 10:11-15; see above **Myth 4** under **1A Eight Myths**).

Commentators acknowledge that it is often notoriously difficult to draw clear ethical instruction from literary genres such as parables and rhetorical traps. For another example of a rhetorical trap, see 2 Sam. 12:1-15.¹²⁵ From Nathan's parable, should we seek to make ethical absolutes from the extremes of poverty and wealth, the fine of paying four times for having killed a neighbor's only and beloved lamb, the death penalty autocratically dictated by an angry king, eating lamb instead of a vegetarian diet, or God's providing David with multiple wives for polygamous marriage? Sometimes, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the obvious behavioral implications are made clear and explicit (outside of the parable): "Go thou and do likewise" (Luke 10:25-37). However, often, as in the parable of the dishonest steward (Luke 16:1-13), the details of the parable constitute part of the "stage scenery" and any attempt to make ethical absolutes out of such details would be ridiculous: "The master commended the dishonest steward for his shrewdness.... Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon" (16:8-9). Had Paul's intent in Rom. 1:24-27 been to provide clear ethical absolutes, obviously he failed, since church fathers for 350 years all interpreted 1:26 as condemning women offering themselves to men for anal sex to avoid procreation, but

only after 400 A.D. as a prohibition of lesbian sex (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9, for centuries interpreted as prohibiting masturbation and only in the late twentieth century as condemning "homosexuality"). When we examine the diversity of biblical sexual teaching regarding such matters as eunuchs (→ **Isaiah** 56), or divorce (where no two texts say the same thing; → **Mark**), or widows remarrying (→ **1 Timothy**), it becomes obvious that many of the "clear sexual ethical absolutes" that fundamentalists claim to find in the Bible only become available when they are brought to the Bible and imposed on the texts. In the case of his rhetorical trap, obviously Paul would expect churches to avoid the sins of idolatry and oppression/injustice that provoke God's wrath (1:18-23, 25; 2:5, 8) which the Bible condemns innumerable times; see also the vice list of 21 items, mainly reflecting items in the Decalogue (1:28-32). However, in his pejorative rhetoric regarding pagan sexuality, Paul refers to "uncleanness" (not "sin," 1:24, 26-27), representing God's *punishment* for the sin of idolatry, and he uses terms which he then deconstructs in the same epistle, presenting them as positive in the later contexts.

Note:

John Stott on Romans 13:1-7, *Romans* (1994:338-47). In his treatment of Paul's exhortation regarding submission to the imperial authorities, evangelical commentator John Stott provides us with an outstanding example within Romans itself of the danger of creating universal ethical absolutes out of contextually limited biblical exhortations. Paul had written:

13:1-2 ¹Let every soul/person be subject to superior [imperial] authorities. For there is no authority except by God, and the existing ones have been ordained by God. ²So the one resisting has opposed the authority of God; and the ones having opposed will receive judgment to themselves.

Stott, however hastens to warn us: "The statement that rulers commend *those who do right* and punish *those who do wrong* is not of course invariably true, as Paul knew perfectly well" (341, citing Acts 25:11). Yet the requirement of submission and the warning of rebellion are couched in universal terms. For this reason, they have been constantly misapplied by oppressive right-wing regimes, as if Scripture gave rulers *carte blanche* to develop a tyranny and to demand unconditional obedience" (1994:341, and then citing Acts 4:18ff.; 5:29; Ex 1:17; Dan 3, 6; Rev 13). Stott elaborates:

[Paul] cannot be taken to mean that all the Caligulas, Herods, Neros and Domitians of New Testament times, and all the Hitlers, Stalins, Amins and Saddams of our times, were personally appointed by God... or that their authority is in no circumstances to be resisted.... Yet the requirements of submission and the warning of rebellion are couched in universal terms. For this reason, they have constantly been misapplied by oppressive right-wing regimes, as if Scripture gave rulers *carte blanche* to develop a tyranny and to demand unconditional obedience.... [the use of Romans 13 by the Nazis to support the Holocaust is the most horrendous example]. Oscar Cullmann

has written: "Few sayings in the New Testament have suffered as much misuse as this one" (Stott 1994:340-411).

Stott cites the example governing authorities in South Africa, who cited Romans 13 to support the continuance of their racist apartheid regime. He then raises the question, "How, then, can it be shown that Paul's demand for submission is not absolute?" (342) and cites a few of the many examples of biblical leaders portrayed positively precisely for their refusal to submit to governing authorities:

As Peter and the other apostles put it to the Sanhedrin: "We must obey God rather than men!" [Acts 5:29] When Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill the newborn boys, they refused to obey [Ex. 1:17] When Nebuchadnezzar issued an edict that all his subjects must fall down and worship his golden image, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to obey [Daniel 3]. When King Darius made a decree that for thirty days nobody should pray "to any god or man" except himself, Daniel refused to obey [Daniel 6]. And when the Sanhedrin banned preaching in the name of Jesus, the apostles refused to obey [Acts 4:18ff]. All these were heroic refusals, in spite of the threats which accompanied the edicts. In each case civil disobedience involved great personal risk, including possible loss of life.... Further light is thrown on the ambivalent nature of the state's authority when Romans 13 is compared with Revelation 13.... Now [30 years after Paul wrote Romans] the state is no longer seen as the servant of God, wielding his authority, but as the ally of the devil (pictured as a red dragon), who has given his authority to the

persecuting state (pictured as a monster emerging out of the sea). Thus Revelation 13 is a satanic parody of Romans 13. Yet both are true.... In loving and serving our enemies, we should still be concerned for justice, and also remember that love seeks justice for the oppressed (1994:342-44).

In treating "Our relationship to the weak" (Rom. 14:1-15:13), Stott even refers to Paul's purpose "to enable conservative-minded Christians (mostly Jewish) and liberal-minded Christians (mostly Gentile) to co-exist amicably in the Christian fellowship" (357) and recognizes that Paul identifies himself as one of the strong ("liberal-minded"!; see "We who are strong....", 15:1; Stott 1994:369).

However, in the case of Rom 1:26-27, Stott and other traditionalists take the text as an ethical absolute, ignoring both overwhelming scientific evidences, the many biblical texts favoring sexual minorities that could be cited as requiring a more flexible interpretation and the centuries of historical evidence of cruelty and violence resulting from the traditional interpretation. Had Stott applied the same wise hermeneutic to his interpretation of Romans 1:26-27 that he applies to the apparent universal absolute in Romans 13:1-3, he would have avoided falling into the heterosexist-homophobic trap of cruelly misinterpreting and absolutizing Romans 1:26-27 (1994:76-78). In his commentary on 1-2 Thessalonians, he boldly sets forth further relevant guidelines for interpreting exhortations regarding Christian praxis, specifically the call to unselfishness in 1 Thes. 4:1-9:

We are to please God (1) and to love one another (9). To these fundamental

simplicities the apostle reduces our ethical obligations. Christian morality is not primarily rules and regulations, but relationships.... Love for others leads us to serve them. Whatever we wish others would do to us, we shall want to do to them (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Thessalonians*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1991:91)

Myth #15 "Although in Rom. 1:18-32 Paul is setting a rhetorical trap to be sprung on the judgmental reader, we may be sure that 1:27 reflects the Apostle's own condemnation of male-male anal sex."

The most recent, detailed scholarly study of Romans¹²⁶ concludes, to the contrary, that in 1:18-32 Paul is citing the rhetoric of a false Jewish-Christian teacher (*prosopopoia*, "speech-in-character," 2:17-23; → Galatians 1:6-9; 2:4-5), whom he then proceeds to refute in 5:1–15:13. Campbell reminds us of the common difficulty in Paul's letters of distinguishing his own views from those of any opponent/s whose views he cites (without quotation marks in the original Greek) before proceeding to his own qualification or refutation. From 1 Corinthians Campbell provides a lengthy list of texts where commentators commonly affirm (eight cases) or debate (five cases) possible citations that do not represent Paul's own views¹²⁷ (see 1:12; 3:4; 6:12-13; 7:1; 8:1, 4, 8; 10:23; cf. 4:6b; 8:5a; 12:3; 15:12; 15:35); in English for the undisputed eight cases the NRSV provides the quotation marks lacking in the original Greek (see below, **Excursus 2, Robert A. Campbell**).

Conclusions:

1. Recent scientific discoveries help us understand that neither being left handed nor homosexual is a

consequence of the idolatry or the religion of certain ancestors, but rather represents a common variation within 1500 species of animals – and among human beings of every place, ideology and religion.¹²⁸ Some recent studies cite the observations of a few ancient astrologers, who observed a diversity in constant human sexual preferences but superstitiously attributed them to the stars. However, if Paul was aware of any diversity of constant sexual preferences amongst his contemporaries, he makes no reference to them, describing instead some prehistoric experience involving the entire human race. And he certainly did not propose any astrological explanation. In fact, the main psychological study of Paul even concludes that the Apostle himself was a person with a repressed homosexual orientation.¹²⁹

2. Some may fear that if Paul employed myths or legends in Romans, we must deny the inspiration and truth of the Bible. However, biblical authors used a great variety of literary genres and the church for centuries misinterpreted → **Song of Songs** as an allegory, instead of recognizing it as erotic poetry. Just as Jesus' parable referred to the "mustard seed" (without scientific precision about size) to illustrate His Kingdom principles (Mat. 13:31-32), Paul apparently refers to some kind of myth or legend (a prehistoric fall occurring in a race that was totally monotheistic and "heterosexual" in

its practices). Such a concept implies prescientific ignorance of evolution and the methodology of modern historians. Nor does Paul demonstrate any understanding of the concept of sexual orientation, a scientific perception that developed only in the late nineteenth century.

3. Paul emphasizes only *one* sexual norm: he condemns **covetous desire** (Romans 1:24a, 26a, 27b), the *excess* of passion (rational and unjust) that was prohibited in the Tenth Commandment and remains normative throughout the letter (13:8-10). The sexual acts in 1:24-27 are examples of such “excesses” that harm the neighbor (13:8-14). The other *four* elements in Paul’s rhetoric (**uncleanness, shame, against nature, change**) do not represent permanent universal “ethical” norms and thus undergo a deconstruction later in the letter. Paul thus emphasizes in the later chapters that sexual acts should avoid “excess” passion, the covetous desire that results in harm to the neighbor (for example, adultery, which deprives the neighbor of his sexual property, 13:8-14). But nothing suggests that Paul intends to condemn every sexual act that is non-procreative (“**against nature**”) or characterized in the Law as “**unclean**,” or considered “**shameful**” by patriarchal society, or that constitutes a “**change**” from previous sexual practices.
4. Countless scriptural examples make clear the danger of taking apparent general prohibitions as absolutes

without exceptions. For example, (a) “Thou shalt not kill,” #6 of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:13 // Deut. 5:17), sounds quite absolute until we learn that the death penalty was commended for breaking many laws and that enemies (including women and children) were to be slaughtered in certain wars (Deut. 7:1-4); (b) Sabbath breaking is punishable by death in the Hebrew Bible (Ex. 20:8-11 // Deut. 5:12-15), even for just gathering wood (Num. 15:32-36), but Jesus and Paul made many exceptions (Mark 2:23-28; Rom. 14:5-8); (c) Jesus flatly forbids divorce and remarriage (Mark 10:11-12), but other texts make exceptions (Mat. 5:31-32; 19:8-9; 1 Cor. 7:15) and in other contexts God commands divorce (Ezra 10:3; Neh. 9:2; 13:23-27; Gen. 21:8-21); (d) Paul commands “If anyone will not work, let him not eat” (2 Thes. 3:10), but with obvious exceptions: children, sick, handicapped; (e) the early believers “had *all things* in common” (Acts 2:44; “with the exception of wives,” hastened to add the Church Father Tertullian);¹³⁰ (f) 1 Tim. 2:9-10 prohibits “gold or pearls or expensive clothes” (1 Peter 3:3-4), also condemned in Isa. 3:16-26 and Hosea 2:15, but praised in → **Song of Songs** (1:10-11; 4:9; 7:1/2) and commanded for priestly vestments (Exodus 28; 39), so there is “not an absolute prohibition against jewelry for people of faith.”¹³¹ Therefore, note similarly, the denunciations of idolaters engaging in anal sex as an expression of egotistic lust that

harms the neighbor; → **Romans** 1:26-27.

5. Since nowhere on Paul's canvas can we detect a devout Christian gay or lesbian adult couple in a committed, loving relationship, scholars continuously debate whether the Apostle would have known of such persons. However, since he never refers to such, his writings can provide us with no basis for an ethical absolute, condemning something he decided not to mention or that he did not even know existed.

Excursus 1

Kathy L. Gaca (2003), *The Making of Fornication: Eros, Ethics and Political Reform in Greek Philosophy and Early Christianity*. Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press ("staggering erudition", Chris Frilingos, Review JBL 123/4 2004:756-599); cf. the Greek *porneia*, "prostitution, unchastity, fornication" (BDAG 2000: 354).

Kathy Gaca shows that the Church Fathers did not draw their conclusions about sexual norms basically from the Hebrew Bible nor the New Testament: ">From the beginning of the second century C.E., patristic writers actively began to adapt ideas about regulating human sexual conduct from Plato, the Stoics, and the Pythagoreans as they developed their own teachings about permissible and impermissible sexual activity...[1] Tatian was an ardent Christian advocate of complete sexual renunciation, also known as the 'enocratic' position, and [2] Epiphanes was a Christian Platonist and a Gnostic supporter of more libertine sexual principles. Both Tatian and Epiphanes drew

on the Stoics for some of their teachings and Epiphanes borrowed from Plato as well. [3] Clement, also a Christian Platonist, censured both Tatian and Epiphanes for going to opposite extremes. He used Plato, the Stoics, and the Pythagoreans to develop putatively more moderate sexual guidelines.... somewhere between the encratite and libertine positions,"¹³² advocating "reproduction within marriage... Tatian, drawing mainly on Paul [1 Cor. 7:1,7], the Septuagint, and the [later] Stoics, advocates that Christians must renounce sexual activity in order to be saved... Epiphanes... argues that the communal sexual principles of Plato and the early Stoics are the right model for Christians to follow... Clement counters the encratic position by maintaining that reproduction within marriage is a worthy Christian practice... Clement's polemic against Epiphanes indicates that it was a matter of some real debate which pattern of sexual conduct Christians should follow, Clement's or Epiphanes' (p. 15).

"By the second century, prominent sectors of the Christian populace started to put highly restrictive sexual principles into practice. Christian monks took to the desert to battle sexual fantasies and nocturnal emissions. Female virgins renounced marriage in order to adore Christ as their spiritual Bridegroom... Married couples opted for the sanctity of a marriage liberated from sexual relations altogether, or at least once their pious duty of reproduction was finished" (p. 9). Gaca seeks to understand why Tatian's encratic position became so popular (9) and concludes that the anti-sexual strain in Christian tradition was basically the result of the Church Fathers who, with their classical

Greco-Roman formations, depended on Hellenistic moral philosophy, especially the *later* Stoics (4-11). In contrast with the *early* Stoics (Zeno and Chrysippus), who formulated an original theory of communal eros, rejecting marriage in favor of cultivating friendships, the *later* Stoics, followed by the Fathers, replaced the communal aspect with established Greek customs of marriage and family coupled with a preference for total abstinence (7; see the similar replacement of Jesus' and Paul's praxis and teaching with the *Haustafeln*, the tables of household duties in → **Colossians, Ephesians, 1 Timothy and 1 Peter**). Like the Fathers, Michel Foucault ignored the early Stoics (6-8), but one reviewer of Gaca's work (Chris Filingos) argues that her critique of Foucault ignores the diversity evident in his writings.¹³³ With their philosophical convictions firmly in place, most Fathers (in typical Fundamentalist fashion) proceeded to make a highly selective literalistic interpretation of a few biblical texts, ignoring or allegorizing any text that did not square with their sexual ideology that permitted monogamous, heterosexual procreative sex but preferred total sexual abstinence.

Gaca concludes that **for Paul**, based not on Greek philosophy or popular culture but on his reading of the LXX, **fornication (*porneia*)** implies **heterosexual relations in a context of idolatrous religion and worship**: "Polytheistic religion in antiquity was intimately connected with sexual and procreative conduct, for people worshipped gods embodying sexual power, such as Aphrodite, Dionysus, Her, and Zeus."¹³⁴ Since Hellenistic culture accepted prostitution/*porneia*, the term was not included in its vice lists; Jesus, addressing

fellow-Jews in Palestine, had little occasion to refer to *porneia*; but Paul, addressing non-Jews elsewhere, made it a major concern: "Paul's cardinal dictate [is] that God's people must avoid sexual fornication in worship of other gods" (p. 14). "The vice of *porneia* is entirely absent from the [vice] lists in Hellenistic philosophy, but occurs frequently and near the beginning of the Pauline lists, Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5; 1 Cor. 12:20-21; Eph. 5:3-5" (14, note 38); rare (twice) in Jesus' teaching (13, note 36; 139 note 52; see Mat. 5:32 // 19:9; 15:19 // Mark 7:21). However, fornication/*porneia* in Paul, following the LXX, is "a heterosexual deviance" and does not refer to homoerotic acts (143, 158). "Biblical *porneia* refers to acts of sexual intercourse and reproduction that deviate from the norm of worshipping God alone.... In the *non*-biblical Greek sense, however, *porneia* means 'prostitution' and has nothing to do with worshipping God alone" (20).

To sustain her argument that *porneia* in Paul refers to *heterosexual* acts in a *context of polytheism and idolatry* (119-159), Gaca refers to various texts from the LXX version of the Hebrew Bible and to Paul, who "considers sexual intercourse in honor of other gods to be worse than nonsexual aspects of other-theistic worship" (137): "Certain kinds of sexual activity are marked as apostasy, and these fit into two groups. First, sexual activity constitutes rebellion against God if it occurs while worshipping gods other than or in addition to the Lord.... Male Israelites... fornicate with Moabite women at the festival for Baal-peor [Num. 25:1-18; → 1 Cor. 10:7-8] Similarly, Jacob's daughter Dinah is subjected to fornication when Shechem rapes her at a festival" (122-124) [Gen. 34:2, 31; see also

Jer. 2:19-22; Micah 1:6-8]. Paul "tells the Corinthian Christians that God killed twenty-three thousand Israelites because of their sexual fornicating worship of alien gods and other acts of disobedience.... (1 Cor. 10:8, 11-12 [regarding the numerical discrepancy, see NVIBE note]) Paul issues the same message to the Thessalonian Christian community. They must abstain from sexual intercourse in worship of other gods in order to avoid 'the avenging Lord' (*ekdikos kurios*, 1 Thess. 4:6). The community in Rome receives notice as well. Paul states that God's wrath is emerging against some or all pagans for sexual worship that they devote to their gods (Rom. 1:18-27)" (138).¹³⁵

Regarding Paul's teaching in Romans 1:24-27, Gaca concludes:

- The reference to "uncleanness/impurity" expressed in covetous desires (*epithumia*) in **Rom. 1:24** continues the theme of idolatry in 1:19-23 and is reemphasized again in **1:25**.¹³⁶
- The theme of idolatry continues in Romans **1:26-27**, where Paul describes the pagans as "burning with desire to comply with their devotion to alien gods such as Aphrodite, Dionysus, Hera, and Zeus."¹³⁷

Moreover, Gaca points out, "There is no transparent connection... between **Paul and the rabbis [centuries later]**, for the Pharisaic background that Paul claims in Philippians 3:5 differs in numerous major ways from the Pharisaism presupposed in the Hebrew-based rabbinic tradition.... [Thus, it is not illuminating to assume that rabbinic sources are the manifest background for Paul's

sexual principles.] It is questionable to use rabbinic evidence to control and fill in what Paul 'must mean' on topics where he is terse or convoluted, as he frequently is, while the rabbis carefully explain their positions, as they tend to do" (14-15; see similarly the differences between Philo's Pythagorean-based procreationism and Paul, who did not exemplify nor advocate procreationism, 206-08). Gaca thus undermines one of Robert Gagnon's favorite fallback positions when his exegetical arguments falter: Paul (or Jesus) must have condemned male homoeroticism because he was Jewish.¹³⁸ However, Gaca fails to apply her own principle when she rejects Saul Olyan's interpretation of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 as only prohibiting male homoerotic anal intercourse¹³⁹ on the grounds of rabbinic discussion. The assumption that ancient Judaism must be seen as universally and essentially homophobic (as if the two verses in Leviticus, Philo and Josephus were the only relevant evidence to be considered) has now been roundly refuted by Ted Jennings' work, which demonstrates that the Hebrew Bible includes a positive emphasis on homoeroticism that was unique in antiquity (*Jacob's Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel*;¹⁴⁰ see Hanks' summary and review at www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar/ingles/ingles.html, Reviews).

Conclusion

For interpreting **Romans 1:18-32** Gaca thus brings strong support to the interpretation that what is condemned are only expressions of sexual "uncleanness" (1:24, 26-27) in a *context of polytheism and idolatry* (1:19-23, 25, 28a), which would thus not apply to contemporary adult Christian believers in a consensual loving relationship.

In addition, both for Paul and Jesus, Gaca concludes that **the texts condemning *porneia*** not only are limited to sexual acts in *idolatrous religious* contexts but are also limited to *heterosexual* acts, while the three Pauline references to male-male anal sex employ other terms and categories. Thus, Robert Gagnon’s desperate attempt¹⁴¹ to find a basis for attributing to Jesus a condemnation of male homoeroticism in his two references to *porneia* is also shown to be groundless.

“The Reproductive Technology of the Pythagoreans” (chapter 4, 2003:94-116). Pythagoras was a pre-Platonic Greek philosopher and mathematician (sixth century B.C.E) known only from later citations, whose emphasis on reproduction technique was transmuted via Plato, Neoplatonism, and the Stoics into later patristic and modern Christian teaching on procreation. Thus Plato (ca. 429-347 B.C.E.) in *Republic* 546b4-d3 refers to a Pythagorean theorem regarding a “nuptial number”, “an abstruse eugenic principle that designates the most auspicious timing for producing human offspring.”¹⁴² According to **Aristoxenus (born ca. 375-360 B.C.E.,** writing about Pythagoreans he knew): “Followers of Pythagoras ideally should refrain from sexual activity in their early youth, marry, and maintain marital fidelity thereafter, and in general they ought to make sparing use of sexual activity throughout their lives” (101). “The reproductive technology... presumes at its core the earliest known Pythagorean tenet – that human nature is a dualistic composite of an immortal soul in a mortal body” (103). “The Pythagoreans interpret conception and birth to be an act of guiding a soul into embodiment....” (101). **Ocellus, ca. 150**

B.C.E. (109-111) reflects typical Pythagorean principles but emphasizes “the older Pythagorean argument that procreationism chiefly serves the interest of the children. Offspring who are produced in anything other than a strictly purposeful way [procreation within marriage] are ‘abject, ill-omened, and abominable’... born under a bad sign.... afflicted with the life-long curse of having been embodied in a sexually abominable way” (110). **“Charondas” (107-09)** was a pseudonymous author of a Pythagorean treatise, **ca. 50 B.C.E.** for whom “Only deliberately procreative sex acts in marriage remain permissible” (108). “Charondas thinks in a Pythagorean manner by the exclusive disjunction he makes between ejaculating for procreation... or for licentiousness.... Unless a man ejaculates into his wife to reproduce, then he does so for licentious reasons [pleasure, friendship], and such license is absolutely forbidden.... Charondas thus goes by the strict letter of his procreationist law, and he would enforce this rule on a lifelong basis” (108; unlike Plato who limited the Pythagorean restriction to about a 10-year period when the couple would produce children).

The treatises of Ocellus and Charondas show that “the older Pythagorean doctrine of procreationism gains a favorable reception during the Neopythagorean revival of the later Hellenistic and early Roman period” (110). Thus, **Seneca (4 B.C.E–65 A.D.),** commonly classified as a Stoic, “advocates procreationism in its Neopythagorean version.... Only purposeful reproduction is justifiable, and marriage is the only institution in which it may occur.... Seneca advocates unconditional procreationism out of concern more for the sexual agents themselves than for the offspring,”

considering that sexual pleasure is like "a fire ready to rage out of control" (111). **Musonius (ca. 20-30 A.D.–79-101 A.D.)**, "though primarily Stoic, like Seneca, similarly promotes Neopythagorean procreationism.... [Sexually deviant men] besmirch themselves 'just like pigs' and they are happy rolling in the mud.... Musonius and Seneca are the only known Stoics who advocate the procreationist dictate. They are completely anomalous as Stoics in so doing, for this Pythagorean rule conflicts fundamentally with the basic principles of stoic eros.... Both Seneca and Musonius are ascetic Pythagoreans in Stoic clothing, at least with regard to their sexual ethics" (113-15). The Stoics generally argued that friendship is the primary goal of sexual activity, quite apart from its reproductive function: "In Stoic sexual ethics... sexual activity is justified if practiced for the purpose of cultivating mutual friendship" (97-98, note 10).

In its more extreme version "procreationism forbids all other sexual activity as reckless and morally reprehensible, be it homoerotic, autoerotic, or heterosexual deviance from strictly temperate reproduction within marriage.... Though it began as a distinctively Pythagorean doctrine, in its more extreme form it later came to be understood as God's law in ecclesiastical Christianity" (96). "Procreationism in [this]... aphoristic Neopythagorean form gains wider currency by the time of the early Roman empire.... and it was well positioned to spread further into the Jewish Platonism of Philo and into ecclesiastical Christianity via Christian Platonism" (116). Our modern Christian emphasis on procreationism thus stems from this extreme aphoristic form of Pythagorean teaching, imbibed by the

Fathers from Greco-Roman philosophy, not from Genesis 1–2. Were this teaching taken literally it would require all to dedicate themselves to the *maximization* of procreation, necessary for the world of Adam and Eve, but disastrous for our modern world with its population explosion. Obviously major voices in the biblical tradition (Jeremiah, Jesus, Paul, all unmarried) were singularly uninterested in maximizing procreation, while → **Song of Songs**, the only biblical book wholly dedicated to the theme of human sexuality, consists of erotic poetry that extols joyful eroticism outside any framework of marriage and with no concern to procreate. Moreover, most Church Fathers strongly preferred total sexual abstinence and only permitted procreative sex within marriage as the inferior option. Gaca thus unmasks modern Christian emphasis on family values and procreationism as reflecting roots that are Pythagorean rather than biblical.

Katy L. Gaca (1999). "Paul's Uncommon Declaration to the Greeks: Romans 1:18-32 and Its Problematic Legacy for Gentile and Christian Relations." *The Harvard Theological Review* 92:165-98. "The genius of [Pauline] Christianity is its concern for all peoples of the world; the genius of rabbinic Judaism is its ability to leave other people alone." Daniel Boyarin's aphorism, which Gaca cites, may serve as a soft introduction to this excursus.¹⁴³ The traditional Hellenistic Jewish argument against polytheism is classically explicated in the deuterocanonical Wisdom [of Solomon] 13:1–14:31, which maintains that those who affirm a plurality of gods in the physical world are *unenlightened* about biblical monotheism and have "ignorance" to blame for thinking that there are many gods: "For

all people who are *ignorant* of God were *foolish* by nature" (13:1).¹⁴⁴ The Jewish philosopher Philo (ca. 30 BCE-45CE), the historian Josephus (37-100 CE) and the *Sibylline Oracles* (3:8-9; 2d century BCE) all support and develop this simple explanation (170-71).

1. With the exception of Romans 1:18-32, other relevant NT texts, as well as the apostolic and church fathers until ca. 160 CE, echoed this standard Jewish explanation, which encourages tolerance and patient education. Thus, Acts portrays Paul as proclaiming to the Athenians, with their altar to an "unknown god," that God had "overlooked the times of [their] *ignorance*" in allowing Paul to proclaim his Gospel (Acts 17:23, 30; similarly Eph. 4:17-18).¹⁴⁵ "The belief that religiously alien ignorance motivates polytheism remains in force among the early [second century] Christian apologists: Aristides [writing ca. 177 CE], Justin [ca. 100-175 CE], Athenagoras [writing ca. 176-180 CE], and Theophilus [fl. ca 169-185]."¹⁴⁶ "Socrates and Plato, however, are heroic exceptions to this rule according to Justin and Athenagoras, just as they are for Philo and Josephus as well" (179-80).
2. Paul, however, in Rom. 1:18-32 had offered "a completely distinct explanation of why some or all polytheistic people in the ancient Mediterranean region worshipped numerous gods. The people in question are not theologically blind outsiders but... knowledgeable about

God...yet they have become rebels who worship the created world rather than its creator.... they are blameworthy 'suppressors of the truth' about God and as such they 'have no defense' for worshipping their ancestral gods" (171). Thus, NT commentators who assume that in Rom. 1:18-32 Paul basically echoes the earlier Jewish tolerance reflected in Wisdom 13-14 are seriously mistaken. "Given the nature of Paul's accusation, the precise identity of the alleged truth suppressors becomes a pressing question.... This problem, however, remains an enigma in the text of Romans itself" (1999:173; the three alternatives discussed are: all humanity, or the pagans as a whole, or a sector of the pagans – the Greeks or their Hellenic culture of philosophy). Paul maintains in Rom. 11:25-27 that "Israel encompasses all humanity, Jew, pagan, and Christian alike [so] the truth-suppressing polytheists are apostate Israel even though they assume this new cultural identity unawares" (172). Paul's strong polemic in Rom. 1:18-32 was misunderstood or ignored for more than a century when the rigorist Christian Apologist Tatian (c. 160 CE), later founder of the ascetic sexually abstinent sect of the Encratites, began to make use of it in a violent attack on Greek civilization, even denouncing Socrates, Plato and Aristotle as leaders of a rebellion against God and initiating a strong trend toward intolerance of Greek philosophy and other religions (181-183). Similar

use of Rom. 1:18-32 was then made by Clement of Alexandria (150-215 CE), who later wavered back to the earlier more tolerant attitude (183-185). Origen (ca. 185-253 CE), however, consistently endorsed Paul’s idea that there are pagan/Greek truth suppressors, including Plato and Socrates (186-188), as did Athanasius (295-373 CE; 188-92) and, above all, John Chrysostom (born ca. 349-54 CE, died 407 CE; 192-195), who also channeled ecclesiastical intolerance to target Jews and homoeroticism.

However, while Gaca builds an irrefutable case demonstrating the two conflicting interpretations of Rom. 1:18-32 in the Church Fathers and subsequent history, shortly before her 1999 article a third interpretation of Paul’s ambiguous reference appeared that has convinced many: the “men/persons” (*anthropon*) in Rom. 1:18ff constitutes part of a Decline of Civilization narrative and refers to ancient humanity as a whole, who at some unspecified past time abandoned its ideal state (a “golden age”) and initiated a decline into the present condition of sin and suffering.¹⁴⁷

Excursus 2

Douglas A. Campbell (associate professor of New Testament at Duke Divinity School), *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009; 1218 pp.]. Cf. also his *Quest for Paul’s Gospel: A Suggested Strategy* [London: T&T Clark International (Continuum), 2005]. In section 3.3 Homosexual Relations (2009:206-07), Campbell writes:

“Queer theorists [note 67 below] encounter in Romans 1:24-27 perhaps the most explicit articulation and condemnation of homosexual activity in all of Scripture [note 68 below]. Certainly, if this passage is read in the standard fashion dictated by Justification, then the reprehensibility of homosexual sex is unavoidable. Paul must himself be overtly and strongly committed to this stance. Furthermore, it is written into the natural order, within phase one of Justification, prior to any special Christian revelation. And this location generated several rather sinister concomitants.

- First, correct theology at all points now presupposes this stance, so to tamper with it is to risk undermining the later Christian dispensation that unfolds from it. Strong paradigmatic reasons now exist for the stance’s maintenance.
- Second, the stance is attributed to all humanity on the basis of innate knowledge and hence independently of special revelation.
- So, third, it is insulated from correction by special revelation. (Indeed, as we have already seen, special revelation can now unfold only in these terms.)
- Fourth, since everyone can be expected to know that such behavior is deeply offensive to God, everyone so offending is liable entirely justly to punishment. Romans 1:18-32 – read in a certain way – tends to describe such punishment rather passively in terms of the divine deliverance of humanity up to the consequences of

its twisted and chaotic desires, but Romans 2 will articulate almost immediately a more active and coercive response to sin (i.e., punishment). And it is a short step from divine government and retribution to such action by human governments. Hence, not only is the condemnation of homosexual sex written into the foundation of the Christian gospel, but that condemnation legitimizes coercive state reaction against such apparent wrongdoing [note 69 below].

In three notes Campbell adds:

- “[67] My colleague Mary McClintock Fulkerson drew my attention to the appropriateness of speaking of “Queer” theory at this point so as to incorporate gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual perspectives; see also Laurel C. Schneider, “Queer Theory,” in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, ed. S. K. M. Adam (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000), 206-12.
- “[68] A classic contribution to this debate is Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 379-80, 391-94; see also Dale Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox, 2006); and Deryn Guest, Robert Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache, eds., *The Queer Bible Commentary* (London: SCM, 2006). On the broader theological issues, see esp. Eugene Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999). For some preliminary remarks on the Pauline interpretative questions, see “The Witness to Paul’s Gospel of Galatians 3:28,” chapter five in *Quest*, 95-111; the specific issue of gay– and by extension Queer–ordination is treated in “A Brief Case Study in the Ethical Aspect of Paul’s Gospel: Gay Ordination,” chapter six in *Quest*, 112-31.
- “[69] So, for example, in the United States, a constitutional amendment forbidding homosexual marriage would be entirely consistent with this theological stance. A corresponding amendment that defined marriage as between a man and a woman (mooted by the GOP in 2004-6) would be similarly consistent, while both would illustrate that such a theological axiom is supposed to apply indiscriminately to Christians and non-Christians alike, and can if necessary be supported coercively by the state.
- “If Romans 1:24-27 is set to one side momentarily, it is still possible that Paul’s view of sexual relations was reasonably conventional in terms of ancient Judaism. He seems to endorse heterosexual monogamy as the main alternative to celibacy, and he occasionally condemns homosexual relations in the context of vice lists (see perhaps 1 Cor. 6:9). But the setting of that opinion is rather more flexible, as his

conditional endorsement of divorce in 1 Corinthians 7 indicates.

- “Moreover, the *foundational* theological function of sexual relations and their legitimate punishment is displaced by relocations both into the future eschatologically and a present ecclesial frame. So, the stakes are fairly high for Queer theorists who find Paul’s ostensible position on homosexual relations problematic. But it is the reading of Romans 1:24-27 in the broader context of 1:18-32 if not 1:18–3:20 in terms of justification theory that generates the bulk of these difficulties. If Justification is removed from the situation, such difficulties are not eliminated, but their most severe implications are significantly mitigated. The foundational reprehensibility of homosexual relations and their punishment – if necessary, by the state – are eliminated, while the resources of special revelation can rapidly be mobilized in relation to that stance, if Paul is not construed in terms of the theory of Justification. The terms of this significant debate are significantly altered.”

My Comment

Although in the 936 pp. of text in his *magnum opus* (with notes, bibliography and indices extending to 1218 pp.) Campbell dedicates only the above-cited page with its three endnotes to treat explicitly the subject of queer theory and homosexuality, the implications of his conclusions are profound and more devastating to traditional

homophobic interpretations than the casual reader might suspect. Few scholars have accepted William Walker’s contention that Romans 1:18-32 represents a non-Pauline interpolation in the letter.¹⁴⁸ However, in recent decades commentators commonly have concluded that in Romans 1:18-32 Paul lays a rhetorical trap, which he then springs on the unsuspecting reader in 2:1-16.¹⁴⁹ Now in this new work, Campbell takes the analysis a step further, arguing that already in 1:18-32 Paul is *not* setting forth his own viewpoint, but citing the rhetoric of the Jewish Christian “Teacher” (see → **Galatians**) whom the Apostle proceeds to oppose and refute as the letter unfolds. If correct, Campbell’s analysis would explain why (as I pointed out in my QBC chapter) the four key elements – uncleanness, unnatural, shameful, change – in the homophobic rhetoric of 1:24-27 are deconstructed later in the letter.

Only careful study of Campbell’s complex and technical work, with continual reference to the original Greek New Testament (often cited without translation), would enable scholarly readers to appreciate the strength of Campbell’s argument. However, since such an effort would be more than many of us could dedicate to the task, I will summarize a few key points that enable us to follow the argument. New Testament and Pauline specialists undoubtedly eventually will give the work the careful analysis it deserves, but if the explosion of diverse interpretations in recent Pauline studies is any indication, most of us probably will not live to see any emerging consensus.

1. Basic to Campbell’s interpretation of Romans is the recognition of the role of the false “Teachers” in →

Galatians, who came down from Jerusalem and sought to impose circumcision and the Law on the pagan converts to Paul’s Law-free gospel. Although in Romans Paul seeks to refute a single Teacher (2:17-23/24), Campbell suggests that this may be the leader of a group similar or identical to those who caused such turmoil in Galatia. The switch to the plural “you” in 2:24 in the citation of Isa. 52:5 and Ezek. 36:22 may indicate that “the Teacher” is the head of a group.

2. Campbell reminds us of the common difficulty in Paul’s letters of distinguishing his own views from those of any opponent/s whose views he cites (without quotation marks in the original Greek) before proceeding to his own qualification or refutation. Above all, from 1 Corinthians Campbell provides a lengthy list of texts where commentators commonly affirm (eight cases) or debate (five cases) possible citations that do not represent Paul’s own views (see 1:12; 3:4; 6:12-13; 7:1; 8:1, 4, 8; 10:23; cf. 4:6b; 8:5a; 12:3; 15:12; 15:35);¹⁵⁰ in English for the undisputed eight cases the NRSV provides the quotation marks lacking in the original Greek.
3. To the objection that no one properly understood Paul before Campbell, he is able to point out that individually most of his points were anticipated by various

commentators throughout church history and that all he is doing is, in the light of recent studies reflecting the New Perspective on Paul, taking the next step, carrying such insights to their logical conclusion, especially regarding in Galatians, 1-2 Corinthians, Philippians and Romans.

4. Most important, Campbell shows how many of the affirmations in 1:18–2:16 are contradicted or **deconstructed** as the Romans scroll unrolls. In my QBC Romans chapter¹⁵¹ and my Jewett review¹⁵² I cited four examples:
 - (1) behavior traditionally categorized as “unclean” (Rom. 1:24) has now been cleansed (14:14, 20);
 - (2) before condemning the “shameful” behavior (1:24, 26-27) we must recall the queer Jesus’ **shameful** crucifixion, God’s decisive instrument of liberating cosmic justice (3:21-26; cf. “boasting,” 5:2-3, 11);
 - (3) behavior “**against nature**” (1:26-27) was precisely what God himself engaged in when engrafting believing pagans into the olive tree of Israel (Rom. 11:24); by referring to pagans as *uncircumcised* “by nature” Paul recognized that circumcision itself is a human cultural imposition, and thus an act “against nature”, 2:27; see also the pagans not having the Law by birth, 2:14);

- (4) even “**ex/change**” (1:23, 25, 26-27 – from what to what?), far from always constituting negative apostasy, may constitute the essence of the sanctification process as we “present our bodies as a living sacrifice” and are “transformed” into Christ’s likeness (12:1-2), with love replacing lust (5:5; 13:8-14).

Campbell sees Paul’s own Good News set forth in 1:16-17, with its citation of Hab. 2:4, and understands *dikaiosyne theou* not as commonly rendered in English (“the righteousness of God”) but in the light of Psalm 98:2 as “the deliverance of God” with apocalyptic and royal overtones, referring to “the act of resurrection, empowerment and heavenly enthronement after [Christ’s] oppression and execution by evil opposing powers” (p. 699; consider my rendering, “the liberating justice of God”¹⁵³).

Solutions for the diversity of teaching in Rom. 1:18-32 compared to Pauline teaching elsewhere, even in the same epistle, may thus be summarized as follows:

1. 1:18–2:29 represents a non-Pauline interpolation;¹⁵⁴
2. Paul lays the rhetorical trap to be sprung in 2:1-16 and hence deconstructed as letter develops;¹⁵⁵
3. Paul is not expounding his own view but cites the (false) Teacher/s (as in Galatians);¹⁵⁶ note that the Jewish teacher devastatingly refuted in 2:17-29 is the first clearly identified person referred to in 1:18–2:29. Thus the notion that false teachings

of this Teacher/s is already echoed in 1:18-32 is not so far-fetched as might first appear when we begin to read the trap being laid for him therein.

In his interpretation of Paul’s letters, Campbell of course prefers the interpretation of *pistou Christou* as referring to Christ’s faithfulness (seven times), living our present life by his faithfulness, not by our faith in Christ; for instance in Gal. 2:20: “The life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith/fulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”¹⁵⁷ (see Rom. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16 [twice], 20; 3:22; Philp. 3:9; cf. Eph. 3:12 [of/in him]; 4:13). This is a key element in the new perspective on Paul (see following chart for outline).

Perspectives on Paul

	Old	New
1	A Christian, <i>converted</i> from Judaism (forgets first-century Christianity = Jewish sect)	Always a Jew, but <i>called</i> to preach to non-Jews Gal. 1:15; Acts 9, 22, 26, Philp. 3:4b-6
2	Judaism = Caricatured Legalism – Salvation by works (Merit)	Judaism = God's covenant people Divine election and grace to <i>get</i> in good works necessary to <i>stay</i> in
3	Justification by faith = Present: Declared just (law court language)	Context: Covenant Theology Present: Declared just (Law Court language) Future: final judgment by works (Rom. 2:5-16; Mat. 25:31-46)
4	Romans theme: Justification by faith	Romans 1–8, Justification by faith Romans 9–16, Jew-Gentile relations in inclusive house churches

5	Romans' problem: How individuals can get to Heaven	God's project for world and cosmos, Ch. 1–8 House churches inclusive of Jews and non-Jews, 9–16
6	"Works of the Law" (8 times: Rom 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16 [3 times]; 3:2, 5, 10 + "law of works," Rom. 3:27)	Good works generally Ethnic markers distinguishing Jews from non-Jews: circumcision, food laws, Sabbath observance
7	Faith <i>in</i> Christ	Faithfulness <i>of</i> Messiah (6 times: Gal. 2:16, 16, 20; 3:22; Rom. 3:22, 26; Philp. 3:9; + Eph. 3:12 [of/in him])
8	Christ's <i>imputed righteousness</i> : Affirmed	Denied (N. T. Wright) ¹⁵⁸ (1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 5:17; Philp. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:21 = "embody God's covenant faithfulness")

	N. T. Wright	James G Dunn
1	First to introduce phrase "new perspective" on Paul (1978) (<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i> 1978:61-88)	Popularized phrase, became identified with it 1983 and 1988
2	Emphasizes covenant context of justification	Deemphasizes covenant language and concept
3	Emphasizes Jesus as messiah in Paul	Deemphasizes Jesus as messiah in Paul
4	For Paul Jews were still in Exile (Daniel 9)	Questions this interpretation

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Romans 1:26-27. Inductive Study in**Context (see translation in 7A above)****Introduction**

The Apostle Paul, during his stay in Corinth around 57-58 AD, addressed his letter to the Romans to some five house churches in Rome whose members were mainly unmarried slaves or ex-slaves, with women in prominent leadership (in Chapter 16, of the 28 greeted, only three married couples are included).

1. 1. To whom does "them" refer in 1:24 and 26? To modern individuals? To individual contemporaries of Paul? To ancient humanity as a whole when they chose idolatry instead of worshipping the only true God? See 1:18-23, 25.
2. What was God's response to the ancient human choice of idolatry? See 1:24, 26, 28.
3. Why would Paul say that God gave humanity over to "uncleanness" instead of "sin" in 1:24? See 14:20, which in the original Greek refers to "all *things*," not just "food."
4. What expressions does Paul use in 1:24, 26-27 to describe excess passions? Which of the Ten Commandments prohibited such excess desire (coveting)? See Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21. Why does Paul agree in condemning such coveting throughout the epistle? See Romans 13:8-10.
5. What expressions does Paul use in 1:24, 26-27 to describe certain (sexual) activities as dishonorable and shameful? Are activities the world condemns as dishonorable or shameful always sinful and to be avoided? Did Jesus avoid everything society condemns as dishonorable or shameful? See Romans 3:21-26; Hebrews 12:2; Romans 1:16. Should we even rejoice/boast in some experiences that the world deems dishonorable or shameful? See Romans 5:2-3, 11.
6. Would the reader/listener who had not yet read/heard 1:26-27 have any reason to think that the dishonoring of bodies referred to in 1:24 did not refer to common (male with female) sexual acts?
7. What new phrase does Paul introduce in 1:26 to describe the sexual acts of "their women/females"? Would the first-time reader/listener of 1:26 have any reason to conclude that the women (like the males in 1:27) had exchanged male partners for female? Since Plato, "unnatural" has commonly referred to any sexual activity that was not procreative (male penis in female vagina); what other sexual acts might be so described? Since the prohibitions of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 refer only to males, would Paul likely invent a new law condemning lesbians in Romans 1:26? (Note: 1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim.

1:10 and Jude 7 also refer only to male sexual activity.)

8. Are all acts “against nature” always sinful? What act of God is described as “against nature” in Romans 11:24 (the only other place in the New Testament that phrase is used)? Note that Rom. 2:14 refers to pagans “who do not have the Law by nature (= birth)” and 2:27 refers to pagans as uncircumcised “by nature” (= by birth), implying that the act of circumcision, which God commanded Abraham (Genesis 17), is an act “against nature”. What does Paul mean by “nature” when he refers to male and female hair lengths as determined by “nature” in 1 Corinthians 11:14? Since the Apostle, preferring the single life to marriage (like Jesus), never expressed interest or concern in procreation, is it possible that by “nature” he simply refers to the dominant custom in a given culture? How does the repeated concept of against/nature link 1:26 to 1:27? Could the “similarly” that introduces 1:27 refer to similar non-procreative acts of anal sex (females with males, 1:26; males with males, 1:27 – without the health benefits of condoms in antiquity)?
9. What “ex/changes” are referred to in 1:23, 25, 26 (see also “leaving” in 1:27)? Is Paul such a traditionalist as to think that any change should be condemned as sinful? See Rom. 12:1-2; 8:18-25; 2 Cor. 5:17. What kinds of change would Paul condemn as sinful? See Rom. 13:8-10 again and 14:15.
10. What great “error” had the males of 1:27 committed? See 1:19-23, 25. In what, then, did the “requit” consist? See “God gave them up...” in 1:24, 26, 28. According to Paul’s argument, then, are the unclean sexual acts of 1:24, 26-27 seen as a sin or as the divine punishment for the sin of idolatry?
11. How should Paul’s laying of a rhetorical trap (1:18-32) and the springing of his rhetorical trap (2:1-16) affect our interpretation of 1:24-27? Would it be wise to try to elicit ethical absolutes from a text that aims to trap arrogant readers into condemning themselves? Would the negative rhetoric in 1:24-27 apply only to those who were idolatrous and involved in sexual acts of abuse of power to oppress others (1:18, 29)? Would 1:27 apply only to those males who originally had sexual relations with a female and then abandoned that relationship for sex with males (the original human option for idolatry)? Would the sexual acts referred to in 1:24, 26-27 only be sinful if they were acts of excess passion (coveting) that harmed the neighbor instead of expressing love for the neighbor?

12. Do you think Paul intentionally sets forth negative elements in his rhetoric to trap judgmental readers in 1:24-27 (uncleanness, dishonorable/shameful, un/natural, changed/leaving) and then consciously undermines or “deconstructs” each element later in the letter or is this just coincidence? Note that the fifth negative element, the prohibition against coveting, remains normative throughout the letter (13:8-10; see above).
13. Does Rom. 1:26 provide a basis today for condemning all female sexual acts that are not procreative (prohibiting all family planning and use of contraceptives, as well as sex with women past menopause)? Having examined carefully the actual words of Rom. 1:27 in their context, do you find any basis in the text for condemning a loving committed relationship between two Christian adult males who have never had sex with a woman? Do you think Paul knew nothing about such persons or intentionally failed to refer to them?
14. When the preceding context already so clearly condemned the ancient human option for idolatry, why do you think Paul interrupts his treatment of sexual uncleanness (1:24...26-27) to insert another condemnation of idolatry (1:25)? Would he be thinking mainly or only of pagan temple prostitutes with their fertility cults?
15. What kind of churches does Paul envision resulting from his letter? Tolerant, inclusive churches that celebrate their diversity or intolerant, exclusive churches that condemn sexual minorities? See the climax to the epistle in 15:7-13; compare the tensions between the strong and weak in 14:1–15:6.
16. Why was Paul eager to see the house churches in Rome united in love, rather than judgmental and divided? See Rom. 15:23-24. Give examples of the way prejudices against persons of color, women and sexual minorities (racism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia) undermine the churches’ mission and the proclamation of Jesus’ liberating Gospel today?

Note: For 350 years after Paul wrote, no church father interpreted Rom. 1:26 as a condemnation of female-female sexual relations (lesbians). Around 400 AD John Chrysostom first introduced and propagated this “revisionist” interpretation, and during the Middle Ages it became the only interpretation people knew. Before Chrysostom’s time the only interpretation given was that 1:26 referred to females with males in non-procreative sex acts.

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Some books are worth two taxi fares and a 2-hour wait in Argentine customs and this proved to be one of them! In this most recent of major commentaries on Romans (804 pp.) the author recognizes that in Romans 1:26-27 Paul does not condemn all homoerotic acts or relations, but only those that are “abusive” (see the attempted gang rape of visiting angels to Sodom in Genesis 19:1-11). In this regard he differs significantly from Robert Jewett’s recent work (which rather uncritically followed Robert Gagnon’s highly prejudiced treatment). Otherwise, Hultgren, who is Professor of New Testament at Luther Theological Seminary (St. Paul, Minnesota) and author of several highly respected works, represents a more traditional reading of Romans (interacting with, but not accepting, some of the most radical conclusions of the “New Perspectives on Paul”).

Published by Eerdmans (conservative and evangelical), Hultgren’s commentary also has an unqualified recommendation from Donald A. Hagner of Fuller Theological Seminary (an evangelical institution with a longstanding anti-gay policy): “Hultgren’s wonderful treatment combines the highest level of scholarship in a non-technical presentation, with a down-to-earth and insightful application”! And lest we dismiss the work as simply popular devotional propaganda, Robert Kysar adds: “In this veritable encyclopedia Hultgren masterfully employs a wide range of the best scholarship in the service of the church.... A treasure for both scholars and preachers” (both comments on the back cover).

Hultgren treats Rom. 1:26-27 exegetically (pp. 95-103) and again in Appendix 2, “Romans 1:26-27 and Homosexuality” (616-622, with a respectable two-page bibliography). His conclusion, briefly stated is: “That larger context of this section.... favors the view that even in those verses reference is being made to destructive and/or abusive behavior” (617). As he points out: “Throughout 1:19b-27 the indicative verbs in Greek are in the aorist (simple past) tense. The effect is that Paul carries on his discourse as though he is talking about something that happened at some point in the past (*in illo tempore*, ‘in that time’ of mythical origins) that explains the present” (617). He concludes: “As soon as the concept of sexual orientation is brought into the discussion and the words ‘heterosexual’ and ‘homosexual’ exist and can be used, the judgments made concerning persons must be changed significantly. There can be no virtue in perpetuating an error in judgment, even if it is tradition and is, according to a traditional

reading, thought to be expressed in Scripture itself. Although the Bible knows about same-gender relationships, it knows nothing of sexual orientation, and therefore it knows nothing of ‘homosexuality’ or ‘homosexuality’ as descriptors of conditions or behaviors” (620).

Hultgren even goes a bit out of his way to comment similarly on another traditional “clobber text” (1 Cor. 6:9) and in such a way as to deprive homophobic interpreters of any biblical basis: “The degree to which 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 should be included within a discussion of Romans 1:26-27 is unclear.... Perhaps the wisest course is to conclude that the precise meaning of the terms is inconclusive [he translates *arsenokoitai* literally as “male-bedders”] but that from the context it is clear that they are examples of persons who exploit others” (100-101).

Hultgren could have presented an even stronger case. He recognizes that “their women” (Rom. 1:26) only practice some behavior “against/beyond nature,” but not necessarily same-sex relations, and he even cites James E. Miller’s article (99, note 65), but follows the same-sex interpretation (initiated by John Chryostom ca. 400 AD). He correctly interprets Rom. 14:14 and 20 as affirming not just “food” but all *things* clean (517) but fails to cite William Countryman and relate this to the sexual “uncleanness” of 1:24. Hultgren also recognizes that later in Romans Paul refers to God himself acting “against/beyond nature” (11:23-24) but fails to see the significance for the interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27 (96). Hultgren envisions Paul as referring to abuse and exploitation in such practices as pederasty (following Robin Scroggs), or those of clients of male prostitutes and the prostitutes themselves

(101). However, he points out that now “A new reality has come on the scene for the church, in which persons of the same gender claim to be Christians (not idolaters), know themselves to be homosexual (not heterosexual deviants), pledge themselves to lives of fidelity (rejecting promiscuity) and want their relationship public (not hidden away)” (619).

Appendix 1

“God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve” – Are you sure?

Genesis 1:1–2:3 and 2:4–3:24 as sources for norms of modern conduct

The popularity of the slogan “God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve” to justify the rejection of sexual minorities raises fundamental questions about the use of Genesis 1–3 as a source for norms of conduct in the modern world. Episcopal Biblicist William Countryman has written an article that refutes the homophobic use of Genesis 1–3,¹⁵⁹ but the slogan (continually used on television by homophobic fundamentalists) has influenced the thinking of millions, while Countryman’s erudite article has achieved very limited circulation. The principal considerations that help us in a correct interpretation of Genesis 1–3 are the following:

1. In theory, everyone recognizes the difficulty and complexity of deriving conduct norms (or “laws”) from biblical *narratives*.¹⁶⁰ Many complain, for example, when a Pentecostal concludes from an account of glossolalia in Acts that “we should all speak in tongues” (which contradicts Paul’s explicit teaching in 1 Corinthians 12–14).
2. Biblicists recognize that we find *two creation narratives* in the beginning of Genesis:
 - *2:4b–3:24, from the Yahwist source*, perhaps written ca. 1000-900 B.C., the period of King Solomon (uses the name Yahweh Elohim for God).
 - *1:1–2:3, from the priestly source*, written during the Babylonian exile, 587-539 B.C. (which uses only the name Elohim for God).
3. Now that both creation narratives form part of the Pentateuch and the Hebrew Bible, a **canonical approach** can reasonably ask about the relationship between Genesis 1:1–3:24 and the Laws of

Genesis 2:4a (priestly) ends the 1:1–2:3 account (forming an inclusion with 1:1), but it also introduces the 2:4b–3:23 narrative and thus serves as an editorial bridge between 1:1–2:3 and 2:4b–3:24 (see notes HCSB 2:4, NISB 2:4, NOAB 2:4a, JSB 2:4, NLT Study Bible 2:4, NIV Study Bible 2:4). As in the case of the four Gospels, instead of “harmonizing” the narratives and teaching a single theology, we should respect the differences and remember that Genesis 1, the first narrative in the canonic order, is in fact of a much later, post-exilic date. Our first aim is to value the message of each narrative for the original listeners/ readers in the light of the historical context they reflect and not look for answers to our contemporary questions, which often are far from the perspective of the original context.

Moses in the Pentateuch (Exodus 20 to Deuteronomy, especially the Ten Commandments).

4. A **Christian approach**, in addition, may seek to relate the Genesis narratives with the teachings of Jesus and New Testament books.
5. However, it is important to proceed with caution, respecting everything the texts say and not proceed with the *selective literalism* typical of all stripes of fundamentalisms.

Genesis 2:4b–3:24 (from the Yahwist source, ca. 900 B.C.).

1. Although placed after Genesis 1:1–2:4a in canonical order, historically Genesis 2:4b–3:24 is the first and most primitive creation account, reflecting the scarcity of water in Palestine. This Yahwist account also gives much less evidence of a relationship with the Laws of Moses. While Genesis 1:1–2:3 ends with the paradigm of the Creator’s rest (2:1-3), Genesis 2:4b-25 expresses concern *for man’s work, not his rest*. God plants a garden and man is placed there “to till it and keep it” (2:15), but without any explicit instructions. Instead of speaking to the couple to instruct them about the urgency of procreating many children, Yahweh-Elohim speaks only to the man (before the woman’s creation), first stressing a certain “vegetarian” freedom: “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden.” Then Yahweh-Elohim adds only this prohibition, with a threat of punishment: “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (2:17). At the end of the narrative the disobedient couple is exiled from the

Garden of Eden, with the “tree of life” (= immortality) out of their reach forever. In this narrative the man must take care of the garden, but we do not read of any more explicit commandment, such as the “six days you shall labor” of the fourth commandment. With the couple expelled from the garden, there is no need for more prohibitions concerning the tree, since it remains out of human reach, guarded by cherubim with a flaming and turning sword (3:23-24). Genesis 2 thus appears to offer few possibilities (or temptations) for deriving norms for ethical absolutes.

Instead of attributing some “divine institution of patriarchal marriage” in Genesis 1–3, we do better to respect the text’s limitations. Gen. 2:18-25 does not pretend to establish an institution, as if it were a “law” or ethical absolute. Rather, as *divine wisdom*, it seeks to *explain* the common attraction between man and woman, not as an absolute law that imposes universal heterosexuality with an obligation of maximum procreation, but as an example of an *etiological* narrative (an *etiology* explains how things came to be as they are):

Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maid (Prov. 30:18-19).

Thus, Proverbs does not pretend to establish absolute commandments that eagles should never rest in a tree or that a snake cannot leave the rocks to touch ground (or to “eat dust,” Gen. 3:14?) or that human intimacy must be exclusively between a man and a woman (cf. Ruth and Naomi; David and Jonathan; Jesus and the Beloved Disciple).

Genesis attributes heterosexual attraction and the potential resultant procreation to God the Creator’s goodness and wisdom (remembering the urgency in antiquity to procreate, Gen. 1:26-28). Thus, like Proverbs, Gen. 2:24 (present tense verbs, NRSV, NJB, JSB) is based on *the observation of common human experience*:

“The way of a man with a maid” is explained by the goodness and wisdom of the Creator.

It is the good news of the Creator’s goodness – but *not a “law”* to be applied to all without exception:

“Heterosexual attraction, marriage, maximum procreation”: sometimes misinterpreted as a universal ethic (obligating everyone to marry and procreate as many children as possible).

Both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament show that human beings may please the Creator perfectly well without heterosexual relations and procreation (Jeremiah, Daniel, Nehemiah, Jesus, Paul).

2. From the fact that God created the male before the female (in Gen. 2:15-24, not in Gen. 1:26-28), Paul attempts to derive norms for the conduct of women in worship in the Corinthian church: they should not pray or prophesy in worship without having the head covered, since God created the male first (1 Cor. 11:7-10). In this very controversial text, Paul follows a Jewish tradition, affirming that God created only the male in God’s image (although Gen. 1:27 teaches that the woman also was created in God’s image; see below and Gal. 3:28). Paul’s conclusions in 1 Cor. 11:2-16 do not

appear to be very appropriate for our historical context today (very few women think they should attend church with their head covered).

3. Even more important, on dealing with divorce Jesus combines the Genesis 1 and 2 texts and thus derives normative elements, since he says:

“⁶But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female’ [citing Gen. 1:27]. ⁷For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, ⁸and the two shall become one flesh’ [Gen. 2:24]. So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Mark 10:1-12, esp. 6-9).

Obviously, if churches want to derive an absolute ethic from Genesis 1–2 following Jesus, they must never accept divorced members or pastors. In fact, however, among the heterosexual majority in the churches neither the clear and explicit divine commandment to procreate to the maximum nor the prohibition of divorce is interpreted as an “ethical absolute” without flexibility in pastoral application. The teaching of Jesus and Paul about divorce permit exceptions in certain cases, and the Hebrew Bible also manifests much diversity of teaching concerning the topic (→ **Mark**, *Excursus* concerning divorce).

On citing two texts of Genesis 1–2, Jesus does not seek to find “laws” or an “ethical absolute” in the narratives to pound divorced persons or other sexual minorities. Rather, he uses the texts to defend persons oppressed by spouses who abandon them for selfish reasons. As Claus Westermann

points out, a parallelism exists with the final judgment scene in Matthew, since in the entire Bible only in Matt. 25:31-46 and Genesis 3 does God emit a direct judgment against sin by judicial process and sentence.¹⁶¹ But in neither case does God condemn sexual minorities (who, like cruelly abandoned women, suffer oppression). Like Jesus’ parable concerning the final judgment – the separation of the goats and sheep – Genesis 1–3 offers us profound theological perceptions but without seeking to represent modern “history” or “science”.

Genesis 1:1–2:3 (from “P”, the priestly source, ca. 586-539 B.C. and reflecting the problem of the excess of water “by the rivers of Babylon,” Psalm 137:1). As in the case of the more primitive Yahwist narrative (2:24b; also see the Babylonian narrative *Enuma Elish*), we should probably prefer a more Hebrew translation of 1:1–3:

When God began to create the heavens and the earth – the earth being a formless void with darkness covering the face of the deep and a mighty/divine wind sweeping over the face of the waters – then God said, “Let there be light” and there was light! (cf. JSB; NRSV; NJB note 1b; Biblia Latinoamericana).

The traditional translation (KJV), influenced by the versions (LXX, etc.), appears to reflect more the later Neoplatonic philosophy (a creation *ex nihilo*, 2 Maccabees 7:28, a dichotomy between spirit and matter), while Genesis 1 describes God dominating a stormy chaos of waters by establishing a heavenly dome, v. 6, and dry land, v. 9; (JSB note 1:1 and 2).

1. The text begins by affirming that God (Elohim) is the creator of *everything* (not only Adam and Eve!) and repeatedly insists

in *the goodness of this entire creation* (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 25, 31). Thus, to affirm that God did not create “Steve” would be a heresy denying the first article of the Apostolic and Nicene Creeds (**Ps. 139:13-16**). This faith in God the Creator of *all* is repeatedly expressed in the Psalms (Ps. 24:1-2; 104:24), and the Apostle Paul utilizes the teaching of Psalm 24:1 to reaffirm the goodness of all things and deny traditional cultural distinctions between “unclean” and “clean” things (1 Cor. 10:26; see Rom. 14:1–15:6). Jesus also had taught that all foods are clean and that nothing that enters by the mouth can contaminate a human being (Mark 7:19; cf. // Matthew 15:1-20). When Rom. 1:24-27, then, refers to certain sexual practices among the pagans as “unclean”, Paul in effect redefines “uncleanness” in the sense of the greed and injustice that proceed from the heart and that are expressed in the oppression and violence that harm the neighbor (see Rom. 6:13, 19; 14:14, 20; 13:8-10; cf. Titus 1:15).

2. To human beings (“male and female,” both created in God’s image), in Gen. 1:1–2:4a Elohim gives them **only one commandment**:

“Have many, many children; fill the world and govern it; dominate the fish and the birds, and creeping things that creep on the earth” (Gen. 1:28).

As Countryman pointed out, if we want to use the narratives of Genesis to create an “ethical absolute” (universal laws applicable to every human being in all times and places), we must insist that every person have sexual relations continually to produce as many children as possible.¹⁶² In fact, many provisions in the Laws of Moses reflect

such a norm, especially the “Levirate law” of Deut. 25:5-10, which requires that on the death of a brother without descendants, another brother must have sexual relations with the widow in order to assure descendants (with the inheritance) for the deceased brother. But divine approval of unmarried persons (Jeremiah, Jesus, Paul; see Matt. 19:11-12; 1 Corinthians 7) shows us that *the only explicit commandment in Genesis 1:1–2:3 does NOT constitute a basis for an “ethical absolute”* that requires marriage for everyone and abstention from all types of “family planning”. Therefore, if heterosexual married couples conclude that the only explicit commandment in Genesis 1:1–2:3 is NOT now normative for them and that they should limit the number of children that they desire, how can they take from these narratives an absolute condemnation of sexual minorities who do not marry or who form same-sex couples? The selective literalism commonly practiced in fundamentalist circles may be comfortable for the majority but quite cruel (harming one’s neighbor, prohibited in Romans 13:8-10) for sexual minorities.

3. From the creation of human beings in God’s image (Gen. 1:26-27), later biblical tradition derives an important prohibition, since after the flood (which had again left the earth uninhabited), God commands Noah and his sons:

“Whoever sheds human blood, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed; for in **[God’s] own image God made humankind**. *And you, be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it*” (Gen. 9:6-7).

Obviously, we can recognize in this text an anticipation of the sixth of the Ten Commandments, which prohibits murder (Ex. 20:13; // Deut. 5:17; cf. James 3:9). But neither does the “**you shall not murder**” constitute an “ethical absolute”, since Gen. 9:6-7 establishes the death penalty and the Hebrew Bible contains many commandments of killing in wars, etc. Many fundamentalists cite Gen. 9:6-7 to support the death penalty in modern nations, but, with their selective literalism, they never think of implementing everything the Bible commands (e.g., the death penalty for a young victim of sexual abuse by another man, Lev. 20:13; cf. Gen. 4:13-16, where God prohibits the death penalty in Cain’s case).

4. Although not an explicit commandment, obviously Gen. 1:29-31, which limits food for all animals, including humans, to a **vegetarian diet**, is presented as a reflection of God’s ideal will, which according to Isaiah 11:6-8 will again become the norm in the future. Only such a state, in which no human being or animal kills an animal for food, represents the state that God can approve as “very good” (Gen. 1:31). God adjusted this provision for the human diet after the flood (Gen. 9:1-3), but still with the limitation of not eating meat with blood (9:4). Perhaps the Gospel of Mark wants to remind us of God’s original will and ideal when it describes Jesus in the desert, at peace with the animals (Mark 1:12-13). Paul describes a future where life triumphs over death, with the entire cosmos transformed (Rom. 8:31-39). Does Revelation also suggest a millennium with vegetarian lions (Revelation 20)? At any rate, Gen. 1:29-31 obligates us to recognize a certain flexibility in God’s will: neither does the original

vegetarian diet represent an “ethical absolute”.

5. Genesis 1:1–2:3 reaches its goal in the description of the Creator’s “rest” on the seventh day (Gen. 2:1-3). In this narrative, God blesses and declares **the seventh day as sacred**, but does not give humans any related commandment. Later, human rest on the seventh day (Saturday) became the fourth of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:8-11 // Deut. 5:12-15; anticipated in Exodus 16). In exile, without the temple and with Jerusalem destroyed by Babylon, Saturday and circumcision came to have a fundamental importance in maintaining Jewish identity (see the institution of circumcision in Genesis 17, also from the priestly source). In the New Testament, however, the commandment to observe Saturday as a day of rest did not become a part of the norms for the non-Jewish Christians (Rom. 14:5-6; Col. 2:16-17). Little by little, churches began to observe Sunday as “the Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10; consider Jesus’ appearances to his disciples, always on Sunday; cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2).

Among Christian groups today, generally only the Seventh Day Adventists continue to insist on obeying the fourth of the Ten Commandments as an “ethical absolute”. Almost all other Christians recognize in the fourth commandment a flexible and contextual element in the Bible. But, if we accept that the element that was the principal object of Genesis 1:1–2:4a and later was one of the Ten Commandments does not represent an “ethical absolute” for Christians today, how can we claim to get such an ethic from a detail in the narrative concerning the creation of Adam and Eve and seek to use it to condemn sexual

minorities today? Again, we can observe how the selective literalism of fundamentalism leads us to misuse the Bible to harm our neighbor.

Thus, in terms of literary genre, it is common to recognize that Genesis 1–3 is “protohistory” and gives much evidence of its pre-scientific perspectives:

- Light existed three “days” before the creation of the sun, the moon and the stars (Gen. 1:3-5, 14-19);
- The sky consisted of a “dome” (Hebrew: *raqia*), a hard substance, hammered out like metal (1:6-8);
- This firmament, like a heavenly dome, separated the waters above from the waters on the earth (1:6-8);
- It is presumed that the waters accumulated on earth constitute seas surrounded by land (1:9-10) and, in addition to fish, great sea monsters lived there (1:21; Is. 27:1; 51:9; Psalm 74:12-14);
- The perspective is geocentric and anthropocentric, since God placed the sun, the moon and the stars in the dome of the firmament in order to light the earth and to indicate the Israelites’ sacred feasts (1:14-19);
- The earth began to produce vegetation and trees before the creation of the sun (1:11-13), and not only the humans (nudists, 2:25) but also all the animals originally were vegetarians (1:29-31);

- God created the universe in six days (1:1-31) but also in just one day (2:4a, where “the day” at times is mistranslated “when”);
- When Yahweh Elohim created the human being, there was not yet any rain, but the land was irrigated by a spring that came from a subterranean sea (2:5-6; see 7:11-12);
- The symbolic character (not history) of Eden is expressed by the geography of “four rivers”, which include two in Mesopotamia (Tigris and Euphrates) and one that encircles Cush (Ethiopia) of Africa (2:10-14; see, in the heavenly Jerusalem, the existence of the “tree of life” that finally comes down to earth again (Rev. 21:2; 22:2));
- The serpent in Gen. 1:21 is a simple creature that slithers, but in Genesis 3 it is more intelligent than the human beings: it talks, it understands divine discourse, it points out apparent inaccuracies in God’s speech, originally it did not crawl; now it eats dust and is always the enemy of humans;
- On threatening the human beings with immediate death, God appears to err (literally “the day”, not “when”, 2:17; cf. 3:4 and 5:5, where Adam lives 930 years);
- God and the humans spoke only Hebrew (Gen. 2:23; 11:1-9);
- Cain easily finds a wife (Gen. 4:17) since God loves diversity in creation

(Psalm 104:24-25) and had created many human beings in addition to the first couple: left-handed people, brown and blue-eyed, bisexuals, lesbians, gay men, etc.; consider the more than 1,500 animal species in which scientists have confirmed the existence of homoerotic acts and homosexual relations.¹⁶³

In summary, we see that Genesis 1:1–2:3, in the context of the biblical canon and interpreted in the light of modern science, may always be “useful” (2 Tim. 3:14-17) to instruct us with wisdom regarding divine justice:

- concerning the praxis, the will and the character of the sovereign Creator, the liberator of the exodus and of the exile, who invites us to share and reflect God’s freedom (Gen. 1:27-29; Is. 45:12-13; Gal. 5:1);
- to *respect the sacred life* of other humans (women as much as men), since they are created in God’s image (Gen. 5:1-2, 9:6; Gal. 3:28; **James 3:9**);
- for consenting adults to enjoy *sexual relations* with justice, responsibility, wisdom and love, as a gift from a God who “is love” (Gen. 1:28; 2:18, 22-25; see 1 John 4:8, 16);
- to *thank God for children*, as a blessing from the Creator (Psalm 127:3-5; 128:3-4; Mark 10:14);
- to be good administrators and *stewards of creation*, treating all animals with justice and mercy (a

modern ecological concern; Gen. 1:28-31; Isaiah 11:1-9); and

- to recognize the necessity of *periodic rest* from our labors (Gen. 2:1-3; Matt. 11:28-30).

Careful attention to everything that a text says, respecting the wisdom of other biblical texts, protects us from the errors of fundamentalism, with its arbitrary selection of preferred texts, which are applied without taking into account the differences between the original context and the contexts of the modern world. Although in Genesis 1:1–2:3 some of the Ten Commandments are anticipated, there is nothing concerning the eighth commandment (“You shall not steal”), since God gives all to everyone in common: air, water, animals, land (there is no “private property” nor “patriarchal inheritance” of limited parcels of land; → **Joshua** 13–24). The early church in Jerusalem endeavored to reestablish this ideal paradigm (Acts 2 and 4), but apparently it did not become normative for the communities in other cities nor for succeeding generations.

Bibliography **Creation**

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Note: The creation of man and woman in God’s image (1:27; 5:1; 9:6; see Excursus, NISB, pp. 7-8). When God speaks in plural (“Let us make humans in our own image and likeness...,” Gen. 1:26), we probably should understand the plural as addressing the celestial court of angels and divine beings (Gen. 1:16; 16:7; 1 Kings 22:19-22; Isaiah 6; Job 1:6-7; Jer. 23:18, 22; JSB note Gen. 1:26-28; NISB note 1:26; HCSB note 1:26-28; NOAB note 1:26). The Nueva Biblia de Jerusalén note on 1:26 says “This plural ended up being an open door for the interpretation of the Church Fathers, who saw implied here the mystery of the of the Trinity.” However, it would be quite anachronistic to attribute to the ancient Israelite author the much later Christian concept, as NLTSB note 1:26 recognizes (the Spanish NBJ note is omitted in the English NJB).

1. Traditionally, reflecting Neoplatonic philosophy, St. Augustine and many others have taught that the divine image refers to the rational soul placed in the human body and then again separated at death (a dichotomy between spirit and matter), ontological concepts alien to biblical theology.
2. In the twentieth century many Biblicists came to prefer a more functional concept: that humans reflect divine action in “exercising dominion” over creation (Gen. 1:26b, 28b), but as a stewardship responsibility, not as permission for ecological abuse.

3. Genesis refers to the first couple, both man and woman, as created in God’s image, thus assuring the equality of woman with man (BENVI note 1:26). However, the purpose is not to devalue or despise sexual minorities (“Steve”), since in the NT Jesus Christ *as individual, unmarried* (sexual minority) also is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3; Rom. 8:29; cf. John 14:8-9; Phil. 2:7; Heb. 2:6-7).
4. Liberation theologies, which advocate in favor of oppressed groups (poor, women, immigrants, and ethnic, racial and sexual minorities), have pointed out that God’s image is reflected in the entire human being (not just in the “soul”) and moreover, emphasize the divine image as guaranteeing the value, dignity and holiness of all humans (James 3:9; cf. 1 Cor. 11:7). Therefore, sexual minorities (like “Steve”) also may exclaim with the psalmist:

¹³For you created my inward parts [lit. kidneys];

you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

¹⁴I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works; that I know full well (Psalm 139:13-14).

5. In addition, however, in the twenty-first century, studies on the body/corporality in biblical theology have emphasized (1) that many Hebrew Bible texts appear to speak of God as having a body (see God “walking in his garden” in Gen. 3:8), (2) that the concept of God as “spirit” is only found in the New Testament (John 4:24) and (3) that therefore we ought not eliminate the physical-material dimension in interpreting the sense of “image” in Genesis¹⁶⁴ (see the following excursus): “‘Image’ is a concrete term implying a physical resemblance like that between Adam and his son, 5:3” (NJB note m).

Excursus: “God is Spirit” (John 4:24).

In the Johannine New Testament writing, we find three unique affirmations: that God is spirit (John 4:24), light (1 John 1:5), and love (1 John 4:16, 23). Jesus himself utters the first in his dialogue with the woman of Samaria, and for centuries commentators and theologians have interpreted his words in a Neoplatonic sense as assuming a dichotomy between spirit and matter/physical and indicating that God is not physical/material (thus still, Millard Erickson, “God is spirit; that is he is not composed of matter and does not possess a physical nature;”¹⁶⁵ similarly → John.¹⁶⁶) However, in Biblical theology “spirit” is not negative but commonly has a *positive* sense indicating *power*, as classically in Isaiah 31:3:

The Egyptians are men and not God;

Their horses are flesh [weak] and not spirit [powerful].

Thus, Paul can speak of the powerful resurrection body as a “spiritual body” with no sense of contradiction, as though he were referring to a “round square” (1 Corinthians 15). The resurrection body

is sown in *weakness*, it is raised in *power*.

It is sown a natural body; it is raised a *spiritual body* (→ **1 Corinthians** 15:43b-44).¹⁶⁷

Paul thus refers to the believers’ resurrection body as a body empowered by God’s Spirit, perhaps recalling Jesus’ capacity to eat material fish but also appear at any place and pass through a door. (See also the contrast between the weakness of the flesh and the power of the spirit in Romans 7–8.)¹⁶⁸ Thus in Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4), he refers to God as “spirit” to indicate God’s power to transcend any spatial or ethnic limitations and be worshipped in spirit by any people in any place. This contrast between the spirit as power in contrast with weakness was evident in the previous chapter in Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus when he referred to being born of water and the spirit:

Flesh gives birth to flesh
[weakness]

but the spirit gives birth to spirit....

The wind blows wherever it
pleases [power].

You hear its sound [invisible],

but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going (John 3:6, 8).

So, in the Hebrew Bible, God’s powerful invisible presence may become manifest at any and all places (1 Kings 8), especially in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle/Temple and even in human form as in the theophanies (Gen. 3:8; Ex. 33:17-23). This phenomenon reaches its culmination in John’s affirmation of the incarnation of the Word (John 1:14), where we should not read into the passage a Neoplatonic “non-material/physical” concept of the preincarnate Word (John 1:1-2). Nowhere does the Bible suggest that God’s powerful invisible “wind-like” presence (*ruakh*) has the Neoplatonic negative connotation of being non-material or non-physical.¹⁶⁹ As Paul Jewett explains:

God...is not an idea; he is personal Spirit (Jn 4:24). To be sure “spirit” (*pneuma*) translates the Hebrew (*ruakh*), which literally means “wind,” an impersonal manifestation of energy. But it is clear that when Israel spoke this way of God, they spoke of him not as an impersonal force, but as the living Subject who, in his essential nature, is the invisible Power (Energy) behind all that is, the creative Breath that animates all living things.¹⁷⁰

Millard Erickson reminds us: “In our day, the Mormons maintain that not only God the Son, but also the Father has a physical body, although the Holy Spirit does not.”¹⁷¹ A close reading of the Bible texts enables us to avoid both the negativism of traditional Neo Platonized theology, as well as the other extreme of Mormonism with its literalistic

interpretation of certain Hebrew Bible texts describing divine theophanies.

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(God is spirit)

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Genesis 1–3. Inductive Studies in Context.

(Translation. See especially NIV, NRSV, NJB)

Introduction

Most biblical scholars recognize that Genesis begins with *two creation narratives* and that the first probably comes from a much later date than the second.

2:4b-3:24, from the Yahwistic source (J), which uses the name Yahvéh Elohim for God, perhaps was

composed as early as ca. 1000-900 B.C., during the reigns of King David and Solomon

1:1-2:4a, from the priestly source (P), which uses only the name Elohim for God, probably was composed during the Exile, ca. 586-539 B.C.

Instead of harmonizing the two creation stories and imposing a single theology, we should respect their differences, remembering that the first in canonical order is actually from a much later date (see the four gospels in the NT). We thus seek to appreciate the message each narrative had for the original hearers/readers in the light of the different historical contexts reflected and not expect answers to all our modern questions, which are quite distinct from the horizon of the original context (see NISB, HCSB, NOAB and NJB with them with notes). We will study the earlier text first, since often its distinctive teaching is blurred by harmonizing it with the more familiar later account placed before it.

A. Genesis 2:4b-25 Creation in the Garden of Eden

1. What *name* is used for God throughout this narrative (also in

3:1-24, but see 4:1ff)?

2. What is the *order* of the LORD God’s creative work in this narrative? Why is the earth, field and ground given priority over the heavens in this account (2:4-7, 9, 19; see 3:17, 19, 23)? Would this emphasis reflect the perspective of the small Israelite farm? Note: God forms “the Adam/man” from the ground, the *’adamah* (2:7). Note: In 2:19 the NIV translation of the verbs (“Now the LORD God *had* formed...all the beasts of the field...”) seeks to harmonize the text with the order of 1:1-2:4a; the NRSV translation reflects the normal meaning of the Hebrew original: “So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal...”, implying the creation of animals *after* the first human. Similarly, in 2:8 “Now the LORD God *had* planted a garden...” (NIV harmonizing interpretation); compare “And the LORD God planted a garden...” (NRSV), indicating that God planted the garden after forming the man.
3. Why does the LORD God put the man/Adam in the garden (literally “serve,” 2:5, 15; see also 3:23)? Does the perspective also seem to reflect the agrarian perspective of Israelite farmers?
4. What evidence do you find in the narrative that the LORD God is portrayed as working like a potter (2:7, 22) or gardener (2:8, 19) and sharing human limitations

(anthropomorphisms; see 3:8; 2:18-20)?

5. Why and how does the LORD God create the woman (2:18, 20b-25)? Note: The same Hebrew word for woman is translated “wife” in 2:24-25 (NRSV and NIV). Does the text say anything about the relationship between the man and woman being one of “complementarity”? Note: The woman as the man’s “helping partner” (2:18, 20; *’etzer kenegedo*) in the original patriarchal context indicated someone inferior and submissive (3:16), not equal and complementary. However, the word “helper” elsewhere even refers to God, the stronger one, as Israel’s “helper” (Ex. 18:4; Deut. 33:7, 26, 29; Ps. 33:20; 115:9-11; 124:8; 146:5, etc.). Often the modern concept of “complementarity” is read into this text, but it is a modern concept, developed in the early nineteenth century to replace the traditional view of woman as inferior.
6. How is the becoming “one flesh” expressed and with what result in 4:1-2a? Note: The NRSV (“knew”) is more literal, but the NIV (euphemism “lay” = had sex with) suggests the meaning in this context. Is there any indication that Adam and his woman “got married” before they procreated Cain and Abel? Was the main purpose of Eve’s creation companionship or procreation?

See 2:18, 24; 4:1-2a. Does procreation seem to be more of an after-thought in this narrative? How did Jesus and Paul deal with the problem of working alone (without getting married)?

B. Genesis 1:1–2:4a. Creation and the Sabbath.

Note: Genesis 2:4a (priestly) concludes the first creation narrative (forming an inclusion with 1:1), but also introduces the second creation narrative and thus functions as a kind of editorial bridge or link between 1:1–2:3 and 2:4b–3:24. This later account reflects the more expansive perspective of the Babylonian exile (sky, sea, land and all that populated them).

1. What *name* for God is used throughout the narrative? See also 5:1-2; 17:3-23, etc.
2. What is the *order* of God’s creative work in this narrative? Compare the order in 2:4b-25. According to the argument in 1 Tim 2:11-15, shouldn’t humanity be subject to the animals instead of vice versa?
3. How does God accomplish the creative work on each of the days 1-6? Compare the more anthropomorphic ways of creation (potter image) in 2:4b-25.
4. Is only the male created in God’s image in 1:26-28 or is woman included (compare 1 Cor. 11:7)? Does procreation seem to have prior importance as the purpose of their creation? Compare the emphasis on companionship in 2:18 and the change after the

couple’s disobedience (3:16). Should we understand God’s command for maximum procreation (1:28; 3:16) to be an ethical absolute, or should we recognize legitimate exceptions? See Jeremiah 16:1; Jesus, the eunuchs in Mat. 19:12; Paul, the virgins in 1 Corinthians 7; Rev. 14:3-4 etc. Does this first creation narrative say anything about marriage as a prerequisite for procreation or in some way “define marriage”?

5. How is humanity’s relationship to the animals expressed in 1:28b? (The naming indicates “authority over.”) Compare 2:19-20, which leaves fish uncreated and nameless. Should we understand human dominion over the animals as central to the meaning of being created in the image of God as sovereign and king? Compare the more humble task of humanity as working/serving the arable land in 2:5, 15; 3:23.
6. What is to be the relationship of humans and animals to plants (1:29-30)? When does this change and why (Gen. 9:1-7)? When will it change again (Isaiah 11:6-9)? Would it be accurate to describe the first human pair as “naked vegetarians” (compare 2:25; 3:7)?
7. What is the conclusion and climax of this first creation narrative (2:2-3)? Why would this conclusion have been important for ancient Jewish readers? See Exodus 20:8-

11. How is the responsibility of work implied in this first narrative (1:28) and in the fourth commandment in Exodus 20? Note how hard work becomes a necessity, not an option, after the disobedience (3:17-19). What rule does Paul lay down in 2 Thessalonians 3:10? Do you think he would have admitted exceptions in the case of children and persons who are ill or unable to work?

8. How does Jesus apply the “one-flesh” teaching of Genesis 2:24 to the question of divorce in Mark 10:1-12? Does the Bible elsewhere permit any exceptions? See Mat. 5:32; 19:9; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:15; Gen. 21:8-21; Ezra 10:3. Why does Paul urge men to break their “one flesh” relations with prostitutes (1 Cor. 6:12-20)?

Conclusion

We have seen that the two creation narratives in Genesis 1–2 present the original pair as naked vegetarians commanded to engage in maximum procreation (to fill an empty earth) and expected to rest on the seventh day (as God did). Since such explicit commands and norms as maximum procreation and Sabbath-keeping are not usually considered ethical absolutes for Christians today, is there any basis in Genesis 1–2 for trying to extract an ethical absolute from the story of God’s creating the first humans as male-female who unite as “one flesh” in order to procreate? Commonly this is the procedure followed in order to forbid committed loving same-sex relations, despite the examples of

so many others in the Bible who did not fit the Adam-Eve paradigm. Theoretically, everyone recognizes the difficulty and complexity of any effort to derive norms for human conduct from the *narrative* portions of the Bible. Commonly we object, for example, when a Pentecostal teacher concludes from the story of the experience of glossolalia (Acts 2) that all Christians thereafter should have the gift of tongues (a conclusion that would contradict the explicit teaching of Paul in 1 Cor. 12–14). Therefore, most biblical scholars understand the creation of male and female with the divine command to procreate as etiological, explaining why male and female commonly unite to procreate – but not as establishing ethical absolutes (that all males and females are under obligation to unite with a member of the opposite sex in order to procreate). Innumerable other biblical narratives (Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan, and Jesus with his beloved disciple, etc.) make clear that other loving relationships with purposes other than procreation are possible and blessed by God. As an etiological account, Gen. 2:4b–3:24 seeks to explain *why* life is commonly the way it is (males unite with females to procreate), not to dictate ethical absolutes that would obligate all humans to unite with persons of the opposite sex and to maximize procreation.

C. Genesis 3:1-24 The First Sin and its Punishment (“The Fall of Man”, NIV)

Introduction

As Theodore Hiebert points out,

Like the idea of creation out of nothing, the notion of the fall is not found among OT writers but first emerges among Jewish interpreters in the last two centuries before the birth of Christianity (Sir 25:24; Wis 2:23-24; 4 Ezra 7:118). While later largely abandoned in Judaism, Paul embraces this view, and thus the fall of humanity – and nonhuman creation with it – becomes a central feature of his interpretation of Christ’s purpose on earth.... While central to Paul, the idea of creation as fallen is not found elsewhere in the NT, and it does not therefore assume a prominent position in the NT view of creation.¹⁷²

Paul’s teaching on the “fall” is found in Romans 5:12-17; 8:18-25 and 1 Cor. 15:20-25. Although the doctrine of the fall provides a convenient explanation for the universality of sin (Rom. 3:9, 23), death (5:21) and natural evil (8:18-25), it would appear to be contradicted by evolutionary teaching of human “ascent” from other forms of life. Notably Jesus emphasizes the universality of sin without reference to any fall (Mark 7:20-22; Mat. 7:11) and for his brother James, humans, although prone to sin, still bear the image of God (James 3:9). Hence, in our reading of Genesis 3 we must be careful to avoid reading into the story later Pauline teaching about the “fall.”

1. How do both the serpent and Eve exaggerate the strictness of God’s prohibition (Gen. 3:1-3; 2:16-17)?
2. Is the serpent’s denial of the divine threat correct? (Gen. 3:4; cf. 2:16-17, NRSV literally “in the day,” NIV paraphrasing to harmonize, “when”.) See Gen 5:5, perhaps the source for 2 Peter 3:8, “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day”.
3. What are the three dimensions of the attraction of the forbidden fruit that prompted Eve to succumb to the temptation (3:6; see 1 John 3:16)?
4. Does the serpent’s affirmation in Gen. 3:5 prove correct (3:7)?
5. How does the concept of God in 3:8 compare with that in Gen. 1:1-24a?
6. Whom do the man and woman blame for their disobedience (3:9-13)?
7. What punishments does God decree for the serpent, the woman and the man (3:14-15, 16, 17-19)?
8. Would “the man’s” naming of Eve indicate a new authority over her (3:16; 2:19-20)? The-man/Adam seems to be named first in 2:20 and 3:17, 21, but the-Adam/man (with the article) continues to be used in 3:22, 24 and 4:1 and then without the article (Adam) in 4:22 and 5:1-7, where God calls both the woman and the man “Adam/man/humanity” (5:2). Note that the same Hebrew term *ishah* (woman) is also translated “wife” in some versions (NRSV, NIV 3:20-21; 4:1) and Eve’s “man” is translated “husband” (3:6 NIV).
9. To whom would the “us” refer in 3:22 (also 1:26)? Is Eve banished also or only the man (3:22-24; 4:1)?
10. Was the man created with an immortal soul or was eternal life only potentially his (3:22)? Note that animals also have the breath of life (3:7; 7:22; Ps. 104:24-30).

Conclusion

The Hebrew texts of Genesis 1–3 say nothing about any marriage or even a husband and wife, since the narratives tell a story and do not propound any definitions (as would be common in Greek philosophical texts). But even if we interpret the texts as providing the first example of heterosexual marriage, it would be difficult to imagine any gay or lesbian marriage with comparably disastrous results (3:16-19; Rom 5:12). The narratives are rather etiological, answering human questions about why things are the way they are (serpents slithering and striking, women under male authority in patriarchal societies and bearing children in pain/labor, farmers sweating to grow enough food and finally dying). Much less do the texts say anything about the nineteenth century concept of “complementarity” which contemporary authors often read into the narrative in order to deny the legitimacy of same-sex marriages. Some seek to blame

“homosexuality” on “the fall” but in Romans 1:18-23 Paul specifies a time when ancient humanity abandoned the true God for idolatry and nothing in Genesis 1-3 indicates that Adam and Eve started worshipping idols (4:1, 25-26).

Excursus Genesis 1–3 and Science

Biblical scholars commonly recognize that Genesis 1–3 gives us stories that reflect ancient understandings of the world, and thus include abundant evidence of perspectives that are “prescientific”. Had the chapters miraculously anticipated modern scientific insights, no one would have understood them until the present, and they would soon be outmoded by future scientific developments. These “prehistoric” narratives, like Jesus’ parables, provide us with profound theological insights but do not pretend to represent modern “historiography” or other sciences, which pursue questions related to the “how” of creation (what happened and when) but make no pretense of asking or answering the “who” question (which is beyond the scope of scientific investigation). Often the prescientific character of the narratives has been masked by modern translations, such as the NIV, but is made clearer in the NRSV.

- The sky consists of a large inverted “dome,” a hard substance, hammered like metal (Gen. 1:6-8, NRSV);
- This firmament (Hebrew: *raqia’*) like an inverted dome or bowl, separates the waters above it from the waters on the flat earth below (1:6-8);
- Like a parent decorating a Christmas tree, on the fourth day God sets the sun, moon and stars in the heavenly dome in order to provide light for the earth and to regulate Israel’s calendar of sacred festivals (1:14-19 NRSV; note the geocentric and anthropocentric perspective, with the stars almost an afterthought);
- Light is created three days before the creation of the sun, moon and stars in a process perhaps intending to depreciate the worship of heavenly bodies in surrounding imperial cultures;
- The earth begins to produce vegetation and trees before the creation of the sun (1:11-13) and not only humans but also the animals are originally all vegetarian (1:29-31);
- In addition to fish and birds, God created “great sea monsters” (1:21; see Isa. 27:1; 51:9; Ps. 74:12-14; 104:26; Job 3:8; 26:12-13; 41:1-34);
- God created the universe in six days (1:1-31), but also in a single day (2:4b, NRSV, where the NIV paraphrases with “when”).
- When Yahweh Elohim created the first human, there had been no rain, but the earth was irrigated by a single spring/stream that rose from the waters beneath the flat earth (2:5-6; see also 7:11-12, where the subterranean waters break forth and “windows” in the sky-dome open to flood the earth);

- The symbolic (not historical) character of the Garden of Eden is indicated by the geography of the four rivers, which include two from Mesopotamia (the Tigris and the Euphrates) and one that flows around Cush (Ethiopia) in Africa (2:10-14; see existence of the "tree of life" (2:9; 3:24) in the heavenly Jerusalem, which at the end descends to the earth (Rev. 21:2; 22:2));
- In Gen. 1:21 the serpent is a simple creature but in Gen. 3:1-7, 14-15 it is more intelligent than humans, understands divine speech, speaks, pointing out deficiencies in God's discourse, originally did not creep on the ground, now eats dust and is ever hostile to humans;
- God appears to err, threatening humans with immediate death, literally "the day" (2:17 NRSV, literally), not "when" (NIV; compare 3:4 and 5:5, where Adam lives 930 years);
- God and the first humans spoke only Hebrew (see the plays on Hebrew words in Gen. 2:7, 19, 23; compare 11:1-9);
- Cain has no trouble in finding a wife (Gen. 4:17), since God loves the diversity in creation (Ps. 104:24) and had created many humans in addition to the first couple: some left-handed, bisexual, lesbians, gays, etc.; see the more than 1500 animal species in which scientists have confirmed the existence of

homoerotic acts and same-sex relations).

Note: In the Ancient Near East creation is understood as bringing order out of chaos, not producing matter. Therefore, although the Hebrew verb *bara'* (create) is only used with God as the subject (Gen. 1:1, 21, 27, etc.), the idea of creation out of nothing (*creation ex nihilo*) is not found in the Hebrew Bible but represents a later Jewish interpretation (2 Macc. 7:28; 2 Baruch 21:4; 2 Enoch 24:2), also taught in the New Testament (Rom. 4:17; Hebrews 11:3) and eventually became the orthodox Christian viewpoint. The doctrine reflects the Greek philosophical development of distinguishing between matter and spirit.

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End Notes

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- ³ Robert Gagnon 2001:71-78.
- ⁴ Hanks 2006:597-98.
- ⁵ Michael Carden 2006:36-38.
- ⁶ See “Prostitution” and “Cultic Prostitution” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, V:505-513, esp. 507-509. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 36-37.
- ⁸ Robert Gagnon 2001:71-91.
- ⁹ George Edwards 1984:53; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37, The Anchor Bible Commentary*, 1997:450, 683.
- ¹⁰ See Ted Jennings 2000.
- ¹¹ Mark Jordan 1997.
- ¹² Byrne Fone, *Homophobia*, 2000:75-350.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 265-67.
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- ¹⁹ Jerome Walsh 2001:207-209.
- ²⁰ Saul Olyan 1994:186; confirmed by Bernadette Brooten 1996; Marti Nissenen 1998, Jacob Milgrom 2000; Jerome Walsh 2001; supported by the Talmud and early rabbinic interpretation, Boyarin, 1995:336; and by comparative study of the laws from neighboring countries, Daube 1986:447-8.
- ²¹ Gagnon 2001:111-146.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 135-142, 169-176.
- ²³ Davidson 2007:334, 634.
- ²⁴ Norman Snaith 1967:126; George Edwards 1984:51-54; Boswell 1980:100-106; 1992:125-128.
- ²⁵ Levine 1989:123; cf. Robert Gagnon 2001:129-132.
- ²⁶ Thomas Thurston 1996:63; Manuel Villalobos- Mendoza 2002:87-91.
- ²⁷ Jacob Milgrom, following Ramban; Sarah Melcher; cf. Robert Gagnon 2001:132-134.
- ²⁸ Jacob Milgrom 1993:8; 2000:1530, 1566-70; 1785-90; 2004:196-197, 206-08; Robert Gagnon 2001:132-34; 2005JM:2-9.
- ²⁹ Gagnon 2005:2.
- ³⁰ Sarah Melcher 1996:98.
- ³¹ Gagnon 2001:79-87; 2003:56-62; 2005JM: 12, nota 46.
- ³² Olyan 1994; cp. Gagnon 2001:134-135; Stephen Bigger 1979, with other liquids.
- ³³ Walsh 2001; cf. Douglas; Brooten; Thurston; Helminiak; Gagnon 135-142, 169-176.
- ³⁴ David Stewart, “Leviticus,” in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, 2006:96-99, citing doctoral thesis, 2000; also, Renato Lings 2009.
- ³⁵ Stewart 2006:97.
- ³⁶ Hoffner 1997.
- ³⁷ As even Gagnon argues, 2001:63-71.
- ³⁸ Susan Rattray 1987 SBL Seminar Papers.

- ³⁹ Recognized by Lings 2009:244.
- ⁴⁰ Saul Olyan 1994/97.
- ⁴¹ Jerome Walsh 2001; also, Thurston 1990.
- ⁴² Jerome Walsh, 2001.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 204-205.
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- ⁵³ Frederick Danker 2000:135 and 613.
- ⁵⁴ Martin 1996; 2006; Harrill 1999; Elliott 2004; see Danker BDAG 2000:613 on *malakoi*.
- ⁵⁵ John Elliott 2004:21.
- ⁵⁶ As Garland recognizes (2003:214, 217-218), citing Halperin, Dover and others; see *adikia*, injustice/oppression, in Rom 1:18-2:16.
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- ⁶⁰ Ibid. and note 32.
- ⁶¹ Bernadette Brooten 1996:290.
- ⁶² Garland, 213.
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- ⁶⁶ Ibid., 213, citing Gagnon.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., 250, 258-260.
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- ⁶⁹ BAGD Danker 2000.
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- ⁷² Ibid., 449.
- ⁷³ Ibid.
- ⁷⁴ Boswell 1980:111-114; Gordon Fee 1987:243-4.
- ⁷⁵ Martin 1996:123.
- ⁷⁶ Robert Geiss 2009:25.
- ⁷⁷ Robin Scroggs, 85-97, 29-65, 105-22.
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- ⁸⁰ Ibid., 2006:91.
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- ⁸⁵ Note 160 Vasey, *Strangers and Friends*, 132, quoted in Thistleton 2001.
- ⁸⁶ Thistleton 2001:451.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 452.
- ⁸⁸ Gagnon 2001:311.
- ⁸⁹ Thistleton 2001:448, citing Bailey 1980:27-41.
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 439.
- ⁹¹ Countryman 2006:750.
- ⁹² *Ibid.*, 748
- ⁹³ Volker Sommer 1990:161.
- ⁹⁴ Countryman 2006:747.
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 749, note 1, citing Judges 13:6; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4.
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 750.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, citing Lev. 15:16-18.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 750.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2006:748, 751-52.
- ¹⁰⁰ D. Martin 1995:244-45; cf. Garland 526-29, who cites Gen. 6:1-4; Job 4:22; 5:1-2; 1 Enoch 6-7; 19:1; 2 Bar 56:10-16; T Reub 5:1-7; and Tertullian; Garland should have added Jude 6-8.
- ¹⁰¹ Thomas R. Schreiner 2003: (pp.?)
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 453-54.
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 453, my italics.
- ¹⁰⁴ Bauckham 1983:54; see even Gagnon 2001:87-88.
- ¹⁰⁵ Schreiner, 453, following Moo 1996:242.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 442-43.
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- ¹⁰⁹ Schreiner, 448.
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- ¹²⁸ Chandler Burr 2008.
- ¹²⁹ Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*, p. 26. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987.
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- ¹³³ Chris Filingos 2004:759.
- ¹³⁴ Gaca 2003:3.
- ¹³⁵ See also Matthew Kuefler 2001:255-60; Hanks 2006:594.
- ¹³⁶ Cf. Dale Martin, 1995:332-55; 2006:22; Countryman, 2007:97-99.
- ¹³⁷ Gaca 2003:185, with reference to gods and goddesses of erotic love.
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- ¹³⁹ Gaca 2003:126, note 23.
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- ¹⁴⁴ Gaca 1999:167-68.
- ¹⁴⁵ Also, *Didache* 5:2 and the *Epistle to Diognetus* 7:2; 8:1-11.
- ¹⁴⁶ Gaca 1999:177-180.
- ¹⁴⁷ Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1994; Dale Martin 2006:53, 207 notes 9, 17; Douglas Campbell 2009, Excursus, 460-66; Hanks 2006:600; Hanks, "A Review of Robert Jewett, *Romans* [2007], and other recent scholarship on Romans 1:16–2:16," 2008; see at www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar/ingles/ingles.html, "Reviews", "Romans".
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- ¹⁴⁹ See Hanks, "Romans" in the QBC, which Campbell indirectly cites in his note 68; also, Hanks, review of Paul Jewett on → **Romans**.
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- ¹⁵⁹ William Countryman 1996.
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- ¹⁶⁵ Millard Erickson 1983/98:294.
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- ¹⁶⁷ Dale Martin 1995:104-136.
- ¹⁶⁸ Brian Ingrassia 1995:123-37.
- ¹⁶⁹ Schökel 1994:692-94, *ruakh*, wind, breath, spirit; BDAG 2000:832-36, *pneuma*, wind, breath, S/spirit.
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