

Gay-Partnerships and the Jesus-Centred Church

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LIFESWAY
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Published by
LIFESWAY
143 Longmeanygate,
Leyland, PR26 6TD, England.
www.lifesway.net
email: admin@lifesway.net

First edition 2006

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A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

ISBN-13: 978-0-9553742-2-7

ISBN-10: 0-9553742-2-7

Typeset in Times Roman 11pt
Printed and bound in Great Britain

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That's A Good Question (1973: Tyndale House USA; 1977 Coverdale UK)

God's Strategy in Human History (1973: STL UK; 1974: Tyndale House USA; 1989 Bethany House USA; 1989 Highland UK)

Reason and Faith (1989: Monarch UK)

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Acknowledgement

Thanks go to all who read and commented on this work, including those at the Nazarene College (especially the Rev Gordon Thomas), and in my own church (especially Bishop Richard Snyder). Thanks also to Professor Gordon Wenham, and Rev Steve Gaukroger and others for their encouragement..

Preface

This work arose out of the research undertaken for a dissertation submitted in summer 2004 as the final element of an M.A. in holiness theology.

In writing a “theological” rather than a “pastoral” work on issues concerning morality and lifestyle one is always aware that peoples’ lives will be affected. Wrong theology could, on the one hand, make people unhappy from denying themselves a legitimate lifestyle, or, on the other hand, leave them in bad case because living out of harmony with the Kingdom of God. Any preaching of the Christian gospel, however, can carry parallel risks. A second century Christian witnessing to an emperor worshipper, an Anabaptist witnessing in the sixteenth century, or a modern Christian witnessing to a Muslim or Hindu – all are by implication inviting commitment to a Christian set of beliefs and lifestyle with potentially profound personal outcomes. This should not mean that we shrink from it, but it should make us take more care that we do not act from mere tradition or subjective feelings or knee-jerk reactions but rather seek to ground ourselves in the teachings of the Jesus to whom we are committed. If, as we believe, he really is the incarnate Son of God, then the one who came to show us the Father is the one whose teachings and approach we need to note and follow. Whatever its failing, this is what the current work attempts to do, both with careful analysis and in seeking the illumination of the Spirit of God.

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1. Background & Assumptions

1.1 Introduction and Structure

Today increasing numbers argue that gay-partnerships are compatible with active Christian faith. Major Presbyterian and Methodist connections are split on the issue. Amongst Anglican/Episcopalians, some firmly oppose accepting any such relationships, whilst in New Hampshire an actively gay bishop was ordained in 2003, and in Washington in mid-2004 the ongoing gay-partnership of a priest was given a church blessing. Since then the Anglican communion has increasingly looked like a serious schism on the issue. The controversy divides those of various strands of theology, and some self-identified “evangelical” individuals and organisations¹ now take “pro-gay-partnership” lines. The days of quick dismissal of the pro-gay-partnership lobby as wild radicals must now be over, and the debate has to be taken seriously.

This work attempts, from a mainstream-evangelical but Jesus-centred approach to biblical interpretation, to examine Christian attitudes to gay-partnerships. It shows how attitudes to sexuality, marriage and divorce, can be consistently based today on this approach, and the shortcomings of alternative approaches to the relevant biblical passages. It is aimed at anyone with a serious interest in knowing the truth about these issues.

In dealing with the topic, it is recognised that there are major issues of the nature of biblical interpretation, biology, and some OT passage meanings, which are crucial but (in a sense) background to the main development. These are signposted in the “main” text, but dealt with in appendices. The intention is that this will enable readers to follow the overall thrust of the argument in

¹ Jeremy Marks founded Courage Trust 1988 (cf Edwards (1999)), radically changing its stance in 2001 (cf www.courage.org.uk).

the main text, whilst realising that these crucial “background” issues have been thoroughly thought through.

Some readers may be surprised at the amount of “preparatory” material that we need to go through even in the main text. Because, however, the topic *is* so controversial, the various basic assumptions made in approaching the biblical passages are crucial to the way in which they are interpreted. Patience in grasping these background issues is therefore vital.

Finally, though criticism has been made of various authors, an attempt has always been made to read them fairly and not misrepresent them. It is hoped that readers, even those who come from a different perspective, will similarly approach the present work.

1.2 Definitions

The debate needs to be about issues, not modern word meanings, so it will be useful here to define the terms to be used.

Christians: These are those who believe in and have made a commitment to follow Jesus as the incarnate Son of God, who died and rose for our forgiveness and salvation. This book will consider what attitudes and lifestyles seem consistent with a claim to be a Christian, but will not make pejorative judgements as to who amongst various writers is a true Christian or false “Christian” because this would be unhelpful to our discussion and search for the truth.

Exegesis & Hermeneutics: These terms are based on the Greek words *ēxēgesis* (narrative, explanation, interpretation) and *hermēneuō* (explain, interpret, translate)² but this need not indicate modern usages of the terms. Actually, these usages vary, but here for simplicity will be adopted the terminology of Fee and Stuart: “exegesis” is to “find out what was the *original intent of the words of the Bible*”, whilst “hermeneutics” also includes “seeking the *contemporary* relevance of ancient texts”.³ Because both

² Cf eg Brown (1986) i. pp.573-584.

³ Fee & Stuart (1993) pp.23-25 see also Achtemeier (1969) pp.13-14.

exegetical and hermeneutical concerns (in these senses) are so central to the gay-partnership issues, these rather technical terms will be used throughout the book.

Homosexual: In this debate more than most, definitions are essential. The Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines homosexual (for which it sees “gay” as a synonym) as:

1. feeling or involving sexual attraction to persons of the same sex.
2. concerning homosexual relations or people.
3. relating to the same sex.

A “homosexual” is someone who is sexually attracted to their own sex, whether they are celibate or homosexually or heterosexually or bisexually active. The problem is that *in practice* the word can intend either mere orientation or active-sex, and the headline “gay bishop outed” could refer merely to revealing orientation or to revealing an active homosexual sex life. To avoid confusion this work will prefer the terms homosexual-orientation and active-gay or active-gay-partnership.

Homophobic: The Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, in a research report entitled *Christian Homophobia*, defined it as “an irrational hatred, disapproval, or fear of homosexuality, gay and lesbian people, and their culture.” The problem is that this could mean that eg from a humanist perspective a disapproval of *anything* based on Christian principles or the teaching of Jesus could be deemed “irrational” and so deemed as a -phobia. The dictionary gives a “phobia” as an “abnormal or morbid fear or aversion” but “-phobia” as “denoting a fear or dislike of what is specified”. So is a “homophobic” anyone who believes that all homosexual acts are wrong, or someone with an exaggerated fear or hatred of homosexuals? Surely one should take it that eg “arachnophobia” is an *irrational* and *exaggerated* fear/hatred of spiders? Arachnophobics would certainly be fearful of touching a live funnel web spider, but my own fear of doing such a thing does not, in itself, imply that I am “arachnophobic”. To believe (as Jesus did) that adulterous lust is wrong is not to be a lustophobic. To believe that same-sex acts are always wrong is not, in itself, to be homophobic. It is, surely the *exaggerated* and *irrational* hatred/fear that -phobia indicates.

Heterosexist: This presumably means (on the parallel of “racist”) someone who is prejudiced against homosexuals. What is unclear is whether this means “prejudice” against those with the inclination, or against those with a gay-lifestyle, and whether the “prejudice” means discrimination in society or a view that such a person cannot join a church. If it is the last of these then presumably such churches would also be “fornicatorist” and “idolaterist” since neither habitual fornicators nor practising Hindus could join the church either. Since the term is so confusing and there is no dictionary definition, it will not here be used at all.

Lust: This means not merely sexual attraction, but mental fantasising about sex with someone other than a spouse, and a desire for illicit sex acts with them should any opportunity arise.

Pederasty: Intercourse between a man and a boy or youth.

Pro-gay-partnership/Anti-gay-partnership Christian: Here these terms refer non-pejoratively to whether or not gay-sex within a loving long-term partnership is thought to be morally acceptable.

1.3 Possible Bases for Christian Ethics

Possible bases for *theology* (including Christian ethics) are Scripture, reason tradition, and experience (which includes experience of the Holy Spirit), and *any* group identifying itself as “Christian” must combine these in *some* way. Since our only effective links with the historic Christ are *Scripture*’s documents, therefore, however deficient these may be supposed to be, *Christians* must make some use of them. Any theology totally devoid of *reason* will be a non-sense. Any group agreeing a “theology” thereby establishes a *tradition*, albeit a new one. Finally, direct *experience* of God *may*, perhaps, be neglected, but *all* our conclusions about reality are based in some way or another on experience.

The way in which these four aspects are combined varies:

Experience: To some theologians *experience* is paramount.⁴ Since, they say, many active-gays presently “feel good” about their relationships and have church lives paralleling those of non-gays, their lifestyle must be right. There, are, however, obvious problems with this as *the main* source of ethics; for Jesus castigated many contemporaries who may well have “felt good” about their religion. In modern times the “Children of God” cult may well have “felt good” about their directedly promiscuous sex lives, but it is hard to see this as consistent with the teachings of the historic Jesus.

Tradition: Some may elevate “*tradition*”, though often past “traditions” (eg on suppressing women) were unbiblical and inconsistent with the teachings of the historic Jesus. Jesus castigated contemporaries whose traditions nullified the heart-meaning word of God,⁵ and clearly no “Jesus-centred” Christianity can be “traditionalist”. This is especially so in regard to sex and marriage for, whilst some Christian leaders (like Clement and Pelagius⁶) adopted moderate asceticism that is at least recognisably Christian, church traditions became progressively less biblical. Tertullian, for example, developed increasingly unhealthy views of women, sex and marriage, finally advocating sexual abstinence within marriage and forbidding remarriage of widows.⁷ This began a tradition of “exegesis of desperation” on verses like 1 Tim.5:14 and Rom.7.3, a tradition continued by Augustine⁸ and leading to some very repressed and unhealthy “traditional” teachings on sex. Thus were, eg, Mollencott and Boswell right about there being an early Greek liturgical ceremony for homosexual marriage⁹ it would not affect Jesus-centred

⁴ Effectively eg Seow in Seow (1996) argues this; Siker (in Brawley 1996) is similar.

⁵ Mk.7:13.

⁶ See Marston & Forster (2000) appendix.

⁷ Compare his earlier advice *To His Wife* with the later *On Monogamy*.

⁸ Cf Augustine: *The Good of Widowhood* and *Marriage and Concupiscence*.

⁹ Mollencott in Siker (1994) p.148; Boswell (1994). Schmidt (1995) p.135 notes Boswell’s argument “depends on quotations taken out of context, questionable

Christians who reject all forms of “traditionalism” as a basis for theology.

Reason: Some may elevate “*reason*” – perhaps operating with science as a source of ethics. Whilst no one should ignore any relevant scientific discoveries, or deny that ethics should “make sense”, it is illogical and a “naturalistic fallacy” to suppose that morality (“ought”) can be derived from biological nature (“is”). What *exists* includes cruelty, sadism, paedophilia, jealousy, and a host of other things abhorrent to Jesus-based ethics. Naturalistic *Darwinian* ethics, indeed, can only reaffirm genetic selfishness, and Darwinian humanists like Richard Dawkins have to make some irrational “leap of faith” to derive human morality from nothingness.¹⁰

Scripture: There are some who ask something like this:

The aim of good interpretation is simple: to get at the “plain meaning of the text.” ... But... then why interpret? Why not just read? Does not the plain meaning come simply from reading?¹¹

This kind of approach has recently received support from supposed “literalists” regarding creation, but it is naïve, unbiblical, and impossible to apply consistently (whatever its advocates *say* they do). A general “plain meaning” approach to Scripture is naïve because it ignores it that human language always communicates meaning within linguistic conventions and particular cultural context. It is unbiblical because it does not follow Jesus’ central approach to OT interpretation eg in the Sermon on the Mount. Concerning consistency, just consider eg: Ex.31:14-15; Deut.22:11; Lev.25:44 Mt.5:27; Lk.22:19 Jn.15:1; Acts 15:29; 1 Cor.7:8; 1 Cor.11:5,14:29,14:34. Is there any individual or group today applying *all* these in their “plain meaning”? Clearly not. However strongly anyone believes in the “inspiration of Scripture”, there has to be both *exegesis* (ie determining what a

translations and speculation” – the ceremony of ritualised brotherhood cited is not sexual.

¹⁰ Cf Dawkins (1989).

¹¹ The question as worded in Fee & Stuart (1993) p.14.

passage meant in its original language and context) and *hermeneutics* (ie principles of how it fits into the overall pattern of God's revelation, and exploration of how God means it to apply to us today in our present cultures and situations). We should, of course, be wary of what has already been called "exegesis of desperation" (which makes a passage "mean" the opposite of what it says), or hermeneutics which involve wild flights of subjective fancy. But to note that exegesis and hermeneutics can be done badly is not to say that they need not be done at all. Fee and Stuart (1993) rightly say:

The antidote to bad interpretation is not no interpretation, but good interpretation, based on common sense guidelines.(p.17).

1.4 Jesus-Centred Ethics and Hermeneutics

Jesus-centred churches must base their ethics on the teaching of the historical Jesus, who was the Christ, the incarnate Son of God.¹² This means that (even aside from any views on the "inspiration of Scripture") Christ's teachings as recorded in the Gospels should be the starting point for any *Christ-ian* ethics. Usually, theologians then recognise that reason, experience, and past understandings (or "tradition") all play *some* part in understanding and reapplying these ethics today. One explicit modern expression of this understanding comes in the so-called "Wesleyan Quadrilateral",¹³ but *some* kind of explicit or implicit recognition of it is inevitable.

The teachings of the historical Jesus can realistically be known only through the Gospel accounts. If, however, these accounts are anything like true, then the historic Jesus accepted the OT as "authoritative"¹⁴, and also deliberately chose apostles to transmit

¹² This was implied at the inauguration in November 2003 of the actively-gay bishop Gene Robinson of New Hampshire, when they sang "The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord".

¹³ Scripture, reason, experience and tradition have sometimes been described as a kind of "*quadrilateral*" but *not* a "*square*"; the four connect, but are not equal partners on similar levels: <http://www.epworthchapelonthegreen.org/wesleystudies/journey/invitation7.html>

¹⁴ Cf Wenham (1993).

and explain his teaching. This means that we need to recognise validity in both the OT and the writings of the New Testament, which were affirmed under apostolic authority. A belief in the "inspiration of Scripture" is a logical corollary to a belief that Jesus was the incarnate Son of God.

This does *not*, however, imply "literalism" in any modern sense because, as we will see, Jesus was not a "literalist". Neither does it imply that the OT is straightforwardly, universally, applicable, for in affirming its "God-giveness" Jesus also indicated its limitations.¹⁵

Jesus himself showed the need for "hermeneutics". On the Emmaus road, to two followers already doubtless familiar with the teachings of the OT:

...beginning from Moses and all the prophets he explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Lk.24:27)

Brown (1986) notes:

In Lk.24:27 *diermēneuō*, means to expound or to interpret, Beginning with the Pentateuch and the prophets, Jesus expounded the OT in terms of his own person and mission.(i p.581).

The word used relates to "hermeneutics", and Jesus' approach here was not primarily focused on exegesis (ie what it meant in the original context) but the more holistic issue of hermeneutics (ie what did it point to in terms of his own mission and Messiahship). Jesus himself took a "Christocentric" approach: he showed them the OT Messianic focus on "things concerning himself". If our theology is derived "Jesus-centredly" then its *content* is "Christocentric". That is, if our theology *is based on* the teachings of the historic Jesus (and his chosen apostles), then the *content* of that theology will centre on his Messiahship and the meaning of the cross, resurrection, and Kingdom of God for us today.

¹⁵ Mt.5:18ff.

This means that, in understanding any biblical passage (and particularly as concerns ethics) there is a threefold process. The first task is exegesis: to determine what the actual words meant to those who heard them in their linguistic and cultural context. Whilst, however, this may be the *primary* focus for an academic,¹⁶ the Christian disciple is interested in it only as a step towards a wider understanding and application. The second task, then, is a hermeneutical one: to place this meaning within a wider “Christocentric” framework of the cross, resurrection and Kingdom of God. The third task is another hermeneutical one: to reapply any principles that emerge from this to our own times and cultural situation.

None of this process can, of course, be completely “objective”. We all inevitably bring preconceptions, linguistic limitations, and the difficulties of being remote in culture from the NT context. But, in line with a generally “critical realist” approach to all knowledge, this should neither make us into total “relativists” nor stop us from striving for coherence and believing that some descriptions of “reality” are more “true” than others.

Various principles of exegesis and hermeneutics are outlined in *Appendix 1*, and there is some useful detailed literature on this. What is less strongly emphasized in the literature is the centrality of Jesus to interpretation for us *as Christians*. There is a progressive revelation in Scripture, but Jesus is not simply one more stage along an ongoing upwards road. God spoke in the OT in diverse ways by various prophets, but *in these last days he has spoken to us through a Son* (Heb.1:1-2). The Word, the Logos, of God *became flesh and dwelt amongst us*, and as the divine only-begotten-one *in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known*¹⁷ (Jn.1:14-17). No post-Jesus prophet can move beyond the revelation of the Son who said things like *He that has seen me has seen the Father* (Jn.14:9). The teaching of Jesus must be the touchstone by which the Jesus-centred church understands proper

¹⁶ Eg Bird in Balch (2000) pp.165ff.

¹⁷ The word used here is actually *exegesato*.

hermeneutics of the OT, bearing also in mind the explanations of that teaching made by Jesus’ own chosen apostles.

The ethical principles given by Jesus (and his chosen apostles) must surely also delineate for us what is right and wrong? Clements, e.g., says: “if you are determined to insist that homosexuality should be treated as a sin, you must provide some rational evidence of the harm it does.”¹⁸ Assuming we read this as “homosexual activity” rather than homosexuality (which is a condition not a lifestyle), then problem is in defining what is “harm”. One suspects that it can only be some kind of ethics based on Kantian autonomy, or utilitarian ethics, rather than seeing “sin” as disobedience against divine intention. Yet the most basic picture given us in Scripture of sin is in the taking of a “fruit” which, in itself, seemed perfectly good to the eye and pleasant to eat. There is no indication eg that it was immediately poisonous. The serpent narrative is, of course, symbolic (and the “seed o the serpent” was the human “brood of vipers” who opposed Jesus, not snakes), but the indication must surely be that revelation is the surest way to discern what is right? If it turns out that Jesus indicates the *right* choice for humankind is monogamous heterosexual marriage or celibacy, then however little “harm” we can see in human terms for eg caring promiscuity, prostitution, plurality of wives, or gay-partnerships, we surely must define them as sin? This is not to prejudge at this point what Jesus did teach, but simply to affirm a Jesus-centred view of determining ethics.

1.5 Some Common Biological Claims

We turn now to an entirely different “background” issue. Pro-gay-partnership theologians have argued that there are people whose “identity as human beings” is homosexual, or “persons whose ‘nature’ itself appears to be homosexual.”¹⁹ Based on this assumption, a frequent argument is voiced succinctly eg by McNeill in Siker (1994):

¹⁸ Clements (2006) <http://www.royclements.co.uk/essays15.htm>

¹⁹ Eg *The Bible and Homosexuality*, p.10; Scanzoni & Mollencott (1978) p.77.

Only a sadistic God would create hundreds of thousands of humans to be inherently homosexual and then deny them the right to sexual intimacy.(p.53).

There are four basic assumptions here:

- (1) Homosexual-inclination is inborn.
- (2) Homosexual-inclination is unchangeable.
- (3) Homosexual-inclination (perhaps unlike eg being born blind) is part of God's design.
- (4) Sexual intimacy is a right for all people whether or not they feel capable of, or inclined to, permanent monogamous male-female marriage

Point (1) is widely assumed as "fact", but actually not all pro-gay figures are happy with the inherent "gay-gene" idea.²⁰ Others accept that: "Even if a gay gene existed, it would not imply that homosexual behaviour could be placed outside the zone of human moral responsibility".²¹ In any event, *Appendix 2* demonstrates that in fact the scientific evidence is clearly against any "gay gene" (as once popularly claimed). There *is* a genetic *influence* on the incidence of homosexual orientation (as also on the tendency to promiscuity and many other tendencies), but it is *not* determinative.

Regarding (2), again dogmatic assertions made of the impossibility of changes in sexual orientation are shown to be baseless in *Appendix 2*. The evidence is that orientation-changes can happen, though are neither easy nor guaranteed.

McNeil's points (3)-(4) are attempts to derive ethics from biology. This is what philosophers call the "naturalistic fallacy"; it is both irrational in itself and involves an unacceptable theology of biology. Further comments on this fallacy will be made later.

²⁰ See eg the leading and militant British "gay-rights" activist Peter Tatchell on <http://www.petertatchell.net/gay%20gene/gene%20genie.htm>

²¹ Clements (w2006) <http://www.royclements.co.uk/essays13.htm>. (2002)

1.6 Biology, Human Nature and Sin

OT theology contains tension regarding both human and biological nature. Humans, male and female, are made "in the image of God". Humans uniquely have propositional language,²² the recognition of morality,²³ and the kind of deep personal relationship epitomised in the "one-flesh" sexual and social intimacy of marriage.²⁴ Implicit in this is freedom of choice, exercised (in parallel with God's exercise) by consciousness of purpose,²⁵ and changes of purpose dependent on the choices of others.²⁶ "I am", said the Psalmist, "fearfully and wonderfully made."²⁷ Yet, from Gen.3 onwards, there is also recognition that humankind is in some sense "fallen". The OT seldom if ever refers to the fall, yet recognises throughout that sin is against the revelation of God's standards and expectations. A parallel tension exists in concepts of nature. Gen.1-2, the Psalms and Job particularly show God as the author of nature, and by implication that nature shows his handiwork. But there is also recognition that, at least in regard to its relationship with humankind, biological nature itself is no infallible indication of God's intention.²⁸

The NT continues this tension. To Jesus God is our father, but the marred image at the heart of humankind gives rise to sin.²⁹ Paul states that in the created order the power and nature of God is recognisable.³⁰ Yet he also states that through the fall of 'ādām (however this is interpreted), unredeemed humankind remain in thralldom to Sin, and the creation itself is in birth pangs of bondage

²² Gen.2:19,23.

²³ Gen.2:17.

²⁴ Genesis 2:18,22,24; see also Marston & Forster (2001) pp.43ff.

²⁵ Eg Gen.1:26.

²⁶ See Marston & Forster (2001) p.116 and also Jon.3:10, 4:2; Ez.12:3; Is.38:1-5; 1 Ki.21:1-35; 2 Ki.20:2-5; 2 Chron.32:24-6; Is.38:1-6,39:1-8.

²⁷ Ps.139:14.

²⁸ Gen.3:17-19.

²⁹ Mt.15:189 but cf 12:35.

³⁰ Rom.1:20.

until the “revealing of the Sons of God”.³¹ Biological nature, therefore, gives indications of a purposeful creator, but no infallible guide to morality.

What, in Pauline theology, is the nature of the “fall” and the reign of Sin? From the fifth century there have been two basic schools of thought on this. Pelagius and the early Augustine (representing mainstream theology) saw the power of Sin as the force of habit.³² The later Augustine³³ and Reformed theology posited a more basic corruption in human nature itself. This theological controversy is paralleled in psychological debate on relative powers of “nurture” and “nature”. Clearly, however, *no* Pauline theology could take human biology as a starting point for constructing ethics. We may be born with all kinds of inbuilt tendencies – alcoholism, bad temper, paedophilia, left-handedness, dyslexia, etc. Some of these may be morally neutral (even if – like dyslexia – dysfunctional), whilst others are not. Biology cannot tell us which is which – we can tell only by either direct revelation or by some kind of reasoning based on more basic consideration of God’s intentions.

Jesus and Paul clearly teach that there is an inner human propensity towards sin.³⁴ But should we expect that if a person is truly converted and dedicated to God then all such wrong impulses will effectively disappear? If so, then the persistence of a homosexual orientation in someone truly dedicated to God could be used to argue that the orientation must be from God or it would have disappeared. We need, then, to think carefully about this.

It we look at mainstream bible commentators, the early Greek and Cappadocian fathers (eg Clement and Gregory) accepted the power of God as sufficient to enable those who so chose to move ever closer to him in sanctification. Their aim, however, tended to be serenity or passionlessness (*apathēs*) rather than redirected passions.

³¹ Rom.8:21.

³² Augustine *Against Fortunatus* 22; for Pelagius see Bruyn (1993).

³³ Such generalisations are generally accepted – though cf eg Thomas (2001).

³⁴ Cf eg Mt.15:19; Rom.5-7.

The historical 5thC Pelagius believed that in voluntarily chosen baptism the power of Sin was broken and then pure life was an option. Augustine (354-430) began a new tradition later in his life, which was more pessimistic, seeing the Christian life as a continuing struggle against sinful desires. In general there have been “pessimistic” theologians who thought that the “norm” for Christians was the continuing struggles of Rom.7, whilst “optimistic” theologians emphasized the victorious Spirit-filled Christian life of Rom.8. On the whole, “Reformed” theologians have tended to be pessimistic, whilst “holiness” writers have emphasized a real possibility of holy living.

Holiness writer and Methodist founder John Wesley taught that “sanctification” was usually a specific experience post-conversion, and “entire sanctification” was an end some achieved even in this life.³⁵ His reasons were largely empirical rather than biblical, and, though he emphasized holy living, he did not believe that entire sanctification was the usual Christian experience.

Some mainstream movements do seem to have gone much further than Wesley on this. The early American holiness leader Phoebe Palmer (1807–1874) preached that if a Christian laid “all on the altar” (Rom.12:1) then a second-blessing spirit baptism would give entire sanctification and freedom from Sin.³⁶ One major holiness church handbook still officially holds that second-blessing dedication deals with “original sin” and brings relief from temptation. Its theologians, however, are increasingly realising the implausibility of the exegesis on which this doctrine was based, and some now speak of such a “crisis” in terms of a “process”.³⁷ Free Methodist Church theologians, also in the Wesleyan holiness tradition, have moved away from the phrase “in an instant” in

³⁵ Wesley wrote more than his *Plain account of Entire Sanctification*; see eg Bassett and Greathouse (1985) vol.2 ch.5; Collins (1997) ch.6.

³⁶ Bassett and Greathouse (1985) vol.2.

³⁷ In the Nazarene Church, Wynkoop (1972) p.351 redefines “crisis” as a “moral word, not a ‘clock-time’ word” – insisting: “no experiential pattern can be imposed on everyone in regard to this.”

describing sanctification, and have a proposed article emphasizing it as a *process* rather than sudden change:

As believers surrender to God and die to self, the Spirit fills them with love and purifies them from sin, through fullness of consecration and a process of growth.

In general, then, holiness theologians (as against those of a Reformed persuasion) emphasize far more that the Spirit-filled life of Rom.8 offers a way to avoid sin and grow in Christ-likeness, but today they generally recognise that there is *no* NT warrant for believing that the *normal* Christian experience is a *complete release* from wrong desires. Few, if any, of us experience any such thing, and most find learning to deal with wrong impulses a long-haul. Arguments, then, for the legitimacy of an impulse/orientation merely because it persists post conversion and/or sanctification, are not convincing in Jesus-centred theology.

1.7 Law and Grace

In the OT Jewish holiness code there is, of course, no clear division between the “ceremonial/symbolic” and the “moral” although later prophets constantly proclaim that symbols are useless without the righteousness of life coming from hearts in tune with God.³⁸ Jesus emphasizes that worship/purity is not in externals, especially commending Gentiles for faith.³⁹ He also declares that what “defiles” is not food that simply passes through the digestive system, but what emerges from the “heart” ie the conscious centre.⁴⁰ His use of the “clean” vs “unclean” OT language leads his Jewish hearers to understand this to refer to the “real meaning” of these OT laws,⁴¹ just as the “real Temple” is the human “spirit and truth” dwelling of the Holy Spirit.⁴² Paul brings out this teaching: OT externals symbolise spiritual realities, as the

³⁸ Is.29:13; Hos.6:6; Joel 2:13 etc.

³⁹ Eg Jn.4:23; Mt.15:11; Jn.2:19; Mt.8:10; 15:28 etc.

⁴⁰ Mk.15.

⁴¹ Mk.7:19

⁴² Jn.2:19.

Temple symbolised the true Temple of the church.⁴³ 1 Pet.1:16 likewise takes the core OT instruction to “be holy for I am holy” in the New Covenant to refer not to ritual or ceremonial purity but heart purity (1:22). Peter’s Acts 10 vision clearly told him not only that there was nothing *inherently* “impure” in the forbidden animals in Leviticus, but also that God had already heart-purified and was in a two-way communicating faith-relationship with Gentiles like Cornelius, to whom Peter was to go and take the new-covenant power of the Holy Spirit.

The “New Perspective” on early Judaism, has shown that mainstream Pharisees did not hold that good deeds *earned* rightstanding with God; Israel were God’s elect through a free and undeserved covenant, and the issue is what was the *badge* of membership not how to get into it.⁴⁴ To the Pharisees, the central badge is “works of the Law”, in particular kosher-diet, Sabbath-keeping and circumcision. To Paul these are neither the signs of, nor the way to, holiness: “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths.”⁴⁵

To Paul (and James) the badge/mark of God’s people is faith-relationship and the “good works” which flow from this.⁴⁶ Externals are merely symbols of what should be the inner life. “Real” circumcision is heart-circumcision, which those of faith (OT Jews or Gentiles or NT Jews or Gentiles) have experienced,⁴⁷ and external circumcision merely sealed what was already in evidence in Abraham.⁴⁸

The key issue is faith-relationship with God, and the fruit of the spirit rather than fruit of the flesh that comes from this. But this does not mean “antinomianism” ie that no rules are to be recognised. Thus in 1 Corinthians Paul twice says “All things are

⁴³ Rom.2:29; 1 Cor.3:16; etc

⁴⁴ See Wright (1997) p. 238; also Sanders (1977), Dunn (1990), (1991), (1998).

⁴⁵ Col 2:16 cf Gal.2:3;4:10;5:3.

⁴⁶ Jas.2:18; Eph.2:10; Tit.3:8 but note 3:5.

⁴⁷ Rom.2:25-29; Phil.3:3; Col.2:11.

⁴⁸ Rom.4:11.

lawful for me”⁴⁹, yet twice appeals to the Law⁵⁰ and repeatedly issues moral instruction.⁵¹ The Law, to Paul, is guidance to what is in the heart of God – in some cases in its actual rulings and in others in the symbolic meanings of its ordinances. Approached in the Spirit-filled way it becomes the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ.⁵² Likewise, the moral rulings that Paul gives are guidelines to what is in God’s heart; this relates back to OT Scripture and/or to the teaching of Jesus.⁵³

Jesus says “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil.”⁵⁴ He looks, however, to discern the purposes behind Torah, whereas originally ceremonial and moral were an undivided package. The Jewish “Sabbath” is ceremonial, but also civil and moral (it ensured a definite rest-day for the vulnerable). Jesus insists it is not an end in itself, but designed for human benefit,⁵⁵ and today its *principles* remain important in any caring society. Our “exegesis” should note the effect in Israel, our “hermeneutics” note the context into which Jesus puts it, and explore the ways in which its principles of rest-days for the vulnerable and time for God might be applied today. *Some* of the OT regulations (the divorce law, perhaps the permission of slavery, etc) were because God was being pragmatic – because of “their hardness of heart”. God is not “commanding” them (as the Pharisees suggested) to divorce, but “permitting” it. Usually such laws are couched in terms of regulating existing practices to lessen abuse. The divorce law protected the woman in a male dominated society – she should not be cast out without

⁴⁹ 1 Cor.6:12; 10:23; Ross (2002) also has useful comment on this.

⁵⁰ 1 Cor.9:9; 14.34.

⁵¹ 1 Cor.5:1-7; 5:9; 6:18; 7:9; 7:10-11ff; 10:14; 10:28.

⁵² Wright (1991) ch.10 shows it is Torah (Law) which operates as the “Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ” (Rom.8:2) - fulfilled not through legal fiction but being enacted because God writes his Law on their hearts.

⁵³ Eg 1 Cor.9:9; 14.34.and compare 1 Cor.,7;10 with eg Mt.19:6, Mk.10:9 where the same word separate (*choristhē*) (*χωρισθῆ*) is used; Paul refers to the teaching later embodied in the gospel.

⁵⁴ Mt.5:17.

⁵⁵ Mk.2:27

reason and the bill of divorce enabled her to remarry. The pragmatic nature of such laws, Jesus implies, dealt with people where they were – and higher considerations need to be applied to find out what is the real heart of God on such issues.

1.8 Seeing the OT through the cross

After saying he has not come to destroy the Jewish Law (Torah), Jesus cites Torah “eye for an eye”, but adds “But I say to you...”⁵⁶ He encourages followers on a personal level to give beyond Torah, based on their personal relationship with God. This is consistent in this whole section of the “sermon on the mount”. When he refers to the Law on adultery (5:27) and extends it to lust, he is encouraging us to look *behind* Torah, discerning what is God’s heart and following this in relationship. This neither rejects Torah, nor establishes a more stringent legalism. Viewed through the cross-principles, not “rights” but *agape*-love guides our actions. Paul approaches similarly the common “household codes” – Paul’s instructions to slave-masters and husbands (who had strong “rights” in that society) completely undermined slavery and patriarchalism.⁵⁷

A Jesus-centred approach then, does not simply “reject” any Laws we don’t much like, but seeks to look behind them and discern God’s heart and purpose. Equivalent social concerns should be addressed in situations that are culturally, economically and politically different, and personal ethics should have a “through-the-cross” dimension whilst recognising the implications of the Laws to show God’s intentions.

A Jesus-centred approach does not see Jesus and his apostles as one more step on a long road to enlightenment, but as inaugurating a cross-centred understanding of the whole divine-human relationship, with an “unsurpassable” ethic. There is, still, a need for good exegesis, for understanding the meaning of what NT writers said in their context. There is also a need for good

⁵⁶ Mt.5:28

⁵⁷ Cf *Appendix 5*.

hermeneutics, for the reapplication of the values and principles their words enshrine. But there is not an expectancy that we can now improve on their teachings because we are more enlightened.

2. The Old Testament and Gay-Partnerships

2.1 Genesis 1-3

Genesis has two great human-creation narratives:

God created man (*'ādām*) in his own image: in the image of God he created him; male (*zākār*) and female (*n^eqēbā*) he created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them: “Be fruitful and multiply: fill the earth and subdue it: have dominion over the fish of the sea...etc (1:27-8)

And the Lord God formed the man (*'ādām*) out of the dust of the ground.... And the Lord God said: “It is not good that the man (*'ādām*) should be alone; I will make him an ally suited to him... Then the rib/side (*šēlā'*) which the Lord God had taken from the man (*'ādām*) he made into a woman (*'iššā*), and brought her to the man (*'ādām*). And the man (*'ādām*) said: “This time! This is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called a woman (*'iššā*), for from a man (*'iš*) was she taken this one!” Therefore shall a man (*'iš*) leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his woman/wife (*'iššā*), and they shall become one flesh.(2:7-24).

Now the man (*'ādām*) knew (*yādā*) his wife (*'iššā*) Eve and she conceived...(Gen.4:1)

Jesus was no “literalist”, indeed a common mistake of friends and critics was to “take him literally” when he was speaking symbolically!⁵⁸ Here, Gen.2.3 (and Ex.20:9-11), taken literally, says that the Sabbath was instituted to purely to commemorate God’s 24 hour “rest”. Jesus, however, says it was designed *for man*, and that actually God continues until now to work.⁵⁹ Origen, Augustine, and bible-based theologians through history recognised that these creation passages were never meant to be “taken

⁵⁸ Eg Mk 15:29; Jn 2:19-21; Jn 3:4; Jn 4:11; Jn 4:33; Jn 6:33-4; Jn 6:52.

⁵⁹ Gen.2:2-3; Ex.8:11; Mk.2.:27; Jn 5:17.

literally” in the modern sense; they were never taken as anachronistically “scientific” accounts of cosmology, astrophysics and snake biology (even by Galileo’s critics), but as about more profound things.⁶⁰ Nissenen (1998) p.126 is, then, unjustified to argue that to take seriously Scripture on sexuality means we have to reject the idea of a spherical earth orbiting the sun.⁶¹ Nissenen, like too many theologians, is probably affected by some common myths about the history of science.⁶² Actually the sphericity of the earth was the general view of Christian theologians throughout history, and the centrality of the earth was believed on common-sense scientific grounds rather than as a point of dogma. Bible-based theologians generally eschewed physical literalism without either emptying passages of meaning or making the meaning arbitrary.

Genesis says that God took the man’s *ṣēlā’* = rib/side. Though some commentator’s retain “rib”⁶³, in most of the other 40 OT uses it means “side”, and the LXX Greek *pleura* also elsewhere (eg Num 33:55, 2 Kings 2:2) means “side”. Thus Philo denies that the account contains “mythical fictions”, but concludes that since men are not now lopsided the account was meant symbolically not literally.⁶⁴ John Chrysostom (c334-407) likewise wrote:

Don’t take the words in human fashion; rather, interpret the concreteness of the expressions from the viewpoint of human limitations. You see, if he had not used these words, how would

⁶⁰ Cf Marston & Forster (2001) pp.203ff.. Modern supposed “biblical-literalism” is an aberration.

⁶¹ Others, eg Helminiak (2000) pp. 80ff, make similarly misleading comments about “literality”.

⁶² I teach history of science at degree level, and the many historians of science I know personally all recognise the prevalence of such common myths. See also *Appendix 5*.

⁶³ Hamilton (1990) p.178 argues for “side”.

⁶⁴ Philo *The Second Book of the Treatise on The Allegories of the Sacred Laws* vii.20; *On the Creation* 13-14. See also Marston (2000b) for a more general Jewish treatment.

we have been able to gain knowledge of these mysteries, which defy description?⁶⁵

Though the “rib/side” was never meant literally, the account *does* convey to us something definite about God’s intentions. Whilst the historical Jesus fosters non-literal understanding of divine language, nevertheless both Jesus and Paul refer heavily to the creation accounts and assume them to be inspired. They are key passages for understanding God’s intention for humanity precisely because they refer to a pre-fall and pre-Israel context.⁶⁶ Their human writers, of course, focussed on issues relevant to their own culture, but if the inspiration of Scripture is taken seriously then the accounts present a theologically true picture of God’s intentions, not just for Israel but for humanity as a whole.

We may note that the term *’ādām* is not a proper name here, but a term for “man” or “the man” which (like the English term) actually “includes men women and children”.⁶⁷ The terms male (*zākār*) and female (*n^eqēbā*) are biological. They are used of animals and humankind, and *n^eqēbā* is from a word-group including “hole” or “pierce”. The terms man (*’iš*) and woman (*’iššā*) normally mean human man/husband and woman/wife, though exceptionally in Gen 7:2 they are used anthropomorphically of animals in parallel to 6:19 and 7:3 where the more usual *zākār* and *n^eqēbā* are used.

Throughout Gen.1 God acts, *implicitly* implying intentionality, which in 1:26 is *explicitly* spelled out. Christians may take “let us make mankind in our image...” to refer to the trinity, but, even if the original writers understood these words differently, clearly humankind were meant to behave and function in particular ways. It is not taking the passages out of context to believe that there are both explicit *and implicit* aspects to this divine intentionality. Neither creation passage refers *explicitly* to eg bestiality or polygamy or serial-monogamy or fornication or sado-masochism

⁶⁵ *Homily 15*. See also Marston and Forster (1999) ch.7.

⁶⁶ Also strongly advocated in Marston (1980).

⁶⁷ Hamilton in VanGemeren (1996) vol.i.p.388. Webb (2001) p.117 takes it as a name in defiance of most modern translations.

or pederasty; but this does not mean that there are no implications concerning such behaviours.

Neither account says or implies that procreation was the main purpose of sex, though this is, unfortunately, often assumed without any evidence. Thus eg Whittaker in Seow (1996) rightly accepts:

The concern within the narrative is to suggest why the *'ādām* needs to have a human “helper”(p.7).

Later, however, he says:

The creation material in Genesis 1-3 accepts, or at least assumes, that procreation is the primary purpose of human sexual relationships (p.9).

He does not explain where it “assumes” this, nor why the account then uses for sex the word “know” which speaks of companion-intimacy not procreation.

In fact in Gen.1 the command “be fruitful and multiply” is separate from the statement that God made them male and female. It implies, moreover, neither that everyone has to have as many offspring as possible, nor that *every* future human must procreate. In Gen.2 the purpose is *not* reproduction but to find “an ally/companion suitable for him”. The man looked at the animals not with a view to reproduction, but for companionship and partnership – this is what “ally” means.⁶⁸ The joining of a man/husband to a woman/wife is the reuniting of the flesh separated to make woman, it is about companionship and communion not reproduction. The cleaving to an *'iššā* is pictured as the restoring of what was taken out of *'ādām* to leave an *'iš*.⁶⁹ The word used for man-wife sex is *yd' or yāda'* = know. Human sex was meant to be expressed in a loving intimacy expressing the ultimate of the specifically personal-companionship relationship appropriate to an “ally/companion fitted for him”.

⁶⁸ The word is used 19 times, mostly referring to God himself as a strong ally: Ex 18:4; Ps 33:20; 70:5; 115:9-11; 121:1-2; 146:5 etc.

⁶⁹ See also Gagnon (2001) p.61.

We may ask about this union:

- Did God imply it was covenant based?
- Are bestiality and incest excluded by implication?
- Did God imply it was inherently human male-female?
- Did God indicate intended restriction to two partners (ie a monogamous relationship)?
- Did God intend it to be permanent, or was serial monogamy intended?

In the passage itself there is no indication that “covenant” is basic either to the immediate union of *'iš* and *'iššā* or in the more general application in 2:24. Later Hebrew theology pictured God as a husband to (usually unfaithful) Israel, though *'iš* and *'iššā* are used seldom in this context.⁷⁰

Bestiality (like same-sex acts) is not specifically referred to in the text. The implication surely must be, however, that no animal was found suitable for the sexual intimacy of “knowing” which was part of the bonding of two “ally/companions” corresponding to each other. Again, incest is not strictly forbidden, though the “leaving” of father and mother seems at least to hint that the wife is expected to be from a different nuclear family.

Regarding (3), the “male-female” concept is much more obvious than that of “covenant”, or even of forbidding incest. God seemingly never considered making a second *'ādām* like the first, and the concept of the “cleaving” is that it reunites the remaining *iš* part of *'ādām* with the part taken out to make *'iššā*. The union of *'iš* with *'iššā* “restores” complete humanity *'ādām*; to unite two *'iš* or two *'iššā* would do no such thing.

Though this seems “obvious”, does the OT anywhere make it explicit? Leviticus (which elsewhere refers back to the creation accounts) proclaims it an “abomination” if a man/husband (*'iš*)

⁷⁰ Hos.2.2 – also in Hos.2:16 picturing a future proper Hebrew marriage of partnership rather than a Baal-based one of mastery. God does not have gender. He is specifically “not an *iš* (Num.23:19), and the male-gender similes are matched by the hen-simile (Mt.23:37) given by Jesus.

lies with a male (*zākār*) as he lies with a woman/wife (*'iššā*). We consider this below, but the most obvious way to take it is as a reference to Gen.1-2, and as a denial that a male can take the rightful place of an *'iššā* in a husband-wife relationship. Elsewhere in the OT (although it mentions all kinds of sexual variation/deviation) there are no references to gay-sex other than two shocking allusions to intended male-rape looked at below. Attempts to suggest that eg David and Jonathan had a gay relationship⁷¹ are totally unconvincing. David's taking of Abigail and even more Bath-Sheba show obvious heterosexuality.⁷² The terms used for David and Jonathan are those of male-bonding between two young warrior-princes, emphasizing Jonathan's acceptance that David and not himself will succeed Saul. None of the terms used in Hebrew or LXX necessarily imply erotic love, and they may be used eg for God's love (Gk *agapon*) for Israel.⁷³

The absence of OT reference must be either because gay sex was unexceptional or because it was rare. Later rabbis confirm that the latter explanation is much more likely to be correct.

Returning to the question (4) above, the immediate context is monogamous (God only makes one woman not two), and the text says that a man will cleave to "a wife" not to "wives". In early Israel, however, polygamy was practised, so this apparent implication was not picked up. By the time of the 3rdC BC, the LXX translation added the word "two":

...and shall be the **two** one flesh (*kai esontai oi duo eis sarka mian*)

This reflected an increasingly accepted Jewish understanding that God intended marriage to be monogamous.

⁷¹ Eg in Kader (1999), Helminiak (2000).

⁷² Ie because in neither case was any marriage alliance a central issue. Cf also Coleman (1980) p.45.

⁷³ Coleman (1980) p.45 also points this out and Gagnon (2001) contains a devastatingly complete demonstration that no erotic connection is implied between David and Jonathan.

The permanence of the relationship (5) is even less obvious. Though divorce was regulated, the rabbis, until well after the time of Jesus (as we shall see), differed over whether in principle a man could divorce and remarry as fancy took him.

2.2 Genesis 19

The Sodomites demand: "Bring them out that we may know them". This word "know" (*yāda*) can mean just "get to know" or can imply sexual intimacy. Since 1955 some pro-gay-partnership theologians have suggested that *really* the townsfolk only want to *know* something *about* these strangers.⁷⁴ Note, however, Lot's response:

Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly! See now, I have two daughters who have not known (*yāda*) a man; please, let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men...

Surely neither Lot nor the angels would object to a reasonable request to know who they were, nor suggest that it was "wicked"? When he says his daughters have not "known" man he does not mean they have no acquaintances but that they are virgins – this same word "know" here implies sex. To offer his virgin daughters for sex makes no sense if all townsfolk want is to check credentials. Lot repeatedly implies it concerns "doing" something to the men/his daughters, and they threaten to "do" worse to Lot – obviously not meaning they will double-check his passport. Another argument that "if they were really homosexual they would not want women" is also implausible. The parallel Judges 19 shows this, and, even though modern evidence is that true bisexuality is rare, this is about rape and power and not about any intention to form loving long-term relationships.

In that society such abuse of men offered hospitality is so abhorrent that Lot is prepared to sacrifice his own daughters. Though today we may feel he has his priorities wrong it is

⁷⁴ Bailey (1955). Boswell (1980) p.93 claims this is increasingly the view of "modern scholarship", followed by eg Kader (1999).

certainly not about immigration checks, it is (as in the Judges 19 parallel) about a wicked intention of homosexual-rape.

On any sensible analysis, however, it *is* irrelevant to modern gay-partnerships. In Marston (1980) I rightly wrote:

The Sodomites (like the later Gibeonites) were bent on committing what would have amounted, to homosexual rape of visitors to their city. Later, Jews saw their sins primarily as those of a lack of social care,⁷⁵ pride,⁷⁶ and a breach of hospitality to strangers.⁷⁷ The particular expression of this was indeed in fornication and lust. But neither censure of homosexual rape, nor later condemnation of idolatrous male prostitution need necessarily imply rejection of homosexual acts within caring relationships.(p.152).

Only the NT Jude 7 could be ambivalent, with Sodomites being judged for “committing fornication and going away after different flesh”. However, Bauckham (1983) rightly states:

...the reference to ‘strange flesh’ cannot... refer to homosexual practice, as the flesh is not “different” (*ετεροαξ*) it must mean the flesh of angels.(p.54)

This relates to the context in Jude 6, and the two are similarly brought together in the second century BC *Testament of Naphtali* 3:4-5.

Unusually amongst modern commentators Gagnon (2001) argues that:

...the inherently degrading quality of same-sex intercourse plays a key role in the narrator’s intent to elicit feelings of revulsion on the part of the reader/hearer.(p.71).

Gagnon offers no evidence that the “Yahwist writer” would have been less outraged had the angels appeared female, other than to refer back to Gen.2-3.⁷⁸ In the parallel incident, however, in

⁷⁵ Ezek. 16:49,50.

⁷⁶ Ecclus. 16X.

⁷⁷ Wis. 19:13,14.

⁷⁸ Gagnon (2001) p.78; Dallas (1996) pp.188ff argues similarly but again none of his “evidence” shows any such thing.

Judges 19, the children of Israel are outraged at the gang rape/murder of a female concubine in lieu of her master/husband who was a Levite. Gagnon rightly comments on the selfish lack of morality shown by the Levite here, but fails to note that their indignation (in terms including “lewdness”, “vile deed”, “outrage”) is apparently undiminished because the eventual victim was female.

Sodom did not concern the loving, consensual, permanent gay-partnerships advocated by modern gay Christians, and is irrelevant. The fact that “Sodomy” became a term in the theological tradition from the middle ages, as Jordan (1997) explores⁷⁹, might affect “traditionalists”; it has little relevance to our present interests because Jesus-centred theology is not “traditionalist”. Jordan (2002) wanders through various blatantly unbiblical church traditions on sex and sexuality, before offering his own brand of “progressive revelation” basing morality vaguely on experience.

2.3 Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13

This section summarizes *Appendix 3*, exploring Leviticus laws given to Israel, examining whether Jesus-centred theology can today simply write them off, and considering various pro-gay-partnership approaches to these passages.

In Pentateuch statutes, foreign immigrants benefit from social and welfare provisions including Sabbath rests (Ex.23:12; Lev.23:22 etc). They have to keep basic laws – like not blaspheming or eating the blood which represented life (Lev.17:10; 24:16 – note Acts 15:20) – and any sacrifices they make have to be done right (Lev.17:8; Num.15:14). They are not, however, forced to be circumcised unless they *choose* to keep Passover (Ex.12:48; Num.9:14). Though repeatedly included in social/moral laws, there is never indication they had to keep dietary law and in one case they are specifically excluded.(Deut.14:21).

⁷⁹ Cf also Boswell (1980) who ascribes the “rise of intolerance” to this period - though he already noted earlier Christian teachers who denounced same-sex acts. Coleman (1980) gives a more succinct and balanced history.

Lev.19 is a core of instruction to Israel. It contains ritual instruction to remind them they are special (vs.19,27), but is full of laws relating to social justice, fair trading, concern for the poor and needy, disabilities rights, and just measures. It contains the command to love your neighbour as yourself (identified by Jesus as one of the two great commandments) and explains:

And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him.³⁴ The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Israelites have to “love” (ie to cherish) foreigners as themselves, and Jesus’ “Good Samaritan” story simply expands this.

Either side of this great passage we find:

With a male (*zākār*) you shall not lie (*shakav*) the lyings of a woman (*’iššā*). It is an abomination (*tó’ēbā*). (Lev.18:22).

If a man (*’iš*) lies (*shakav*) with a male (*zākār*) as he lies with a woman (*’iššā*), both of them have committed an abomination (*tó’ēbā*). They shall surely be put to death. (Lev.20:13).

There is no technical term for homosexual acts in Hebrew. The word *shakav* literally means to “lie” or “lie down with”. Depending on context, like the English phrase “sleep with”, *shakav* can imply sexual activity. However, a woman can “lie with” a man (eg Gen 19:32, 33, 35) or a man “lie with” a woman (eg Gen.30:16,34:2; Num.5:13). No *particular* form or kind of sexual intercourse (eg anal intercourse) is implied, and no implication of active or passive roles in sexual terms. The beautiful Abishag is to “lie” in David’s bosom (1 Ki.1.2) and has no full intercourse (1 Ki.14), but is regarded as more than David’s specialist nurse (1 Ki.2:22). Likewise when Ruth “lay at the feet” of Boaz, this claims intimacy (without full intercourse) and proclaims marital intention (Rth.3:7,14). There is actually a phrase “the lying of seed” (Num.5:13) which specifically includes ejaculation – and that is *not* the phrase used in Lev.18:20, 21:13.

In view of this, what basis is there for Jordan (2002) p.30 to note that “some scholars” believe it only concerns anal intercourse (not mutual masturbation or oral sex)? To “sleep with” (then as now) in

a marital-sex context could involve a range of sexual activities including physical affection (cf Gen.26:8), caressing erogenous zones (So.of So.7:8; Pr.5:19) kissing (So.of So.8:1), etc, it is not restricted to the climax of male penis penetrating female vagina. The Leviticus phrase “as with a wife/woman” cannot, in any case, imply that two men could copy this exactly, as neither have a vagina, and there is no reason to think homosexual anal-penetration is its “equivalent” in Hebrew thinking to vaginal penetration. To “lie with a male as with a woman/wife” includes any kind of sexual activity of one man with another that is paralleled between husband and wife.

The Hebrew language, as noted, is reminiscent of the creation accounts. The *’iš* (man/husband) is meant to unite in a deep intimacy of one-flesh sex with an *’iššā* (woman/wife). To substitute a biological male (*zākār*) in this role is an “abomination”. The LXX faithfully translated Lev 18:22 and 20:13 as “bed a male” by *arsen* (male) and *koitē* (bed), so in 20:13 it reads as: *arsenos koiton*. In Num.31:18 and Jdgs.21:11-12 women who have not known lying with men (*koiton arsenos*) just means “virgins”, not the non-promiscuous or those who have avoided some *particular* form of sex.

If it is *not* some special *kind* of sex, how else can pro-gay-partnership theologians approach such a seemingly general prohibition?

Some⁸⁰ have suggested it is part of a “pre-scientific” view of sex, making various “explanations” of these laws in terms of the supposed sanctity of male sperm or procreation as central to sex. None of these are based on anything in the passages, in the OT, or convincingly in early rabbinic Jewish materials. They are in disharmony with the ally-companionship-intimacy language of Scripture, and some contradict actual Torah ideas eg the “seed of the woman”.

Some suggest it is just part of Jewish ceremonial laws, but Canaanites are never castigated for not keeping Jewish dietary

⁸⁰ Appendix 2 provides citations on all these arguments.

laws and in general these are not enforced on foreigners. Not only is *tô'ēbâ* rarely used for the purely ceremonial, but the extremity of expression in Lev.18-20 (about the land vomiting them out for such doings) seems indicative of more than ceremonial abhorrence.

Some link it exclusively to Canaanite cultic practices. Now *some* “abominations” (eg passing seed through the fire to Molech) *are* cultic ordinances, but other things pronounced *tô'ēbâ* in Lev.18 include incest, adultery with neighbours' wives, etc, and seem to be “doings” (*ma^aśeh*) of the land of Canaan, rather than “ordinances”. There is no evidence that same-sex acts were part of a Canaanite fertility cult. The Hebrew terms *qādēś* and *q^edēśâ* used to be translated as “shrine prostitutes”, but recent scholarship is sceptical of this. Whilst a female *q^edēśâ*, may have been sexually available (cf Gen.38), we cannot be certain of the male *qādēś* role. If, however, the *qādēś* involved a specific kind of male-on-male-sex, and if Lev.18 intended just to refer to such cultic activity, then why not explicitly say “To become a *qādēś* is an abomination”?

2.4 Conclusions

Leviticus abhorrence of incest, bestiality, adultery and male same-sex acts seems moral and not merely ceremonial – and especially on the male same-sex because the language is directly reminiscent of the creation accounts. In themselves, however, such Leviticus passages are no sure guide to the mind of God for all humanity. They *are*, after all, addressed to the covenant nation of Israel. Jesus-centred theology sees the OT through the perspective of Jesus and his apostles, and we need to consider how *they* viewed the creation accounts and the Leviticus strictures on such sexual matters.

3. Jesus' Teaching and Gay-Partnerships

3.1 Jesus and Morality

As we noted, Jesus neither abrogates “the Law” nor takes it “legalistically”. The central contention of Jesus and Paul with the Pharisees is not that Pharisees think you can “get to heaven” by “doing good works”; it is fundamentally about what marks a person off as being one of the people of God. To Christians, holy lifestyle is not about rules, but discerning the mind and heart of God and living in dynamic relationship with Him. Jesus says that food types cannot really “defile” anyone, and implies that the real meaning of the dietary laws is to point to the actual defilement that is a heart-thing and not a stomach-thing (Mk.7:15ff). But he continues:

What comes out of someone, that defiles them. For within, out of the human heart, come evil thoughts, adulteries (*moicheia*), fornications (*porneia*), murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness (*aselgeia*), an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these things come from within and defile a person.(Mk.7:21-3).

Current Western cultural fashion is to emphasize “inclusiveness”. Desmond Tutu claims that the gay issue is like apartheid because:

...black people were being made to suffer for something we could do nothing about – our very skins. It is the same with sexual orientation – it is a given. [Baird (2004) p.5]

We all, he says, have to love each other because we are all part of God's family. But this is misleading because even if we accepted that sexual *orientation* is “a given”, sexual *lifestyle* is not. Paul, of course, rightly says that in Christ there is no male or female, slave or free, Jew or Gentile. What neither Jesus nor Paul say is that any and every sexual lifestyle is equally “valid”. We are, of course, to love the adulterous, the fornicator or the licentious person – but this does not mean that their lifestyle is condoned or is “a purely

private matter". Jesus tells the adulterous woman who has just confessed him as Lord: "neither do I condemn you" – but also "go your way, *sin no more*."⁸¹ Gagnon (2001) pp.216ff shows that here "condemn" means "seek to execute", which would prevent redemption, it does *not* mean refusal to pronounce adultery to be wrong. Jesus "got close", in compassion, both to women guilty of sexual irregularity and to tax collectors who were often traitors guilty of extortion. His purpose was to redeem and transform – not to proclaim that sin (whether sexual or exploitative) was non-existent or unimportant.

Of the words Jesus uses:

"Moicheia" (adultery) is clearly forbidden in the OT – though in that context it means unfaithfulness of a wife to her husband.

"Porneia" is a very general word for sexual sin/deviation:

The word group can describe various extra-marital sexual modes of behaviour... eg homosexuality, promiscuity, paedophilia, and especially prostitution.⁸²

Often in the LXX *porneia* means "harlotry", though there is also reference to a woman who "plays the whore in adultery" (*porneia emoicheuthē*)⁸³ which is not necessarily to have sex for money but simply to be promiscuous. As we have noted *q^edēšā* (which seems to have involved sexual availability) was forbidden, but OT attitudes to common prostitutes (*zōnā*) and general promiscuity were more ambivalent. Proverbs warns men against the risks of taking either harlots or other extra-marital lovers but there is no clear Torah ruling against them.⁸⁴ There were no punishments in Torah for harlotry/fornication/promiscuity or licentiousness. Jesus, however, discerns that these, no less than adultery, are out of line with the heart of the Father and his intention for sexuality.

⁸¹ Jn.8:11

⁸² Reisser in Brown (1986) p.497. Jordan (2002) p.27 suggests that because the word is general we can virtually ignore it in Paul because it might be "metaphorical" - an exegesis of desperation.

⁸³ Sir.23:23 also Ez.16:15ff.

⁸⁴ Pr.5:3,20; see also Pr.2:16-19; 7:24-27.

If postmodern desire to be "inclusive" means we should ordain active-gays, should not the same apply to the promiscuous? Would not a promiscuous bishop encourage the promiscuous to attend church? Bishop Gene Robinson claims, there have always been *active-gay* bishops and so the current controversy about openly ordaining such a bishop is really just about "honesty".⁸⁵ But then should not the same apply to *promiscuous* bishops? The basic point is that Jesus is *not* saying that there is no such thing as "defilement", he is saying that defilement comes through things like *porneia*, *moicheia* etc rather than diet or ceremonial. A central question for us, then, is whether or not Jesus included *all* or only *some* kinds of same-sex acts as equivalent to *porneia*. The natural use of the word in his culture would have included all, but is there any other evidence?

3.2 Matthew 19:1-12 (& Mark 10:2-12)

In line with Jesus' general practice of interpreting and extending OT passages, the following incident is recorded:

The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason (*pasan eitian*)?" And he answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female' and said 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." They said to him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness [stubbornness] of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality (*mē epi porneia*), and marries another, commits adultery (*moichatai*). And whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." His disciples said to Him, "If such

⁸⁵ See the comments in http://www.nhepiscopal.org/BishopSearch/The_Rev_Canon_V_Gene_Robinson.htm

be the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” But he said to them, “All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born eunuchs from their mother’s womb, and there were eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it.”(Mt.19:1-12).

This passage is centrally relevant to the gay-partnership issue. This is not only because Jesus refers (as we shall see) to male-female as basic to marriage, but because a frequent modern Christian pro-gay-relationship argument runs something like: *Since Jesus forbade divorce but churches now accept into fellowship remarried divorcees, we should also now accept active gay partners.*⁸⁶

Both exegeses and hermeneutics on this passage vary significantly, and views on it include:

- (1) Marriage is literally indissoluble, and remarriage after divorce is always adulterous.⁸⁷
- (2) Jesus set up the ideal, but later it had to be relaxed (either by Paul in 1 Corinthians or in modern times).⁸⁸
- (3) Contextual understanding of Jesus’ words means that sometimes it is right for divorcees to remarry, and for remarried divorcees to be church leaders.⁸⁹

View (1) *looks* “Jesus-centred”, but cannot be applied convincingly.⁹⁰ It would imply, eg, that a former prostitute could repent and legitimately marry, and a wife-murderer could repent and legitimately remarry, but an abused and deserted wife would

⁸⁶ Eg in Balch (2000) by Toulouse p.34ff and Gudorf p.121, also John (1993) p.3.

⁸⁷ Effectively Heth & Wenham (1997), Cornes (1993), Williams (2000).

⁸⁸ Effectively Gagnon (2001) pp.202ff.

⁸⁹ Instone-Brewer (2002), Instone-Brewer (2003), Deesley (2000). This is also the position of my own Free Methodist Church.

⁹⁰ What follows is an outline explaining why this is so, but it is considered in *much* more detail in my *Christians, Divorce and Remarriage* (2006). See also Instone-Brewer (2003).

have to await the death of her absent, adulterous, now-remarried former husband before she herself could remarry and provide a father for her children.⁹¹ Jesus and Paul would both, in Jewish context, be horrified at this kind of “consistency”. It also contradicts Deut 24 where a man is forbidden take back a divorced original wife. David, moreover, having deserted Michal who remarried, the Scripture calls Palti her “husband” (2 Sam.3:14), and never again calls her David’s husband after he retook her (this latter act apparently according to *Mesopotamian* custom rather than biblical guidelines).⁹² In any case, advocates of (1) would seldom regard other churches with divorcees in the same light as those with gay-partners in leadership.

View (2) is inconsistent with a Jesus-centred hermeneutic.

For, then, consistent Jesus-centred hermeneutic to be adopted for sexuality and marriage, view (3) must be demonstrably in harmony with it.

Now all the references of Jesus to divorce (Mt.5:31-32; Mt.19:1-12; Mk.10.1-12; Lk.16:18) come within a particular linguistic context. The gospels are, of course, in Greek, and Jesus spoke Aramaic, so we do not have a verbatim report but a translation that conveys in the various accounts *his meaning*. The degree of explanation needed in conveying meaning, however, depends on readers’ assumptions and knowledge.⁹³ Take eg:

“Is it OK to go out with unbelievers?” asked the teenager. “No,” replied the Pastor, “it’s inadvisable.”

“Unbelievers”, in the context, means non-Christians, and this would need explaining eg in countries where it might mean “non-Muslims”. Furthermore, no one in our Western culture would take this reply “literally” to mean not to “go out” on a school coach trip, to play golf, or a fishing trip with a casual friend. The context implies “go out” = “enter a one-to-one affectionate boy-girl

⁹¹ Cf *Appendix 3*.

⁹² Ben-Barak explains this in Clines & Eskenazi (1991) – the presumption was that David’s desertion was involuntary.

⁹³ Instone-Brewer (2002) very helpfully analyses this.

relationship which could turn into courtship". It would be totally mistaken for someone to "take the reply literally", or assume that "go" and "out" must be meant in their most general senses, though in some cultures explanatory notes would be needed.

We should, then, always take seriously efforts to understand what NT words meant in their actual context and culture, and this is a part of any proper exegesis. In this instance, the question "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"⁹⁴ *could not* have been asked in its apparent "literal" sense by any contemporary Pharisees – it definitely *was* lawful under *any* interpretation of the OT then extant.⁹⁵ Mark's gospel was compiled in a Church era when there were numerous Jewish Christians, who knew very well what the background was, and what any such questioner was really asking. Matthew's gospel was compiled later, so in apparently reporting the same incident added various bits of explanation that were then essential.⁹⁶ We today need even more explanation of some technical terms to understand it properly.

Background

By Jesus' day, various understandings of the OT marriage-divorce laws were generally accepted by Jews. Gen.2:14 reads:

Therefore shall leave a man his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

As already noted, the LXX strengthens the monogamist implication:

⁹⁴ Mk.10:2.

⁹⁵ Mauser (in Brawley (1996) p.4) even claims that this "cannot reflect a genuine origin in Jesus' life" as such a question was "unthinkable from teachers of Jewish law" because already settled. Instone-Brewer (2002) ch.4 also looks at the Qumran materials which imply that even those of that more strict sect allowed some divorce.

⁹⁶ This explanation seems more plausible than that of Gagnon (2001) pp.200-2, that Matthew "liberalised" Mark's version as too severe. Gagnon seems over-anxious to shatter the "liberal" view of Jesus as easy on sexual ethics. See also my *Christians, Divorce and Remarriage* (2006).

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife and they **two** shall be one flesh. And the **two** were naked, both Adam and his woman, and were not ashamed.

Jesus' teaching is reported exactly in the words of the LXX because he endorses the (by then) Jewish understanding that monogamy was implied.

Instone-Brewer (2002) pp.103ff shows in detail that *all* rabbinical schools accepted that Ex.21:10-11 entitled a slave-wife to freedom *and divorce* if materially neglected (ie if denied adequate food, clothing, or conjugal rights to sex). This being so, they reasoned that a free-born wife could hardly be given *less* rights, and so material neglect entitled her to divorce and restoration of her dowry. This was enforceable through Jewish courts, and proven desertion was also seen as similar grounds. Paul (1 Cor.7:15) follows their judgement that in such cases the deserted divorcee is "free" ie can remarry.

However, rabbinicism also considered Deut.24:1-4:

When a man has taken a wife, and married her, and it happens that she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found in her uncleanness of a matter, and he writes a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand, and sends her out of the house, and if she leaves his house and becomes another man's...

Deuteronomy then goes on to say that if second husband divorces her, or dies, the original husband may not retake her. The "bill of divorce" was a protection for the woman, because, without it, she could not remarry. The prohibition about "retaking" was probably also to prevent abuse in a male-dominated society.

What, however, did "uncleanness of a matter" mean as grounds for divorce?

The Jewish Mishnah records a basic dispute thus:

The School of Shammai say: "A man should not divorce his wife unless he has found in her a matter of indecency, as it is said: For he finds in her an indecent matter." And the school of Hillel say,

“Even if she spoiled his dish, since it says: For he finds in her an indecent matter.”⁹⁷

Thus Instone-Brewer (2002) comments:

The Hillelites argued from Deuteronomy 24:1 that divorce could be on the [alternative] grounds of “any matter” or “indecency”; the Shammaites replied, “No, this text allows divorce *only* for ‘a matter of indecency’” (p.112).

Now Matthew has the Pharisees ask: “*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any matter?*” In context, they were asking Jesus whether he sided with Hillelites or Shammaites in interpreting Deut.24. They were not asking whether, eg there are sufficient grounds for someone to divorce based on the Ex.21 grounds of “material neglect”. The contemporary controversy concerned Deut.24, and they naturally asked Jesus whose side he was on. It is important to note that this use of “background” is not based on mere supposition, a vague hypothesis, or some kind of general scepticism that effectively empties Jesus’ words of any discernible meaning. The evidence as to what was the controversy is clearly there in Jewish writings that relate to the period, and without it the question ascribed to the Pharisees would make no sense at all in the known contemporary context.

Jesus’ First Response

We should note firstly here that Jesus is disinterested in legalism, but points them back beyond the laws to the mind and intention of God as revealed in Genesis. The primary issue is not “What am I allowed to do?” but “What was and is in the heart of God?”

Jesus’ view of marriage is:

- God made them male and female.
- So a man leaves his parents (a new family relationship is forming, the action is public and socially recognised).
- The husband and wife “cleave” (“cleaving” involves emotional and social identification - as with Ruth and Naomi in Rth.1:14).

⁹⁷ *m. Git.9:30* – cited eg in Instone-Brewer (2002) p.111.

- The “two” form a sexual as well as a social union – a “one flesh” relationship.
- There is no indication that the “one flesh” refers to childbearing, nor that childless couples are not properly married, nor that the primary purpose of marriage is to bear children (Jesus does not mention Gen.1:28, and later implies that staying unmarried and so childless is better than entering uncommitted marriage).
- The union is not only a human arrangement, but God has joined them in one. Humans *can* always terminate this God-made union, but (in the context of the question he has been asked) *should not*.

Jesus clearly accepts the divine inspiration of Gen.1-3, basing his view of marriage on it. Jesus is not concerned with the sociological/anthropological issue of what the passage might or might not have been focussing on in its original OT human context. Whether or not the divorce issue was in the mind of the human writers/compiler of Gen.1-3, Jesus is looking behind it to discern the intentions and heart of God.

To Jesus, “God” is not a human experience of spirituality, but a person with intentions. Jesus takes it that marriage is not merely a human institution, but a result of divine *intention*, and that not only two humans but also God is involved in any marital union. Jesus-centred theology, therefore, accepts this aspect of the creation accounts.

As noted, Jesus accepts the LXX understanding that Gen.2:27 implies “two” are involved in marriage – that polygamy was never intended by God. His later words in Mk.10:11 are: “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery *against her...*” In Jewish society a wife could initiate divorce, but, even if a court enforced it, officially the man divorced her.⁹⁸ Again, “adultery” in the OT was, strictly speaking, a crime against a man whose wife was unfaithful; since polygamy was permitted, a

⁹⁸ Salome was exceptional in utilising foreign practice to divorce her husband (see Josephus *Antiquities* 15:259-260).

husband taking another unattached woman was *not* adultery. Jesus not only assumes monogamy, but makes it all totally even-handed – a man can now commit adultery *against his wife* if he takes another woman.

We will return later to the male-female element of Jesus' "first response".

Intention and the Creation Accounts

Webb (2001) p.124 accepts that on divorce "the creation pattern carries a strong transcultural force" but is critical of a general view that "the creation material would yield an ongoing pattern and purpose". His concern is whether the account carried any force outside its immediate culture (ie is "transcultural"), but his analysis seems confused. He notes eg that Eden portrays man and woman as married but says that this is not a "tightly ordered paradigm for all of humanity to follow" and singleness is acceptable. This, however, confuses what is desirable from what is directed. It is as true today as in Eden that, as God said, "it is not *good* for humans to be alone"; but Jesus proclaimed that in a post-fall world some may (for whatever reason) be better celibate/single than entering what could prove to be a non-permanent marriage. Genesis *does* imply God's ideal, and Jesus-centred theology needs his authority to determine where that can be amended. However, Webb raises various reasons to doubt the "transcultural force" of the creation accounts. First, he claims the pattern of Adam being set to "till the earth" has "no binding implications for today". This is true only if one adopts an absurd literalism (analogous to arguing that since we don't wear sandals Jesus' feet-washing is no longer relevant); most Christians believe that we *do* have present ecological responsibility, and responsibility to work for food and shelter. Webb argues next that "presumably the mode of transportation within the garden was walking" and God "walked in the garden" but now we depart from this pattern. Again this is absurdly literalist, and in any case no *instruction* came from God about walking. On procreation, Webb notes that Gen.1:28 told them to "fill the earth and subdue it" whereas now we use birth control. But Gen.1:28 neither says "everyone have as many children as possible" nor that when the

earth *is* filled with humanity we should keep overfilling it (as though telling someone to "fill the kettle" meant continuing to add water long after it was full). Finally, he suggests that the Sabbath and length of working week is a "creation pattern with a significant cultural component". But the *creation* accounts give no command or indication to the man and woman that they should keep the seventh day – this comes later in the Mosaic Law, and Paul shows clearly in the New Covenant that it is the principle rather than the Mosaic specificity which is central. Perhaps all Webb is saying is that we need to apply the *principles* of the accounts rather than literal detail – but if this is all he means then it adds nothing to the obviously Jesus-centred approach.⁹⁹ Both Jesus and Paul clearly take the creation accounts as giving strong transcultural indications of the intentions and mind of God, but neither is crudely literalistic in his exegesis and hermeneutics of the texts and their implications.

Further Questions to Jesus on Divorce

Jesus has not really answered the Pharisees' question about divorce, so they return to the OT text concerned: "Why did Moses command to give her a bill of divorce and put her away?" The "command", of course, was not that anyone *should* divorce, but that *if* he did so then a bill of divorce must be given. What was the point (they ask) of the statute if the focus must be just on what God intended? So now Jesus asserts that the statute is in recognition of human hard-heartedness, not an indication of God's heart/desires. His words "from the beginning it was not so...." again go back to the creation texts – it is these (not the much later Mosaic Law) which Jesus sees as central to understanding God's intentions. Jesus is determined that the *starting point* should be the ideal God intended: marriage should be permanent and monogamous. However, he *does*, finally answer their question: "whoever divorces his wife, not for sexual immorality (*mē epi porneia*) (*μη επι πορνεια*)." Here Jesus does *not* use the

⁹⁹ Appendix 4 contains detailed critique of Webb's hermeneutics.

word for “adultery”. (*moicheia*)¹⁰⁰, but the more general word *porneia*. Mt.5.32 is even more explicit: “except for a matter of indecency” (*parektos logou porneias*) (*παρεκτος λογου πορνειας*). Instone-Brewer (2002) well argues that the reason this phrase is used is that it was the “most accurate translation” of the Deut.24:1 Hebrew phrase “indecent matter”. The LXX is not given because, although its translation was strictly accurate, its greater vagueness enabled the Hillelites to take their broader interpretation. The Shammaites took “indecency of a matter” to mean “matter of indecency” and this is the exact phrase used here. Instone-Brewer rightly concludes: “it is likely that the exception that occurs in Matthew... summarizes the Shammaite interpretation.”(p.159).

The phrase “divorces... and marries another (*kai gamēsē akkēn*) (*και γαμηση ακκη*)” occurs also in Lk.16:18 where Nolland (1993) comments:

...it is very likely that the subject here is divorce for the sake of remarriage... among the Greek fathers the linking *kai* [lit.“and”] was often understood in a final sense [that is as denoting purpose: so, “dismisses... in order to marry”]... (p.821).

The Mishnah reports of a later renowned Hillelite rabbi:

R.Aquiba says, Even if he found someone else prettier than she, since it says “And it shall be if she find no favour in his eyes.”¹⁰¹

By this time, of course, polygamy was not an option. Perhaps, then, even in Jesus' day, Hillelites were effectively allowing divorce just to marry a younger/prettier woman. The question to Jesus was not, for example: “Is it lawful to remarry a woman who was divorced five years ago because her husband mistreated her?” All rabbinical schools encouraged the remarriage of both young divorced women and young widows – and Pauline encouragement to widows is totally in line with this.¹⁰² The question was the

¹⁰⁰ This is conveniently defined in Rom.7:3, and we noted above in Mk.7 that Jesus says both *moicheia* and *porneia* come out of wickedness of heart.

¹⁰¹ *m. Git.*9:10 – again cited in Instone-Brewer (2002) p.112 and elsewhere.

¹⁰² Instone-Brewer (2002) p.125; 1 Tim.5.14.

Hillelite: “Is it lawful to divorce *on any matter?*”; it concerned someone *contemplating* divorce for “trivial” or selfish reasons eg to marry someone prettier - a situation all too common today.

Divorce Summary

The Pharisees begin by asking Jesus if he follows Hillelite views that divorce based on Deut.24:1 is permissible “for any matter”. Jesus initially insists the focus be on God's ideal, not what is “permitted”, and this is for monogamous lifelong commitment. Pressed further, Jesus asserts that on Deut.24:1 he takes the stricter Shammaite view, that a serious sexual misdemeanour is grounds but not just bad housekeeping, or to get a prettier wife. Jesus implies it is “even-handed”: a husband seeking a prettier wife, or wife arranging for divorce to marry a paramour, would both have unfaithful adulterous hearts. Jesus does not see procreation as the key point of marriage, but faithfulness in companionship. If someone cannot enter a commitment intending permanence then they should stay single and childless. Jesus is dealing with those considering divorce, or considering a permanent marriage commitment – he is not dealing with the issue of whether a divorcee can remarry. Paul in 1 Cor.7.10 reinforces the general command of Jesus not to divorce (“separate” is the same term used in Mt.19:6) purely from choice, but in 1 Cor.7:15 deals with the divorce grounds of Ex.21, which is not the issue in Mt.19. This is neither a “concession” nor a liberalising on the issues Jesus had dealt with.¹⁰³

Jesus-centred churches today, then, may rightly refuse a continuation of church leadership/membership to those who initiated divorce for unwarranted selfish reasons. Jesus-centred exegesis rejects divorce/remarriage “for any thing”, ie purely from personal preferences or “feel good” factors. With understanding, in context, of what Jesus and Paul are saying, there is, however, no inconsistency in accepting today *some* remarried divorcees into church leadership. A bishop must indeed (1 Tim.3:2) be an irrefragable “one woman man” (*mias gynaikos andra*); but such

¹⁰³ I deal with these issues in more detail in *Christians, Divorce and Remarriage*.

a committed present 'iš- 'iššā bond as God intended excludes neither eg remarried widowers, nor all those whose previous marriages were irrevocably terminated by unbelieving spouses.

The Gay Issue

Jesus' words in these passages remain central to our understanding of marriage, and none of them is now somehow "superceded". This being so, we now consider more closely Jesus' interpretive perspective on the creation accounts. Putting back the Hebrew terms behind his words:

Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male (*zākār*) and female' (*n^eqēbā*) and said 'For this reason a man ('iš) shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife('iššā), and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate... Moses... permitted you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning it was not so.

Jesus takes the creation accounts to indicate God's primeval intentions – these are universal for humankind, unlike the more specific ordinances of Moses. In this he strongly endorses divine intentionality. God made them...(God) said... God has joined... A marital bond is not a humanly designed thing, but a divine intention.

We already noted Jesus accepts the LXX "two", indicating monogamy was God's intention. He takes the marital bond as divinely intended to be permanent. Now note, **crucial for our theme**, that Jesus *deliberately* brings together Gen.1:27 (where humankind ('ādām) in the image of God is *male and female*) with Gen.2 (where humankind ('ādām) becomes husband-wife as experienced in the one-flesh knowing intimacy in later marriage). He deliberately joins the biological terms in Gen.1 with God's intentions for marriage in Gen.2.

Jesus does not particularly emphasize here marriage as a "covenantal relationship". The OT does compare God's covenantal relationship with Israel to marriage. As, however, God covenants with Judah as well, if covenant were the primary focus presumably this could be used to justify covenantal polygamy or group marriage. The actual Genesis concept is reflection of the

divine image, and the trinity is not usually seen as covenantal. Jesus' amplification, again, is not on a *covenant* between the man and the woman but the divine agency as they enter the cleaving one-flesh union.

Could Jesus have accepted that a sexual and social covenant between two males was a viable alternative to male-female cleaving, divinely "put together", one-flesh-union? With his *deliberate* linking of the male-female (which comes from the earlier Genesis passage) the answer must be no. To Jesus, marriage arose from God's design for *male-female*, monogamous, lifelong, divinely sealed, sexual and social union and intimacy.

Jesus takes the inspired creation accounts to imply that God's intention was for one-flesh sexual/marriage union to be lifelong between a male and a female. He does not *specifically* address the issue of homosexual-partnerships because he does not have to. As classic pro-gay-partnership figures like Scroggs admit, homosexual activity was rare amongst the Hebrews to whom Jesus was speaking, and certainly there was no rabbi or rabbinical school who would have argued that any kind of gay-partnerships were acceptable. There *was* a controversy about divorce grounds, and Jesus addresses it (ultimately endorsing the Shammaite side, but emphasizing the centrality of God's intention for marriage as permanent, monogamous and heterosexual). There was *no* controversy about the wrongness of gay-sex, so there was no need to explicitly address the issue. It is, in fact, all the more remarkable that Jesus *implicitly* does address it, by the deliberate juxtaposition of the male-female with the "two" leaving-cleaving.

How do commentators react?

So why is this passage so often ignored in dealing with the gay issues? Stott (1998) remarks:

It is significant that those who advocate same-sex partnerships usually omit Genesis 1 and 2 from their discussion, even though Jesus our Lord endorsed the teaching of those two passages.(p.43).

Since Jesus *deliberately* joins the male-female to the idea of union this is even more surprising than Stott implies. Very few modern writers on Christian attitudes to homosexuality seem to notice

what Jesus does¹⁰⁴ – most ignore the passages altogether, claiming that Jesus was silent on the issue.

Coleman (1980) concludes that Paul was clearly against all homosexual acts, but ignores Mt.19.

Amazingly, Scroggs (1983), in a close analysis of biblical texts relevant to the gay issue, ignores Mt.19.

Perry (1990) proclaims

What did Jesus say about homosexuality? The answer is simple. Jesus said nothing. Not one thing. Nothing! Jesus was more interested in love.(p.40).

John (1993) says:

In the New Testament, the Gospels have nothing to say about homosexuality. As far as we know, Jesus never mentioned it. The only other relevant texts in Scripture are in letters by Paul or attributed to him.(p.13).

Siker (1994) p.184 lists the “significant” texts, including Gen. 1-3 but not Mt.19.

Vasey (1995) omits it from his “seven texts” relevant to homosexuality.

Dallas (1996) lists passages that he feels forbid gay sex (ch.11), but omits Mt.19, preferring to make the unconvincing argument that Jesus *might have* addressed the issue in teaching not preserved.

The anti-gay-partnerships Grenz (1998) virtually ignores it, speaking of “Jesus’ silence”(p.60).

Wink (1999) likewise ignores it (except to assert Jesus’ supposed “contradiction” of the OT divorce laws).

Helminiak (2000) omits it from passages considered.

Doe (2000) says “Jesus says nothing about homosexuality” (p.36)

¹⁰⁴ Mauser (in Seow (1996) p.40) is one of very few.

Gagnon (2001), who rejects gay-partnerships, does consider Mt.19 – though unfortunately tends also to read a general anti-gay-sex attitude into some other passages where it is more dubious.¹⁰⁵

Jordan (2002) omits it from the “Scriptural Authorities” (cited as having “authority because they function in Christian communities as perennial topics”(p.46) rather than any generally intelligible meaning).

Bird, in Balch (2002) p.165, complains that Hays extracts from the Gen.1-3 passages divine intentionality not explicit in the original, without noting that Jesus did exactly this in Mt.19.

The Dominican Moore (2003) ch.5 looks at Gen.1 and Gen.2, and argues the latter teaches male dominance and social superiority. He makes no attempt to consider the Hebrew, and ignores that fact that from *'ādām* (humanity) is taken a side, leaving an *'iš* who is incomplete without the *îššā*. Mt. 19 is again ignored.

The compendious “official” Anglican work *Some issues in human sexuality: A guide to the debate* (2003) lists in section 4.3 “the New Testament Texts” seen as “forbidding homosexuality” (presumably it really means forbidding homosexual *acts*?). These are all Pauline – there is no reference to Jesus’ words on marriage.

Baird (2004) says “Jesus of Nazareth, it seems, had nothing to say about homosexuality.” (P.38)

Dawson (w2006) ignores the passage.

Hopper (w2004) also ignores it, proclaiming:

But you will look in vain for any teaching or guidance from Jesus on the issue of homosexuality, whether positive or negative.

White (w2006) states:

“Jesus says nothing about same-sex behavior.”

Clements (w2006) ignores the “male-female” in the passage, instead arguing:

¹⁰⁵ Gagnon’s book is useful, and he demolishes some of the critical reconstructionist views of Jesus, though his understanding on the divorce pronouncements seems less insightful than Instone-Brewer’s.

Jesus indicated that divorce was an example of the kind of pragmatic concession that is sometimes necessary in such an imperfect world (Matthew 19:8). It is at least arguable that homosexuality should be regarded in a similar way.

Ironically, Jesus *actually* says that those unable to enter lifelong male-female commitment should stay celibate – not that eg gay-partnership or caring promiscuity make a good second best. Jesus here forbids divorce (whether consensual or otherwise) to take another *woman*, and both Baptist minister Roy Clements and Episcopalian priest Gene Robinson left wives to take gay-partners.

Of course sometimes divorce is the “least of the evils” (as for Abraham and Hagar), but this always relates back to God’s ideal of heterosexual monogamy.

Celibacy

Anyone entering marriage has to recognise that God meant it to be permanent. The disciples find this scary, and suggest (Mt. 19:10) that in this case it might be better to stay single. Jesus’ reply is in terms of “eunuchs”. We have already noted that Jesus-centred exegesis cannot be “literalist”.¹⁰⁶ As usual, then, Jesus’ language is symbolic; the “eunuch” is an emphatic way of speaking of someone totally celibate. It is therefore odd for anyone to suggest that Jesus never says that unmarried people should be celibate¹⁰⁷ – his meaning is very clear. Celibates may be disinclined from birth, forced into it by decisions of others, or those who “have made themselves ‘eunuchs’ for the kingdom of heaven’s sake.” Paul later speaks of singleness as a gift, but this is *not* Jesus’ emphasis here.¹⁰⁸ What he is saying is that there are those who do not feel able to enter a male-female, monogamous, permanent marital union, and so *voluntarily* embrace a celibate lifestyle for the sake

¹⁰⁶ In spite of the modern avowed “literalism” in some church sectors, Jesus’ modern followers include few literal eunuchs or one-eyed men (cf Mt.5:29). Avowals aside, we all actually recognise that he frequently spoke symbolically.

¹⁰⁷ Courage Trust (<http://www.courage.org.uk/articles/change.shtml>) states: “In fact, insistence upon celibacy has no biblical support.”

¹⁰⁸ Courage Trust also claims that “they” (Jesus and Paul) “are clear, singleness is a gift”. Actually Jesus says no such thing, to him it is a conscious choice.

of God’s kingdom. Jesus neither offers other alternatives (like caring-promiscuity or gay-partnership) nor discusses whether this is “unfair”. His options are male-female marriage or celibacy.

Contrast with diet issues

Jesus points us back beyond Moses to the creation accounts. This guides us as we consider what is basic/moral and what merely ceremonial and local. In Genesis, God pronounced that all his created things were good;¹⁰⁹ and in the new beginning with Noah he said, “Everything that lives and moves will be food for you”.¹¹⁰ The later Mosaic prohibitions were not part of some original natural order laid down by God, but were often primarily (like, for example, circumcision itself) object lessons on holiness. When Jesus taught that in *themselves* foods could not defile, he was simply going back beyond the Mosaic Law to the more fundamental revelation of God’s designs in Genesis.¹¹¹ The Pauline corpus makes the connection even more explicit, objecting to those who order others “to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving For *everything God created is good* and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving”.¹¹² The Mosaic dietary laws, given for a particular purpose to Israel, were not based on anything fundamental in God’s stated design in Genesis. They are not, therefore, to be enforced in the New Covenant. But it must be emphasised that the removal of Jewish restrictions in the New Covenant is not simply based on a principle of “anything goes”. It is based on a return to what was fundamental in God’s design, as stated in Genesis. Applying the same principle, as Jesus does, to sexuality, that design was for monogamous, lifelong, male-female, marriage. Jesus links God’s creation of humankind to God’s intention that the union of two in male-female should make up one complete human unit. It is difficult to see how a union of two males or two

¹⁰⁹ Gen. 1:31.

¹¹⁰ Gen. 9:1

¹¹¹ Mark 7:1-23.

¹¹² 1 Tim. 4:3, 4

females could do this. A married couple are a complete human unit, a single person might be seen (in a sense) as incomplete, but a homosexual "marriage" can only be (in the technical sense) a monstrosity. Within the framework of monogamous, heterosexual marriage there is, of course, great scope for variety and human creativity; but Jesus took this framework as divinely laid down.

3.3 Matthew 8:5-13 & Luke 7:2-10

This is an account of a healing by Jesus of a Roman centurion's "pais". The LGCM website claims that Matthew's use of "pais" (=child), and Luke's use of both "pais" and the more general word "doulos" (=slave) indicates a slave-boy used for sex by the Centurion, and that "If this story does mention a gay relationship, then it confirms that Jesus was less interested in what people did rather than in their faith and love." Helminiak (2000) p.129 concludes it was "most likely" that the centurion and his slave boy were sexual lovers, and that Jesus' actions show that he was "not disturbed by the homogeneity of his day" where Roman householders "would use their slaves for sex". Hopper (w2004) is similar, referring to: "the centurion's surprising use of the Greek 'entimos' [precious/loved] and 'pais' [child/son] to refer to a male slave".

Are such claims credible?

Actually, the word "pais" is a very general word. It can mean simply a child (Mt.2:16; 17:18; 21:15; Lk.2:43; 8:51-54 (of a girl); 9:42). It can mean a son (Jn.4:51 compare 4:47). It can mean a servant (Lk.15:26, Acts 4:25), or not be clear whether it is son or servant (Acts 3:13; 3:26; 4:27; 4:30). There was nothing unusual in the centurion's use of "pais" to refer to a servant. Any suggestion, moreover, that its predominant meaning to a gospel writer would be a boy-slave used for pederastic sexual purposes is absurd. Likewise "entimos" is a general word for value used eg in Lk.14:8; Phi.2:29 and of Jesus in 1 Pet.2:4 & 6. There is no implication of erotic love or sex. It seems bizarre for Hopper to suggest, as he seems to, that a man commended by Jesus for his faith could have such regard and love for a young slave only if he were having sex with him. Jesus would surely not condone the

forcing by a Gentile centurion of paedophilic sex on a young slave boy, commending that centurion for his faith-relationship with the Hebrew God.

3.4 Conclusions

Jesus puts love of God and neighbours above all, and eschews legalism. The resulting transformation in ethical priorities does not, however, mean abolishing sexual ethics, but a return to God's creation intentions. For Jesus, sex is specifically restricted to committed, monogamous, *male-female* marriage.

4. Paul's Teaching & Gay-Partnerships

4.1 1 Corinthians 5-9.

With Paul, as with Jesus, creation accounts are more basic than the Mosaic laws for understanding God's intentions, and OT concepts and ideas are viewed through the cross.

Corinth was a Greek seaport, famous not for philosophy but for licentiousness and worship of Aphrodite. Its church was divisive and unruly, its sexual morality was patchy, and its worship services were a shambles. Paul brings them a vision of wholeness, order, and harmony in his letters.

Jesus took the OT Temple to symbolise the "real" Temple of his body,¹¹³ and in 1 Cor.3:16 and 6:15 Paul raises as a key theme their part in this Temple-body of Christ. In 5:1-2 he picks up a part of the Lev. 18 holiness code: the issue of incest. In 5:6-8 he offers the Christian vision of Passover: the "leaven" is to be cleaned out and Christ is our Paschal lamb.

Paul confirms incidentally our understanding that intimacy and bonding rather than procreation is seen as central to the "one-flesh" sexual union. In 1 Cor.6:16 he cites the exact LXX of Gen.2:27 "the two shall be one flesh", implying that sexual intimacy in itself with a harlot creates this "one flesh" bonding, it is nothing to do with procreation. Paul's words are, of course, full of nuances and word-plays – the contrast of being "one flesh" with a harlot and being "one spirit" with the Lord etc.

In 1 Cor. 7 Paul continues the theme but turns to specific responses to their letter:

Now for the matters about which you wrote: "It is a good thing for a man not to have physical intimacy with a woman/wife¹¹⁴." On the contrary, on account of cases of physical intimacy, let

¹¹³ Jn.2:21.

¹¹⁴ The Greek *gynaikos* means either "woman" or "wife".

each (man) hold to his own wife, and let each (woman) hold to her own husband. Let the husband give to his wife what is due to her, and similarly the wife what is due to her husband.

Thiselton (2000) p.497 argues convincingly that this is the meaning of the text here, and Paul is rebutting their suggestion that celibacy is good even for marrieds. As the rest of the passage makes clear (whether or not one accepts Thiselton's arguments) Paul is totally against "marital celibacy": sexual abstinence within marriage should be only at times when (by mutual agreement) both partners also forgo food in prayer and fasting. In this he is in line with general Jewish teaching (though is extreme in his gender equality – the wife "owns" the husband as much as *vice versa*) and totally against later sexual teaching by Tertullian, Augustine etc. Even this kind of agreed abstinence is, he says, a concession – not obligatory.¹¹⁵ Paul later gives some personal advice that in view of the present troubles the unmarried are better off because unburdened with cares and less distracted. However, Paul never identifies celibacy as a more exalted spiritual state, nor suggests that "priests" should be celibate males (the church knew only priesthood of *all* believers, and male leaders were recommended to be "one-woman-men" in 1 Tim.3:2). He never suggests that marital sex is anything but sanctified (cf 1 Thess.4:4) and to be mutually enjoyed.

Paul's focus is to be free to follow God's calling – whether to marry or stay single – mirroring Jesus' teaching on choosing celibacy for the kingdom of heaven's sake.

1 Cor.7:10-11 is agreed by "virtually all modern writers"¹¹⁶ to concern marriage between Christians:

To those who are married I give this charge, which is not mine but the Lord's: a wife should not separate from her husband (but if a separation occurs, she is to remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband); and a husband is not to divorce his wife.

¹¹⁵ That the "concession" is abstinence not sex is convincingly argued by Thiselton (2000) p.511, Witherington (1995) p.175 etc.

¹¹⁶ Thiselton (2000) p.523.

Divorce in “Roman” Corinth would be frequent and easy. Seneca says many Roman women:

...reckon their years not by the number of consuls but by the number of their husbands. They leave home in order to marry and marry in order to divorce.¹¹⁷

Paul here addresses the “pre-divorce” situation, where Christian married people are thinking about divorce – possibly to marry someone else. The most obvious way to take his words is as a reference to Jesus’ teachings later embodied in the gospel passages already considered. Obviously Paul is not here setting down a complete guide to all circumstances – as the rest of the passage will show. He does not deal eg with a situation where there is cruelty, where permanent desertion has already taken place, or where a previous partner has remarried. He speaks to married couples thinking of divorce/separation. He has no distinct-from-divorce permanent state of “separation”, and he says it should not happen, using the same word as Jesus’ injunction that man should *not* separate. Basically, he speaks in a “pre-divorce” or “contemplating-divorce” situation and (like Jesus) says “Don’t!”

Paul recognises, however, that there are different circumstances in which pastoral judgement is needed. Many became Christians after contracting non-Christian marriages. In Paul’s NT thinking the OT “holiness” principle is transformed – they are not “polluted” by contact with unbelieving partners, rather the unbelievers are (in a sense) made “holy” (or “set apart in a special way”) by contact with them. A marriage is, of course, to Paul not dependent on any particular religious ceremony (often Romans had none) but on the intent – and pagan marriages are just as “valid”. Christians should not divorce spouses merely because unbelievers, but he adds that “if the unbelievers depart” then the Christian is “not bound”. This is his application of the Jewish understanding of the Torah instructions in Ex.21 applied to slave and free wives – accepted as we have seen by both Hillelites and Shammaites – that such intentional desertion was valid grounds

¹¹⁷ Seneca (4-65 AD) *De Beneficiis* 3:16:2.

for divorce (and remarriage). To be “not bound” must mean (as to be “free” in 7:39) free *to remarry*. What else could it mean? It cannot mean “not bound to live with them” as they have left anyway and the rift (presumably) is permanent and irreconcilable (perhaps eg because the other partner has remarried).¹¹⁸

In 1 Cor.5.1-5 Paul is shocked to find incest among them. In this Paul endorses the Leviticus holiness code (Lev.18:8,20:11). He does not, of course, call for the death penalty as Lev.20:11 instructs, because this is the New Covenant where the focus is redemptive. But he does urge them to deal with this sin, which even “the nations” abhor. Was Paul right? After all, Jesus nowhere *specifically* forbids a man to eg marry his widowed stepmother. There is nothing in the creation accounts to *specifically* forbid such incest. There is, in a sense, much less “backup” for Paul here than on the gay-sex issue and perhaps the incestuous relationship here was consensual and “felt right”. But if we really are to look at the OT through NT perspective then surely we have to accept that Paul *was* right? His “inclusivity” in Christ did not imply accepting just *any* consensual and affectionate sexual lifestyle.

In various places Paul uses customary literary devices eg “household codes” and “lists of vices”. 1 Cor. has three “vice-lists” of such as “will not inherit the Kingdom of God;”¹¹⁹ 1 Tim. contains another:

<u>1 Cor 5:10</u>	<u>1 Cor 5:11</u>	<u>1 Cor 6:9-10</u>	<u>1 Tim 1:9-10</u>
<i>Pornoi</i>	<i>Pornoi</i>	<i>Pornoi</i>	Unruly
Greedy	Greedy	Idolaters	Impious
Robbers	Idolaters	Adulterers	Sinful
Idolaters	Slanderers	<i>Malakoi</i>	Unholy
	Drunkards	<i>Arsenokoitai</i>	Profane
	Robbers	Thieves	Fornicators
		Greedy	<i>Arsenokoitais</i>

¹¹⁸ This is examined in much more depth in my *Christians, Divorce and Remarriage*.

¹¹⁹ 1 Cor.6:9-10.

Drunkards	Menstealers
Slanderers	Liars
Robbers	Perjurers
	Parricides
	Matricides
	Menkillers

As noted, *pornoi* is a general word for the sexually immoral.

The word “*malakoi*” literally means “soft”, though in context means effeminate men. Gagnon (2001) pp.306ff shows that the term can neither be restricted to male prostitutes (as Scroggs) nor made to mean virtually any effeminacy (as Martin). In Greek culture pederasts were usually attracted to the “feminine” charms of young boys, and the latter would sometimes seek to extend their years of desirability through hair removal and dress. They might or might not be male-prostitutes, slave or freeborn. Since modern gay Christians, however, are not usually advocating such lifestyles, we may leave this word for now.

Of more interest is the meaning of the word *arsenokoitai*. As noted, Lev.18 and 20 used a very general term for “lie” with a male. In the LXX this is faithfully translated as “bed a male” by *arsen* (male) and *koitē* (bed), so in 20:13:

...whoever shall lie with a man as with a woman/wife (*meta arsenos koiton gynaikos*)

Scroggs (1983) rightly notes that Jewish Rabbinic scholars made “lying with a male” from Lev 20:13 into a Hebrew noun and:

...this Hebrew expression lies behind the rare Greek word, *arsenokoitēs* (lit lying of, with a male) in 1 Cor 6.9.(p. 83).¹²⁰

The rabbinic discussion in *b. Sanh.54a* (based on this Hebrew noun) assumes the passive partner may be an adult or a minor – so “lying of/with a male” (Heb: *miškab zākūr*) was *not* restricted to

¹²⁰ Cf also Gagnon (2001)pp.314ff. The rabbinic references are *b. Sanh.54a*; *b.Sabb.17b*; *b.Sukkah 29a*; *y.Ber. 9.50.13c*.

pederasty, but included any kind of male-on-male sex. Paul was familiar both with rabbinical Jerusalem Judaism (having studied under Gamaliel), and also with the Greek LXX, which he can cite and (where needed) correct.¹²¹ In his list of vices he *deliberately* takes the noun-form of the rare verbal compound used in Lev.20:13, the exact Greek translation of the Hebrew noun coined by the rabbis to describe any kind of male gay-sex.¹²²

So let us recap:

- In 5:1-7 Paul endorses the Lev.18:8; 20:11 incest laws on sex with stepmothers.
- In 6:9 he uses the noun of the LXX term *arsenos koiton* from Lev.20:13 as amongst the “unrighteous” who will not enter the Kingdom of God – a term rare in other literature but the Hebrew form of which rabbis made into a noun from this verse to indicate *all* forms of male same-sex activity.
- In 6:16 he cites the exact LXX of Gen.2:24 “the two shall be one flesh”.
- In 7:2 he says that other than celibacy “let each (man) have his own woman/wife (*gynaika*) and each (woman) her own man/husband (*andri*) – a possible reference again to Gen.2 where the LXX has the man “cleave to his *gynaika*”.

It makes, then, no sense to take *arsenokoitai* here to imply other than the LXX and general rabbinical meaning. This is no de-contextualised isolated “proof text”, but part of a whole pattern of teaching on human sexuality given both by Jesus and by Paul. Both imply a choice between either permanent male-female marriage or (if one feels unable for whatever reason to enter this kind of relationship or has the calling to facilitate greater concentration on Christian work) celibacy.

¹²¹ 2 Cor.11:22; ; Phil 3:2-6; Gal 1:13-14; Acts 22:3; 26:4ff; 23:6. See Witherington (1998) ch.2, Hengel (1991) pt.2; Hengel & Schwemer (1997) pp.7-10 etc.

¹²² For the generality of their application see eg Dunn (1991).

There is, remember, *no* word in Greek or Hebrew for “homosexual” (which in English means same-sex attraction), and Paul never makes any comment on homosexuals. The issue is not the inclination but the sex-act, and the context is of lifestyle. Of course Paul implies neither that someone who has told one lie nor that someone who ever had a same-sex partner is irrevocably banned from the Kingdom. The issue is someone who adopts the *unrepentant lifestyle* of lying, fornicating, or a man “sleeping with” another male as with a woman/wife.

But if the focus is on the act/lifestyle, yet it must surely be general in scope. To Paul, as it seemed with Jesus, the “one flesh” intimacy was to be expressed in monogamous, faithful, male-female marriage: “each husband a wife and each wife a husband”. Casual sex (*porneia*), or a man “sleeping with” another man as with a woman/wife (*meta arsenos koiton gynaikos*), are lifestyles which exclude a person from the Kingdom of God. Nowhere in Paul is it ever suggested that issues eg of food and drink, Sabbaths, head coverings, or other purely symbolic or cultural issues are this serious.¹²³

Pro-gay-partnership reactions

Pro-gay theologians have here either to argue Paul is “out of date”, or, rather implausibly, that he only has *certain kinds* of gay-sex in mind.

Scroggs (1983) pp.107-9 basically argues thus:

- (1) The term “*arsenokoitēs*” does not appear anywhere in earlier Greek literature, other than in verbal form in the the LXX of the OT Lev.20:13 where the word has a completely general meaning of “have sex with a man as with a woman”.
- (2) The rabbis took the verbal form of the Hebrew Lev 20:13 (faithfully rendered in the LXX) to make into a noun indicating someone who practised *any* form of homosexual act

¹²³ Fee and Stuart (1993) p.72 says: “Paul’s sin lists never contain cultural items”.

- (3) *Malakoi* are often associated in Greek culture with pederasts or *paiderastai*.
- (4) So, therefore, when the rabbi Paul (who knew both Hebrew and the LXX) used the term *arsenokoitai* (which is the noun form of the LXX term used in Lev.20:13) rather than *paiderastai* after *malakoi* in his list, he really meant to restrict it to pederasty rather than apply the term to all forms of male-on-male sex act.¹²⁴

Even on a textual basis, without contextual consideration, this is breathtakingly unconvincing – although specifically latched onto by others eg Moore (2003) p.110. If Paul really meant to refer to “a very specific form of pederasty” why in the name of all reason did he totally mislead his readers by using the most general word for male gay-sex he could think of, a rare term directly related to the LXX Lev.20:13 (which, as Scroggs admits, Jews took as a general ban) rather than the word “pederasty” which was what he meant?

Pro-gay theologians often try to argue on flimsy grounds that the term is “uncertain”, as we now briefly explore (cf more detail in *Appendix 4*).

Martin, in Brawley (1996) pp.117ff claims the LXX Lev.20:13 irrelevant because the words *arsên* and *koitēs* are used but “*not joined*” (odd since LXX and early Epistle copies were in Greek Uncials which rarely have spaces between words). Martin argues that “really” *arsenokoitai* means hetero or homosexual “economic exploitation by means of sex”. He argues solely on *where* in later lists the term appears – but even then has to use special pleading and ignore some of them. Countryman (1980) pp.200ff argues that in Timothy *arsenokoitais* “really means” prostitutes, because it is next to *pornoi*, and believes it involved ingratiating greed. Scroggs (1983) pp.118ff, in contrast, argues that in Timothy the *pornoi* are the male prostitutes (though this is not its general meaning in the LXX or NT) and the *arsenokoitais* are those who use them.

¹²⁴ Philo (*De legibus specialibus* 3:7) pairs *paiderastai* and *paidika*, terms Paul could well have used had this been what he meant.

Hopper (w2004) accepts that in using the term *arsenokoitais* “Paul is pointedly referring back to Leviticus 20:13”, but takes Paul (even though he is using a general term for male-on-male sex) to be writing *only* about abusive Corinthian gay-sex (presumably pederasty?). Boswell (1981) pp.341-353 argues that the first part of *arsenokoitai* is subjective, even though in Leviticus “*arsen*” (male) is definitely the object *not* the subject. Dawson (w2006) notes it is “odd” that Paul did not use eg *paideraisteia*, but implausibly suggests (in view eg of Heb.13:4) that *koitas* implies excess. None of these flimsy arguments raise any real doubt about its general meaning.

Basically, as eg Field (1979)p.22 points out, there were various other more specific words Paul could have used (*paideraistēs*, *paidothoros* or *arrenomanēs*) but he used the most general possible for male-on-male sexual activity.

4.2 Romans 1:26-29.

Paul, like Jesus, sees God's stated intentions in Genesis, rather than the Mosaic Law, as the most fundamental guidelines for marriage.¹²⁵

In Romans Paul systematically works out his Messiah-centred theology, which has both similarities to and differences from the basic Pharisaic eschatology he formerly held. The first eight verses set out this Messiah-centred theme, followed by personal greetings in 1:9-15. We noted how the “New Perspective” has shown us Paul was not combating a view that people could earn “heaven” independently of grace (which no Jew believed), but arguing that the faith-life (rather than works of the Law like circumcision, diet and Sabbaths) was the basic indication that someone was one of the people of God. In Rom.1:16 he proclaims he is not ashamed of the Christian gospel because it brings a new power for anyone (Jew or Gentile) living a faith-life, and it demonstrates the righteousness of God as based on the faithfulness of Jesus-Messiah.¹²⁶ Rom.1:16-18, then, contrasts two sets of

¹²⁵ Eg Eph.5:31.

¹²⁶ These ideas in Romans are explored in Marston & Forster (2000) pp.40ff.

people: those who live the faith-life (1:16) and those who “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” and experience divine wrath (1:17f). Paul's early chapters demonstrate that *both* groups were always represented amongst *both* Jews and Gentiles. Thus 2:7-8 and 2:9-10 reflect 1:17-18: there have always been Gentiles on whose hearts God has (as it were) written the true meaning of his Torah (Law), and who have lived the faith-life.

The basic attributes of God (eternal power and divinity) have been obvious since the creation of the world by the things he has made. Those, then, who suppress the truth, are those who refuse to worship God and their hearts become darkened. Putting anything else above God is idolatry, and so:

Therefore also God gave them up in the passions (*epithymia*) of their hearts to uncleanness (*akatharsian*) to dishonour their bodies among themselves, who exchanged (*metēllaxan*) the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served created things (*ctisei*) rather than the Creator (who is blessed to the ages, amen!). Because of this God gave them up passions (*pathē*) of dishonour. For even their females (*thēleiai*) exchanged the natural (*physikēn*) use (*chrēsin*) to the use against nature (*para physis*). Likewise also the men (*arsenes*), leaving the natural (*physikēn*) use of the woman (*thēleias*), burned in their lusts (*orexei*) for one another, men (*arsenes*) with men (*arsesi*) committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the due penalty of their errors...

Gagnon (2001)pp.252ff seems to see Rom.1.18ff as about “universal human sinfulness”, rather than about just one stream of humanity.¹²⁷ If, however, we take Gagnon's generalised “humans” to mean those in the unrighteous stream Paul identifies, Gagnon well presents the basic thread of Rom.1:19-32 in “stages” which are not chronological but idealised:

Stage 1: God's invisible transcendence and majesty is visibly manifested in creation (1:19-20).

¹²⁷ This may be bound up in a pre-New-Perspective view of Paul. Thus his view of Rom.2:26-29 (p.257) as Gentile “believers in Christ” is un-contextual and very unlikely – were it true then Paul's entire point in this section (that faith-life has never been restricted to Jews) would be undermined.

Stage 2: Humans knowingly and thus foolishly “exchange” the true God for idols (1:21-23, recapitulated in 1:25 and 1:28a).

Stage 3: God “gives over” humans to their desires/passions and to an “unfit mind” which aim at self-degrading and self-destructive forms of conduct (1:24, 26, 28).

Stage 4: Many humans then dishonoured themselves by “*exchanging*” natural intercourse for manifestly self-degrading and unnatural intercourse (1:26-27) and engaged in some form of “improper” and evil conduct (1:28-31).

Stage 5: The self-degrading evil behaviour to which God “gives over” humans, ends in the ultimate recompense of death.

It seems odd that some argue that here “Paul does not refer to the creation narratives”.¹²⁸ Paul specifically refers to the creation of the world and the “things made”(1:20), and contrasts God with the created things (1:23) in terms reminiscent of the animal types in Gen.1. Rational reflection on nature indicates that there is a creator-God, and those who suppress this put something else in God's place (idolatry). For anyone accepting there is a creator, rational reflection would indicate that this God designed a sexual complementarity of male-female both in genitalia and in procreation terms. The rejection of the creator-God, therefore, can lead (and in general Gentile society apparently did lead) to a different use of human sexuality – ie to same-sex acts. Gagnon may well be right in suggesting that Paul begins with the same-sex activity (from which he goes on to list more general vices) because it was a most obvious example of suppressing what one could deduce from the creation about the intentions of a creator-God. Ungodly lifestyles result in present experience of “wrath”, which will culminate ultimately in judgement – even though human philosophies may construct ethical apologetics for immoral behaviour (1:32).

Paul here does not deal with “homosexuality” ie with the inclination or sexual orientation as such. It is because strong desires turned to lust and then to *lifestyles involving illicit sex* that

¹²⁸ Nissenen (1998) p.107. We already noted Paul's strong creation references in 1. Cor. in connection with sexuality.

he is critical, and he refers to both female and male same-sex acts of intimacy.

Paul's Meaning of Natural/Unnatural

The suppression of truth in unrighteousness led to a focus on the created things (*ktisei*) rather than the Creator, and the created order (*ktisei*) itself groans in bondage awaiting redemption (8:21). Sin's reign has been broken by the death of Jesus the Messiah, and the resurrection life is in the one “New Man” or “New Humanity” which is the risen Christ (6:5-6). Paul believes, however, that our present psychologically driven bodies (*soma psychikon*) will always remain imperfect but will be resurrected as spiritually controlled bodies (*soma pneumatikon*).¹²⁹ The idea, then, that he would (like some Stoics) derive ethics from physical nature itself (*ktisis*) or from human nature, is absurd.

Paul also diverges from Platonism. Unlike, say, Philo, who was much influenced by Middle-Platonism, Paul's fundamental eschatology and world-view was that of a Jewish Pharisee - though transformed to be Christo-centric. Thus Paul, unlike Platonists, is not waiting for his spirit to be released from the bondage of the body, but for the resurrection of *soma pneumatikos*. Plato believes that good Laws can re-form human nature; Paul knows that Laws are insufficient because they just tell us what we are doing wrong - we need a redeeming Saviour and the power of the Holy Spirit. To Plato, the God/gods/Good is an abstraction to be honoured; to Paul God is a person to be experienced. Plato thinks the ultimate city should be established through human wisdom; Paul knows it needs divine intervention. In *Appendix 4* we explore Plato's views on gay-sex issues, but it cannot be assumed that Paul simply adopts Middle-Platonist views on “natural”.

Various other implausible views of the Romans language are in *Appendix 4*, but we need to ask what *does* Paul mean by “*contrary to nature*”? Gagnon (2001) p.255 rightly agrees with Hays (1996) p.387, that it concerns what God *intended*, not just what *is*.

¹²⁹ 1 Cor.15:44.

However, Gagnon also rightly criticizes Hays for seemingly expecting “what ought to be” to be what is “revealed through stories and laws of Scripture”. Certainly Scripture reveals God’s intention, but the whole point of this part of Romans is that something of both God and his creation intention can be known through right reflection on our physical world independently of Scripture. Gagnon, then, sees as paramount the “material shape of the created order” rather than custom and culture. He says:

...by fittedness I mean not only the glove-like physical fit of the penis and vagina, but also clues to the complementarily provided by procreative capacity and the capacity for mutual and pleasurable stimulation. These clues make it clear that neither the anus, the orifice for excreting waste products, not the mouth, the orifice for taking in food, are complementary orifices for the male member. For Paul it was a simple matter of commonsense observation of human anatomy and procreative function that even pagans, otherwise oblivious to God’s direct revelation in the Bible, had no excuse for not knowing.(p.254).

What, however, is important is that *against nature* and *according to nature* do not simplistically imply that whatever exists must be right. The various nuances of the word “nature” (*physis*) (*φύσις*) elsewhere in Romans do not fit an exclusively biological focus, but also concern rational human culture.

Paul uses the phrase “Jews by nature” (Gal.2:15) and “uncircumcised by nature” (Rom.2:27). This is sometimes taken to mean by genetic descent, but of course everyone (Jew or Gentile) is born uncircumcised; whether one is a “Jew by nature” or “uncircumcised by nature” is an issue of culture not genetics. A Gentile full-convert to Judaism, moreover, is also a “Jew by nature” in Pauline terms – it concerns what someone *is*, not just their birth origins. Amazingly, one of the standard reference works,¹³⁰ arguing that *para physis* means “by descent”, cites to “show” this Wis.13:1:

¹³⁰ Brown (1986) ii.p.660.

Surely vain are all men by nature, who are ignorant of God, and could not out of the good things that are seen know him that is; neither by considering the works did they acknowledge the workmaster, but deemed either fire or wind...(etc)...to be the gods...

This clearly is not about genetic descent, but about a failure to recognise the Creator properly through the creation – and ideas from the book of Wisdom are reflected in Paul’s Rom. 1:19-20, as elsewhere in his epistles. The “by nature” refers to what they *are* – which results from a failure to infer the Creator from the created, not from their genetic descent. Likewise when Paul speaks of doing right “by nature” (Rom.2:14) it is not genetic descent but a wider nexus of genetics, culture, and freewill decision which makes up what a person becomes. In 1 Cor.11 Paul deals with a complex situation, where the city treasurer, slaves, husbands and wives, Jews and Gentiles (perhaps with some ex-courtesans (*heterai*)) are meeting together in a totally unprecedented love-feast communion meal and (apparently somewhat chaotic) worship gathering. With Paul’s counter-cultural views on the importance of allowing women to minister in church (by praying and prophesying), he says something about them wearing the sign of their own authority to do so, to indicate that this is not a rebellious form of “women’s lib” but an entirely acceptable and proper function.¹³¹ Paul is well aware (cf 11:6) that it is a culturally based affair, and we can infer that since it involves symbolism (which is important but secondary) different cultural situations may indicate different practices.¹³² But in 1 Cor.11:14-15 Paul says:

Does not nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it is a disgrace, but for a woman it is her glory, for her long hair is given to her for a covering.

¹³¹ The Greek “authority” (*exousian*) means the person’s own authority not someone else’s.

¹³² See Marston (1980) Appendix 2. Thiselton (2000) examines this thoroughly.

Paul obviously knew that most men *can* physically grow long hair. True that male-pattern-baldness often occurs in respected elders,¹³³ but this in itself would not make long hair “a disgrace”. By “nature”, then, he does surely not mean mere physical science or biology, but that complex of the physical and culture which generally prevails: “the way things are”.

Again, when Paul speaks (Rom 11:21) about grafting back a wild olive onto a cultivated olive *para physin* (contrary to nature) he certainly does not mean that this breaks physical laws, but that it is against all custom and indeed reasonably motivated action. In “nature” = “natural world” = “the biological world independently of human action” *nothing* is grafted at all – the grafting process is a part of human culture based on human intentions in reaction to the physical world and potentialities. Helminiak (2000) p.78 notes that here God himself is doing something “contrary to nature”, rightly concluding that “natural” refers “to what is characteristic, consistent, ordinary, standard, expected and regular.” Helminiak argues from this, against all sensible context, that in Rom.1 Paul only means that gay-sex is “unexpected” and not wrong. However, the wrongness does not *consist* in unnaturality, rather Paul believed that “nature” (human understanding, based on seeing the creation and acknowledging the creator – even if unaware of Biblical revelation) *should* have led people (as indeed it did for people like Plato) to *recognise* the wrongness of the acts. To Paul the divine grafting of Gentiles into God’s special people and representatives was against any normal human expectancy and reason – and only the strongest divine revelation convinced him that it was so. There is certainly no similar indication – in Scripture or anywhere else – that God has sanctioned gay-sex or homosexual-partnerships “against nature”.

Paul, surely, with his concept of the fallen-ness of humanity, has even less reason than Plato to assume that “contrary to nature” means against peoples’ inbuilt inclinations. Neither Paul nor Plato,

¹³³ In Marston (1980) this seemed more plausible to me than it now does, though Gagnon (2001) p.375 still adopts it. Gagnon seems to overemphasize the purely biological in the term “nature” as Paul uses it.

of course, could by “contrary to nature” *simply* mean “contrary to common culture” – because pederasty was a common and expected feature of Graeco-Roman culture. We need to accept, then, that “contrary to nature” is a complex term, but fundamentally it means *rightful* human recognition of how nature was *meant* to function. Whilst to Plato this comes through philosophical abstraction, to Paul it comes through the divine revelation given to Moses, the prophets, and ultimately through the Christ. Paul, like Plato, believes that we should rule over and control inbuilt human passions¹³⁴ – though to Paul the Holy Spirit is central in this process. Paul, like Plato, believes same-sex acts (male or female) to be wrong and unnatural in themselves – and sees them as caused by wrong desires and unbridled passions that sometimes can be extreme. Unlike Plato, Paul never suggests that the main purpose of sex is procreation – his view of sex/marriage is founded on the Gen.2 implication that the companionship of allies is central (though, of course, that is not his theme in Rom.1).

“Nature”, to Paul, is never separate from either God’s intentions or his activity. Thus, in speaking of the two streams of humanity from Rom.1:16 onwards, Paul says that there may have been Gentiles who did not have the Jewish Scriptures but “by nature” followed a right and God-related life, in which God wrote the laws on their hearts (Rom.2:14-15). This “by nature” implies a result of the abstraction to the creator from created things (as Rom.1:19-20 and Wisdom), the best wisdom of their culture, *and the inner workings of the God who wrote the Law on their hearts*. But this is very far from suggesting that, in general, human feelings or inclinations (whether genetically or culturally determined) are a totally reliable guide to right and wrong. Paul knew too much about fallen human nature to have thought this – let alone that such things could override Scriptural indications of what God did intend.

¹³⁴ Philo’s version of this is much more “platonic” in form – he even allegorises such a meaning from the Genesis 2-3 story (though he also has a historical interpretation). The idea, moreover, of the moral sense and reason being “master of the passions”, is reflected in the inter-Testamental Jewish work 1 Maccabees.

One final point: the two first century Jews Josephus (in *Against Apion* 2:199) and Philo (in *Spec.Laws* 3:37-42) both seem to assume that sex is intended just for procreation – and that to marry or have sex with an infertile woman is reprehensible. There is no indication in Paul that he shares their view, which reflects Middle-Platonist leanings not the OT. In 1 Cor.7:1-9 Paul insists that suspension of conjugal sex should be granted only for special times of prayer, and the vs.5 command “do not deprive one another” is not linked to procreation. There is no indication that sex is to be discontinued either during pregnancy or post-menopause. Whatever later “Christian” systems may have seen sex as mainly/only for procreation, the view is neither OT nor Pauline.

Paul's meaning in Rom.1:26ff is plain. The wording is perfectly general and does not refer to particular kinds of same-sex acts. There is no possibility that he expects morality to be dictated by the biology of a fallen humanity, rather than by Divine revelation in the Genesis creation accounts as endorsed by Jesus the Messiah. It is unlikely that Paul objects to sexual passion as such, and no reason (if he did) for him to couch it in homosexual terms. Reason/revelation determines *which* natural passions are right, and spirit-filled Christians are in control of them.

4.3 Conclusions

Paul holds that for a man to sleep with a male as though with a woman/wife is inconsistent with Kingdom values. Male and female homosexual acts are associated with human suppression (on a society level) of the truth about God and his creation intentions.

5. Issues for Today

5.1 Would Jesus/Paul think differently today?

In Rom.14 Paul is clear that symbolism concerns what something means to individuals; so *if* eg eating meat offered to an idol symbolises idolatry for someone *then* it is wrong. In 1 Cor.11 he tells women to wear head-coverings as a sign of their autonomy/authority to pray and prophesy; again this concerns symbolism, and again Paul's treatment in is full of cultural references “If it be... then...” Circumcision, Sabbath keeping, and diet are all symbols – they concern ethics only through what they symbolise to those involved. Such things can change, but there is no indication anywhere in the NT that Jesus or Paul saw sexual ethics in this light.

Medical and political possibilities can also change. Modern research backs Paul (1 Tim.5:23) that moderate wine intake is healthy, but today there are plentiful health alternatives (eg stomach remedies) and massive alcohol problems, so Paul could well have concluded that teetotalism is the best option for Christians in today's society. This would be unlikely to rise beyond a pastoral general advice which was situational – like eg young widows should best get remarried (1 Tim.5:14) or in times of persecution best stay single (1 Cor.7). On an issue like slavery, Paul effectively undermines it for Christians, but cannot directly challenge the Roman institution. The extension of personal undermining to seeking legal abolition when political realities so allow, is an entirely logical and obvious step. Neither of these instances involve change in doctrine, but recognition that practical advice based on good principles may change with situation.

What, though, could have changed in the issue of God's intentions for sexuality?

Are loving gay-partnerships a “new” concept? A modern long-term male homosexual partner is a “man who is intimate with a male as with a wife” – virtually the exact wording of the Hebrew and LXX in Leviticus and reflected in Paul's term *arsenokoitai*.

Ironically, although many pro-gay-partnership theologians argue that loving homosexual partnerships were unknown in the first century, Boswell (1980) ch.3 describes how 1stC Romans accepted homosexual romantic love, even emperors “abandoned traditional sexual roles for more reciprocal erotic relations”. He tells how “by the time of the early Empire references to gay-marriage were commonplace” and “the marriage took place under the same law which regulated marriage between men and women.”(p.82) Boswell is, admittedly, an unreliable historian, but even allowing for exaggeration, surely Paul would know about *some* loving gay-partnerships?

So is the “change” about modern biology/psychology? We have already considered and discounted the idea that sexual morality could be derived thus. We may have many inborn or inbuilt tendencies (altruism, left-handedness, alcoholism, paedophilia, or homosexuality), the mere fact that they are there does not tell us which are right to act on and which not.

Some, eg Furnish in Siker (1994) p.31, simply believe Jesus and Paul got it wrong, or that there are no moral absolutes anyway. Furnish, however, gives no real guidance (other than some heartwarming rhetoric) as to what we *are* to take as our touchstone if *everything* in Scripture or in the words of the incarnate Son of God is unreliably culturally relative. Furnish’s “faith community” is evidently *not* defined by faith in the historical Jesus (because, he thinks, the historical Jesus was culturally relative and so often mistaken), so *who* is to tell us on *which* issues Jesus was mistaken?

5.2 Can sexual ethics be partially changed?

Is it logical to accept committed gay-partnerships, but then censure other alternative sexual lifestyles? Some of the more radical theologians effectively do conclude that *any* kind of consensual sex activity *is* OK.¹³⁵ Feminist Elizabeth Stuart denies

¹³⁵ Schmidt (1995) ch.3 looks critically at some of these. Satinover (1996) p.62 argues that “normalisation of homosexuality has been followed by a move to normalise all forms of sexuality, *pedophilia explicitly included...*”

being a postmodernist¹³⁶, but as “acts of physical intimacy have no inherent meaning then the onus is on the friends to establish the boundaries of their relationship.”¹³⁷ To her, marital models are flawed because patriarchal, and sex for enjoyment (even between relative strangers) can take place as long as there is honesty, consent and no exploitation. In Vasey (1995) the author (who sadly died in 1998) is also vague about sexual ethics for practising gays. In Holloway (1999) a bishop effectively concludes that only consensuality is essential in “Godless morality”. If any of this is “consistent”, it is not recognisably Christian.

More commonly, however, pro-gay-partnership theologians would agree with eg John (1993) who rejects Stuart’s and Vasey’s approaches, and argues to restrict Christian blessing to permanent same-sex partnerships on similar basis to marriage. Is this, however, consistent? The following summarizes the arguments such theologians generally make for accepting gay-partnerships:

- The Leviticus law is full of things we don’t now accept.
- Jesus never specifically addressed the issue.
- Only a particular *form* of the arrangement was condemned.
- We now know that the homosexual inclination has a physical basis.
- We want to be “inclusive” in the church.

All these same points can be made for various other sexual lifestyles. There may, eg, be some people who feel that they cannot enter any permanent covenantal sexual arrangement. Would a better and more loving option for them be “caring promiscuity”: a series of friendly, casual, arrangements, involving sex but without any permanent commitment? Perhaps it could be argued thus:

- “The OT nowhere explicitly prohibits sexual relations between unmarried consenting heterosexual adults, as long as the woman’s economic value (bride price) is not

¹³⁶ In Bradshaw (2003) p.73.

¹³⁷ Stuart (1995) p.224.

compromised.”¹³⁸ The OT really does not deal at all with “caring promiscuity”, though Proverbs seems to imply that such casual sex is better than adultery. Even prostitutes (like Rahab and Jephthah’s mother) were well regarded – so consensual casual sex was accepted.

- “Adultery” involves the betrayal of a covenant to grant exclusive sexual rights. Caring unmarried promiscuity beaks no covenants.
- Perhaps a marriage covenant is the *best* option, but surely those who feel unable to enter one should not be denied the God-given pleasures of a sexual experience?
- Jesus “is silent” about *caring* promiscuity. Jesus and Paul speak of “*porneia*”, but this may have been exploitative sex, or in the Gentile context sex with a Temple prostitute, not *caring* promiscuity on the modern model.
- Though Paul recommends that each man has a wife and each woman a husband, he is unaware of the genetic/physiological basis which makes some people less able to achieve this kind of faithfulness. For them caring promiscuity is the best option.
- Jesus associates with the fringe members of society, and Mat.21:31-32 could even be taken to be condoning prostitution as a lifestyle of choice as long as it involves no idolatry. The church today needs to be inclusive and accepting – if we refuse full membership to those with a lifestyle of caring promiscuity then we will exclude a lot of people who could otherwise find a place in the church.

Similar arguments apply to other sexual arrangements. Polygamy/polyandry is presently illegal, but unofficially people can form any kind of multiple liaisons they want, so perhaps the time has come to avoid “hypocrisy” and legalise multiple marriages (as long as known and consensual). The OT allows it, neither Jesus nor Paul specifically forbid it (apart from a cultural

¹³⁸ Wink (1999) p.39. Wink also claims the Song of Songs eulogises a love affair between unmarried persons.

recommendation for “bishops” in 1 Tim.3:2), and it would enable people to explore the rich variety of sexual expression God has given them. For covenantal triangular arrangements similar arguments might apply. For father-daughter incest all the same arguments apply (and genetic issues are irrelevant in this modern age of contraceptives and surrogacy).

The basic problem is that, once we reject parts of the sexual ethics of Jesus and Paul, there is no obvious way to tell which bits to keep. Usually, pro-gay-partnership theologians just make some arbitrary choice (eg “covenant”, “consensuality”, “monogamy”) without any clear rationale. In June 2004 the Bishop of Washington, John Chane, held a same sex blessing for the gay-partnership of priest Father Hopkins who said: “We’re asking to live in accountability to the church in our relationship.”¹³⁹ But why not also hold a service to bless those in the Christian Caring Promiscuity Association of Washington¹⁴⁰, so that those wanting to live a caringly promiscuous Christian lifestyle can live in accountability to the church?

Jeffrey John is one of the most erudite advocates for restricting blessing to monogamous covenantal relationships, but careful reading of his little book shows more appeal to Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* than Scripture. He asks rhetorically:

Is it true that the capacity to make a covenant of lifelong, committed, faithful love with one person is one of God’s greatest gifts, a reflection on his own nature?¹⁴¹

But there is no *biblical* attempt to answer this question. Why “with one person”? The trinity (God’s nature) involves three persons, the marriages of Abraham, Jacob, Elkanah, David, etc were polygamous. If we are to ignore Jesus’ indication that marriage is for *two* and *male and female* then where does the emphasis on monogamy come from? With “Jesus and Paul”, claims Jeffrey John, “their stress is entirely on the quality of the relationship and

¹³⁹ *The Times* 24th June 2004.

¹⁴⁰ A society I just made up in case anyone is wondering.

¹⁴¹ John (1993) p.34.

that it should be a covenant of total sexual fidelity and indissoluble union.”(p.17). Yet, where Jesus does speak (Mt.19) of permanent (*not* indissoluble) union and fidelity, he says *nothing* specific about “covenant” but *does* specifically say “male and female”. Where Paul speaks in 1 Cor.7 of the mutual enjoyment of man/husband (*andra*) and woman/wife (*gynaika*) there is nothing about “covenant” but the words used are sex-specific and the same Paul elsewhere uses an LXX based term which pronounced as an “abomination” a man using another male as a *gynaika*. Fluently as Jeffrey John argues, what he claims they say is demonstrably not what they say at all.

5.3 Gay-partners in the Church

Temptation and sin

In Scripture, gay-sex is not presented as some kind of specially heinous sin – it is put next to slander, adultery, theft, greed and covetousness. If, then, we allow the greedy or covetous to become church members (or bishops), then why not active gays? To answer this we need to distinguish four levels of involvement in various activities Paul lists as wrong:

1. Inclination	2. Wrongful Lust	3. Action	4. Lifestyle
Heterosexual	Heterosexual lust	Adultery	Adulterous-lifestyle
Acquisition	Covetousness	Theft	Career-thief
Homosexual	Homosexual lust	Gay-sex	Active-gay-lifestyle

Inclinations are part of the human experience of “passions” – which can be bad or good. The Jewish concept was that we should be master of our passions (which to Paul was through the agency of the Spirit of Life in Christ) – but few theologians or churches would expect wrong inclinations and desires to easily disappear. Heterosexuals, just like homosexuals, may feel attraction towards someone to whom they are not married. It is when passions or inclinations for wrong things rule instead of being ruled that they become “lusts” – whether fulfilled only in imagination or in the actual flesh.

At stage-2, then, the inclination leads to inner lust, imagining having something that is illicit, really desiring it and perhaps stopping only from fear of consequence. Covetousness (which included illicit lust) was actually forbidden in the Ten Commandments – and in equating lust with adultery Jesus was simply emphasizing and reiterating this principle. With “covetousness/lust” however: firstly it is “private” and difficult to detect, secondly it is an issue of degree. At what exact point does a desire to have a car like the neighbour’s BMW become “covetousness”? When does admitting the beauty of another person’s spouse become lust? Clearly a church would not want as a leader anyone eaten up with wrong desires – but it is not all that easy to tell. By stage-3 it has become an action. Though there may possibly be “marginal” instances, usually, adultery, theft, or gay-sex either has or has not happened. An actual lifestyle is even more clear-cut. Being dominated by “covetousness” may be undetectable or perhaps an issue of degree, whereas a lifestyle career thief cannot join the church as a member until he gives it up and gets another job.¹⁴² Someone whose lifestyle is promiscuous, in an adulterous relationship, or in a gay-partnership, would come into the same category. If any such lifestyle is unrepented then the church’s attitudes towards such should be (as the title of Grenz (1998)) “welcoming but not affirming”. Needless to say, once any such lifestyle is renounced and repented there is no barrier to full Christian fellowship.

A homosexual person who succumbs to a temptation for non-marital sex and then repents is in no different case from a parallel heterosexual. When the adulteress confesses Jesus as “Lord”, the sinless Christ replies, “Neither do I condemn you; go, *and do not sin again*”.¹⁴³ Homosexual activity is not a special sin, and God’s forgiveness and cleansing are available.¹⁴⁴ Homosexual temptation should arouse no more “shock-horror” when someone asks for

¹⁴² Eph. 4:28.

¹⁴³ Jn.8:11; as noted above, “condemn” means demand punishment, not to pronounce in the wrong.

¹⁴⁴ 1 Jn.1:9;Heb.10:22;Mt.18:22.

prayer concerning it, than a person confessing temptation to pornography or envy. NT scales of values are not always those of “respectable” present day Christians.

There remain, of course, pastoral issues of timing. When people first come into a church context they may have all kinds of aspects of lifestyle that they have never thought about as moral issues. There is always a balance between the basic Christian wish to see them in a relationship with Jesus as the source not the product of a new lifestyle, and the recognition that Jesus makes moral demands of his followers.

A Gay who does not believe gay-partnership is wrong

The real issue today comes with someone living unrepentantly in a gay-partnership, denying that it is wrong. Ultimately, should the Jesus-centred church be “inclusive” and accept such a person into Christian fellowship anyway?

Paul makes it clear that there are issues on which Christians are called to be mutually tolerant. Rom.14 discusses various matters of symbolism where there should be individual conscience and mutual toleration. But Paul gives very different instruction on sexual lifestyles:

I wrote to you in my letter not to keep company with sexually immoral people (*pornois*). Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous or extortionists or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or an extortionist – not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside, God judges... Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators (*pornois*), nor idolaters, nor adulterers (*moichai*), nor the effeminate (*malakoi*) nor active homosexuals (*arsenokoitai*), nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will enter the kingdom of God.(1 Cor. 5:9-12; 6:9-10).

Paul is clear that we are to befriend, work with, and socialise with people whose lifestyles are immoral, just as Jesus did. However, lifestyles (though *not* inclinations or repented past-acts) do, according to Paul, affect who can be accepted into specifically Christian fellowship and standing. A person determined to keep to a lifestyle of idolatry, promiscuity, adultery or gay-partnership cannot be accepted as in fellowship with the church. These are not issues of culture or symbolism but morality.

To treat such people as though non-Christians,¹⁴⁵ however, does *not* mean that they are to be hated or reviled, for Christians love and help *all* neighbours. Ironically, had Jesus told his parable today to any Christians, an active-gay might well have been cited instead of a Samaritan for the question: “Who then was neighbour to him that fell among thieves?... Go and do likewise.” (Lk.10:36-37).

Although often compared with the women ministers issue, this is really not similar. There are, of course, those who believe that 1 Tim.1:11ff bars women from ministry for all time, but even they can see it only as an instruction – not as an identification of a moral issue so serious as to concern participation in the Kingdom itself (as in 1 Cor.6:9-10). The concern of a Jesus-centred church is not which “sides” various “traditionalists” advocate on these disconnected issues, but the logical hermeneutic of Scripture. Paul recommends to a church a woman “minister” (Rom.16:1), so was hardly likely to suggest that a church “should not keep company” with Christians who give women a ministerial post in a church in which we are collectively a “royal priesthood”.¹⁴⁶ He does advocate such action for issues of sexual lifestyle.

Handling Disagreement

For those in the UK, the divisions in the Anglican/Episcopalian church community on this issue have recently been very apparent and saddening.

¹⁴⁵ 1 Cor.5:1-5;Mt.18:15-17.

¹⁴⁶ See also my *Women in Marriage and in Church Leadership* (2006)

On 20 May 2003 it was announced that the Queen had appointed the Rev Canon Dr Jeffrey John to be the new Suffragan Bishop of Reading in the Diocese of Oxford, to be consecrated in October 2003. Dr John believes that he has a lasting relationship of “covenant love” with a long-term male partner. He asserts that this relationship has been celibate for the last decade, but also openly advocates the blessing of same-sex partnerships. The appointment raised controversy, and 7th July 2003 it was announced that, at the request of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr John had withdrawn from the appointment. The reasons suggested in the papers were that otherwise evangelicals would withdraw financial support for the church, and since the strongest area in the church is evangelical (rather than amongst *Guardian* writers), this would have spelled disaster. In the Synod meetings in mid July the issue dominated although not on the agenda – as one point Peter Tatchell and his gay-rights activists invading the platform and haranguing delegates. In April 2004 (under the prevailing ecclesiology of the established church), the Prime Minister offered Dr John appointment as Dean of St Albans and Rector of the Cathedral. The appointment remains controversial.

In October 2003 the actively gay Gene Robinson was ordained as bishop in New Hampshire, against the apparent advice and wishes of the majority of world Anglican Primates including Rowan Williams at Canterbury. Though the differences seem irreconcilable, the objections made by American Episcopalians at the ceremony were politely made and heard, as befits Christians.

In June 2004 the bishop of Washington held a blessing service to acknowledge a 12-year-long gay-partnership of one of his priests.

At this time the official Eames commission was considering:

the legal and theological implications flowing from the decisions of the Episcopal Church (USA) to elect a priest in a committed same sex relationship as one of its bishops, and of the Diocese of New Westminster to authorise services for use in connection with same sex unions

The existing “official” Anglican position is generally regarded as a fudge, though is variously understood. The most obvious understanding of it is that gay-partnership is acceptable (if less

than ideal) for ordinary Christians, but not for clergy. Whilst the pastoral advice in 1 Tim3.2 might be argued to give some precedent for such a lay-clergy distinction, it is satisfactory to neither “side”. What seems impossible is to reconcile the different viewpoints.

What can certainly be regretted is the intemperate language used by some of those involved. Emotive newspaper headlines like “Church sacrifices gay bishop” are to be expected, but evangelicals can only feel a sense of profound shame that the Archbishops of Canterbury and York were shocked at the vitriolic language used in “traditionalist” letters sent to them. Since Paul places “slanderers” in the same bracket as *arsenokoitai*, one has to wonder how some of these “traditionalists” may fare at the judgement – however “orthodox” they believe they are. There were, of course, more courteous submissions from evangelicals with concern, and (as far as any “outsider” can judge) Archbishop Rowan Williams himself (albeit some may disagree with parts of his theology) behaved with temperance and dignity. The pro-gay Bishop Richard Harries of Oxford, on the other hand, who sponsored Dr John, has been generally criticised by evangelicals as high-handed and dismissive. The Oxford lecturer Rev Dr Giles Fraser, a friend of Dr John, wrote an extraordinarily intemperate article¹⁴⁷ denouncing the “virulent form of rightwing Christian fundamentalism” who “mask their hatred” (which he claims “really” parallels that of the most lunatic-fringe vitriolic website he can find) behind “that helpful Christian smile”. There are shocking “traditionalist” websites full of hatred, but there are also pro-gay websites which twist and distort the words of those who believe homosexual acts are wrong, denouncing them as “homophobic” etc. On 19th November 2003 in a Manchester paper it was reported that a respected cleric, the Bishop of Chester, was to be interviewed by police after he encouraged gay Christians to seek therapy and “reorientate” themselves with the help of the medical profession. This followed complaints from gay activists, and it constituted an attempt at suppression of his

¹⁴⁷ *The Guardian* July 14 2003.

religious freedom.¹⁴⁸ There are, alas, both homophobes and gay activists who manifest the spirit of the Inquisition. The *Guardian* on 25th July 2006 reported the *Pink News* as suggesting that Chancellor Gordon Brown could be “homophobic” because he had failed to vote on the various “gay rights” bills in Parliament – even though ministerial absences are common.

If Jesus could say “Father forgive them” even about those who crucified him, how could any serious follower of Jesus or any Jesus-centred church treat with vitriol those with whom they disagreed? What, then, must be reiterated is that, however badly some pro-gays or traditionalists may behave, there is no place in Jesus-centred theology for anything but love towards others – whether we agree with them or not and whether we are in Christian fellowship with them or not.

5.4 Christians and Active-Gays in Society

In a multicultural society people tolerate other lifestyles and religions that they believe to be wrong. Christians disapprove of eg idolatry, promiscuity, adultery, and gay-partnerships, but this should not imply that we want to make these *illegal* or seek a Christian version of the Islamic “sharia law”. As Paul; said: “For what have I to do with judging those who are outside?” We expect civil government to have a God-given role of maintaining law and order, and pray that it will be so and will enable us to live “tranquil and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” (1 Tim 2:2, cf Rom.13:1ff). Civil laws should prevent people infringing others’ rights to freedom of religion (including ours), but are not there to enforce one particular theological position or sexual-lifestyle. Past state-churches that have enforced such things have also persecuted, tortured and killed my spiritual ancestors such as many peaceable and Jesus-centred Anabaptists.

In employment, there may be some posts for which religious/sexual orientation is relevant – eg as a minister, a church youth-worker or in a “faith school” where teachers are required to

¹⁴⁸ Though it has to be said that other gays defended the bishop’s rights.

be practising as Christians, Muslims, or Jews. It is not for the state (or in the case of the UK the Trades Union Council which has attempted to interfere in the legislation) to tell my church what sexual lifestyles or beliefs are or are not acceptable in our members. In more general occupations, however, religious belief and personal lifestyle are irrelevant and discrimination is rightly illegal. This includes appointment of teachers in state schools.

In education, Christians should welcome and insist on the teaching in schools of toleration in society, but rightly object to their children being taught in a state school that sexual lifestyle is morally neutral. It is a total fallacy to suggest that in order to tolerate other lifestyles one has to agree that they are right and moral. The whole essence of toleration in a multi-cultural society is that one tolerates lifestyles which one believes are neither. Nor should this prevent dealing with bullying of any and every kind. A UK poll in February 2000 found a majority wanted to see heterosexual marriage promoted as an ideal in education, but at the same time strongly believed that any anti-gay bullying should be dealt with severely.¹⁴⁹ “Gay bashing” is as utterly evil as “Muslim bashing” or “Evangelical bashing”, in school or any other place or context.

A social issue sometimes raised today is whether gay couples should be allowed to adopt or raise children. One of the reasons people sometimes vehemently oppose this is their supposition that somehow such children will have their sexuality disturbed or will be maladjusted. But one of the things that eg Wilson and Rahman (2000) *do* seem to show is that children’s sexual orientation is not so simply affected as this, and children brought up by gay couples seem no more maladjusted in general than any others. I would as a Christian prefer *all* children to be brought up in “Janet and John” extended-family practising-Christian homes – rather than (say) atheistic, single parent, gay-partner or Muslim ones. But we recognise that we are in a multi-cultural society, and it seems to me homophobic to single out the gay issue over the others as

¹⁴⁹ In a *Guardian/ICM* poll, reported in the *Guardian* 15 February 2000.

determining “unfitness” to parent in this context. Whether the birth-parent should have choice regarding the religion, sexual lifestyle, or racial type of the adoptive parents is a more general question – but again the gay-partner issue is just one of several.

A slightly different issue concerns ‘rights’ of long-term gay partners. In 2004 The UK government passed a Civil Partnerships bill, which saw the first registrations in December 2005. Any two members of the same sex can register (there is no reference to sex taking place in the bill) apart from “prohibited degrees of relationship” such as parent /child or parent/adopted child. Thus eg two celibate unmarried flatmates could register and obtain mutual tenancy rights, avoid paying death duties, etc, but not an invalid mother and her unmarried daughter who has devoted most of her life to nursing her. The problem is that to allow unmarried daughters to “register” would bring other problems – eg she would then be unable to marry without losing her inheritance rights from her mother. The central concern is general issues of fairness in a society levying death duties, rather than Christian morality as such, and the issues are not straightforward. Should such a partnership be called “marriage”? In the UK at present it is not, but there is controversy throughout Europe and the American States about it. In June 2006 a bill defining marriage as specifically heterosexual failed in the U.S. Senate by 49-48 votes (although the President supported the idea) and a number of states are seeking a direct vote of their electorate on gay-marriage. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life did surveys that found the number of Americans opposed to civil unions fell from 60% in 2004 to 51% in 2006, though 59% still opposed gay-marriages,

Whatever society decides, for Christians the NT *does* (eg in 1 Cor.7) sanction heterosexual marriages being recognised irrespective of whether they were contracted under Christian ceremony, but there is *no* indication that homosexual liaisons would be thus recognised.

Whilst Christians may have an interest in some anomalies of unfairness inherent in Civil Partnerships legislation, there are a lot of other far greater issues of social fairness domestically and internationally in politics. Kingdom values greatly concern the

poor, the oppressed, and the fate of the stranger amongst us. Issues eg of fairtrade, of real aid for poor countries, of acting as a voice for the voiceless, of abolishing the evil of landmine production, and of restricting gas emissions to act on world climate change – all these kinds of “political” issues concern millions more people in far greater need. Let us not forget that Paul also places extortionists, the greedy, etc amongst those who will not inherit the Kingdom. Great church figures like John Wesley have been well aware that Christians should speak out on issues of social justice as well as “morality” in the personal and sexual contexts..

Appendices

Appendix 1: Exegesis and Hermeneutics

Introduction

In section 1.2 we adopted basic definitions of the terms “exegesis” (ie to “find out what was the *original intent of the words of the Bible*”) and “hermeneutics” (which includes “seeking the *contemporary* relevance of ancient texts”).¹⁵⁰ We further noted that there were two stages in hermeneutics: (i) placing the meaning within a wider “Christocentric” framework of the cross, resurrection and Kingdom of God and (ii) reapplying any principles that emerge from this to our own times and cultural situation.

Arguments about the proper ways to go about all this fill vast tomes, and all that can be hoped for here is an outline that makes sense because the issues are central to our conclusions on the main issue at hand. Even so some readers may find this particular appendix over-technical, though no understanding of biblical teaching on such a controversial issue can be without serious thinking about the principles of interpretation being used.

The NT Practice

There are various characterisations of Jewish hermeneutics. Longenecker (1975) and others have identified (1) Literal (2) Midrashic (3) Peshet (4) Allegorical – though this is, of course, our superimposed schema and early Jews did not neatly divide

¹⁵⁰ Fee & Stuart (1993) pp.23-25 see also Achtemeier (1969) pp.13-14.

these.¹⁵¹ They are all reflected in the teachings of Jesus and his apostles.¹⁵²

The *literal* is the face-value meaning, the proper product of “exegesis” in our terms. Sometimes to rabbis this meant an absurd literalism (as when eg the provisions in Deut.21.18ff could not be applied by a dumb or handless parent¹⁵³), but at others (eg in the Hellenistic Jew Philo) there was clear recognition that even in the “literal” interpretation (eg on the “side” of Adam used to make the woman) the language itself might be symbolical.

The *Midrashic* interpretation is really what we have termed hermeneutics, and Rabbi Hillel (who taught his son Simeon who taught Gamaliel who taught Paul) codified seven guidelines for doing it. Both Jesus and Paul use some of Hillel’s guidelines¹⁵⁴ eg Mt 12:11-12 uses *Kal V’Khomer* (Light and heavy).

Peshet is particularly important in the Qumran community – it resembles Midrash but is more “charismatic and eschatological”.¹⁵⁵ As Jesus adapts the approach, it is the idea that OT incidents and comments are “fulfilled” in some fuller sense in his own times.¹⁵⁶ “Prophecy” in this context is not exactly “prediction”, but a principle that reaches more profound fulfilment in the Messianic times, and we are in the “last times”.

Allegorical interpretations use historical stories to illustrate something quite different. Thus eg Paul’s near contemporary Philo has both a “literal” interpretation of the Adam and Eve narrative, and an allegorical one in which Adam represents mind and Eve sense-perception with its passions.¹⁵⁷ Paul himself says that

¹⁵¹ Longenecker (1975), Jeanron (1994) pp.16-17, Klein et al (1993), etc.

¹⁵² See particularly the great detail in Longenecker (1999).

¹⁵³ *Mish Sanh* 8:4 cited in Longenecker (1999) p.15.

¹⁵⁴ Cited in Longenecker (1999) p.20 or type “The Seven Rules of Hillel” into Google!

¹⁵⁵ Ellis in Marshall (1979) p.207.

¹⁵⁶ Cf eg Mt 26:31; Lk.7:27.

¹⁵⁷ Cf Philo: *Allegorical Interpretation II* after *On The Creation*.

Abraham's family life is an "allegory" (Rom.4:24) for the two covenants.

Abraham's life could also illustrate another division of meanings in early Jewish as developed in Christian thinking: literal, moral, spiritual and allegorical. There really was a *literal* Abraham with two wives; the story illustrates the *moral* problems arising from polygamy; there is *spiritual* significance in both the messianic promise to Abraham and establishing him as a paradigm for faith; and the *allegorical* meaning is the two covenants, as Paul says.

Klein et al (1993) note that the apostles:

...interpreted the OT from a radically new perspective – in the light of the Messiahship of Jesus and the new age inaugurated by his coming... they understood the OT christologically.(p.29).

Klein et al also note that the apostles followed the example of Jesus himself in seeing OT prophecy as relating to him, and as they: "cited OT text interpreted literally to support their instruction on Christian morals."(p.30). All this is what we would call a "Jesus-centred" approach to interpretation, leading to a Christo-centric theology.

Should we follow *all* the NT hermeneutical practices? There has been dispute between Longenecker and Hays on this and it should be recognised that we do not have the same authority as Jesus and his apostles. This lay at the heart of the dispute between the early school based at Alexandria (eg Clement, Origen) and that at Antioch (eg Theodore, Basil). The Alexandrians accepted a literal meaning, but also emphasized highly allegorical understandings; the Antiochenes emphasized only the literal meaning and regarded allegory as speculative because one could make whatever one liked of it and there seemed no obvious way to validate it.

What we must recognise is that those who emphasized the literal meaning (eg Augustine and Aquinas) were not "literalists" in the modern sense. Augustine's *Genesis in the Literal Sense* recognises the use of symbolic language even here – eg regarding the "days" of creation as symbolic – and Aquinas is similar. To believe that the prime focus of interpretation should be on the obvious sense does not make one a crude literalist.

Some Recent Historical Context

There are many books that relate the various hermeneutical ideas arising from the 19thC onwards, and there is no need here to repeat their details.¹⁵⁸ Various forms of "criticism" (source, form, tradition and redaction) have purported to analyse the sources used (eg by the Gospels), the forms or genres of content, and the redaction or editing process and its rationale.¹⁵⁹ The actual work done has varied from what is mere personally biased speculation disguised as supposed science, to work which is a useful aid to deeper understanding of Scripture. Plainly, meaning does relate to culture, intent, and assumptions – and knowing more about these is helpful.

A second debate has concerned the degree of interaction between reader and material. Friederich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) pointed out that we can understand terms only if we have some pre-understanding of them. As a modern commentator puts it:

Is it vain to speak of love to one who has not known love... One must already have, in some measure a knowledge of the matter being discussed. This may be termed the minimal pre-knowledge necessary for understanding, without which one cannot leap into the hermeneutical circle.¹⁶⁰

This is, of course, true for *any* learning situation. The idea of a "circle" reflects interaction interpreter and text, and, as taken up by Schleiermacher, Barth, and Bultmann, often became over subjective and "existentialist", focussing on the interpreter rather than assuming objective meaning in a text reflecting the views of a real, personal and active God. The over-subjectivity was often coupled with an unacceptable philosophical naturalism (going back to Hume and D.F.Strauss), and a contrast between the "Christ of faith" and the real "Jesus of history" that is not acceptable. Following Bultmann, the "new hermeneutic" was developed in the

¹⁵⁸ Eg Bruce in ch 2 of Marshall (1977), Morgan & Barton (1988), Jeanrond (1994), Klein et al (1993).

¹⁵⁹ Usefully summarized in Marshall (1979).

¹⁶⁰ Palmer (1969) pp.87-8.

later 20thC, particularly by H.G.Gadamer. The emphasis here was that the biblical text was itself not static but a kind of “speech event” which masters the reader and confronts him with the “Word of God” at that moment. Some of the emphases in this are useful, but it could again tend to underplay the actual historical context of the text. There is an obvious interplay or “circle” between interpreter and text, but this is not purely subjective.

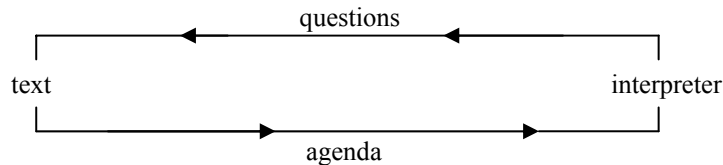
Rather than a static “circle”, some have suggested the image of a “spiral”¹⁶¹ and Osborne (1991) makes this the title of his book. Osborne says (p.415) he agrees with R.T.France’s call for:

the priority in biblical interpretation of what has come to be called ‘the first horizon,’ ie of understanding biblical language within its own cultural context before we start exploring its relevance to our own concerns.¹⁶²

Osborne adds, however that we need to:

...maintain the tension between meaning and significance as two aspects of a single whole. The intended meaning does have a life of its own as a legitimate hermeneutical goal. However, it is not complete until the significance of that data has been determined.(p.324).

He sees this as a spiral:



The text itself sets the agenda and continually reforms the questions that the observer asks of it. The means by which this is accomplished is twofold: grammatical-syntactical exegesis and historical-cultural background. These interact to reshape the interpreter's preunderstanding and help to fuse the two horizons.

¹⁶¹ Thistleton (1980) p.104; Lundin in Lundin et al (1985) p.25 etc.

¹⁶² France in Carson (1984) p.42.

The interaction between interpreter (using proper exegetical tools) and the text spirals into greater understanding:

The actual contextualization then occurs as this process of fusion reaches out in another and broader hermeneutical spiral to encompass the interpreter's life and situation.(p.324).

At base, what this is saying is that both what we have called the process of exegesis, and the process of hermeneutics, are dynamic and interactive between the text and interpreter. Klein et al (1999) p.114 also describe this spiral, in which the interpreter moves upwards in understanding. They also rightly emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit, not to *replace* good exegetical tools but as an essential for success in grasping truth that is spiritually discerned.

One other essential issue in modern discussion is that of linguistics. Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) distinguished synchronic linguistics (studying language at a given moment) from diachronic linguistics (studying the changing state of a language over time). Language is socially constructed, and we cannot assume any simplistic “reference” from words to real concepts. Moreover context is crucial: “The sense of a term depends on presence or absence of a neighbouring term.” The problem with this (as it led into one meaning of the word “structuralism”¹⁶³) is that the logical corollary would be that original meaning is irrecoverable and untranslatable. One post-structuralist movement called “reader-response-criticism” regards “authorial intention as almost irrecoverable anyway” and assumes that no two readers will have the same response to a text.¹⁶⁴ Another development, “deconstruction” as advocated by Jaques Derrida, argues that ultimately all human communication “deconstructs” or undermines itself. All these kinds of nihilistic linguistic conclusions are useless in practice. Whether we are trying to discover which medicine works, how to fix the car, what uncle Henry died of, or whether Jesus intended to forbid gay-

¹⁶³ Levi-Strauss uses it differently, to mean a similarity of basic underlying structure more primary than surface meaning.

¹⁶⁴ Klein et al (1999) p.439/

partnerships, we try to do our best with human understanding and communication whatever their shortcomings.

Another point arising from Saussure is that there may be arbitrariness in the existence of actual *terms* in a language, and that the absence of a term does not imply that the concept is absent in the culture. As Crystal (1965) p.144 points out, it can be wrongly assumed that “the unit of translation-equivalence between languages is the word...” The same concept may actually be expressed by a *phrase*. Again the point is clearly valid, but yet absence of a term *may* indicate absence of a concept. Nida rightly observes that the different tense system in Hebrew *need not* imply that they had a different view of time from us.¹⁶⁵ On the other hand, there *is* no medieval word or term for Newtonian “inertia”, because the concept itself really was not invented until Descartes in the 17thC. The lack of equivalent words may also make translation clumsy - where eg there is no English word for *arsenokoitas* nor ancient Greek word for *homosexual*.

We all, of course, accept that (i) communication is about much more than words (ii) words have different meanings in different contexts and (iii) words can mean different things to different people or at different times. Nevertheless, words are used in communication, and major reference works like Kittel (1972) and Brown (1986) contain “words studies” which try to look at the various contexts within which different word groups are used. The liberal anti-evangelical scholar James Barr (in Barr (1961)) mounts a robust criticism of this whole approach. Barr argues firstly against “illegitimate totality transfer” (p.218), the explicit or implicit transfer of *all* the meanings of a given word into any given passage – and he believes contributors to Kittel tend to encourage this.¹⁶⁶ He gives the example (p.218) of the word *ekklesia* (church or gathering), claiming that the term in Mt 16:18 does not contain all the later meanings of *ekklesia*, as the Kittel

¹⁶⁵ Cited by Thistleton in Brown (1986) iii pp.1126ff.

¹⁶⁶ Carson (1984b) also usefully expands on this and other exegetical fallacies, and contains numerous cautionary examples.

article implies.¹⁶⁷ Barr’s own aversion to supernaturalism may here, however, have led to a rejection of any concept of prophetic vision in Jesus – and whether a richer view of “*ekklesia*” here is really “illegitimate totality transfer” may depend on one’s metaphysics. Barr has, of course, a valid general point, though it is questionable how many articles in Kittel or Brown really do it.

A second fallacy, Barr says, is the “root fallacy” which assumes that “the ‘root meaning’ can confidently be taken to be part of the actual semantic value of any word or form which can be assigned to an identifiable root.”(p.100). Words change meaning, and this particularly applies to compound words. A term that has been used to illustrate this point is “greenhouse”. This is actually an interesting example because whilst it is *not* (as one might imagine) a green coloured house (like the White House), it *is* a kind of structure to “house” green growing things. The word “chairman” (now usually shortened to “chair”) is a like example – again on its own it would be ambiguous or confusing but we can see some logic in the origins of the word. In general, compound words, especially if they are in common use, *may* come to mean something quite different from their constituent words, but in some contexts reflect the compound meaning well enough.

Root meanings, then, need to be treated with care, but as Osborne (1993) p.68 rightly concludes: “at times a study of roots can be highly illuminating.”

If, as an example, we take the Hebrew word “know” (*yāda*’), this clearly has some very different meanings eg:

- to know that or know about (eg Ex 3:19; Is.50:7)
- to recognise (eg Ex.9:15; Ki.20:41)
- to be friends with (eg Deut 34:10)
- to have sex with (eg Gen.4:1)

These alternatives can be clearly established from the above, and so in some instances (eg in Gen.19:5) where there is dispute, we need to look carefully at the context to determine the meaning.

¹⁶⁷ And as we seem to imply when we sing the hymn: “I will build my church...”

Sometimes, however, a meaning is claimed for which there is *no* clear illustrating example. As noted in Marston & Forster (2000) pp.226ff, it has been claimed that the word *yāda*’ (and parallel Greek word *ginōskō*) can effectively mean “to choose”. Yet, not one of the commentaries which copy each other in making this claim, can either produce extra-biblical case in which it is used thus or point to a single instance in the OT, LXX or NT where the Greek or Hebrew word more naturally has this meaning than one of the clearly established ones. The natural conclusion is that the ascription of this unusual and unsupported meaning was mistaken.

Word studies can be useful – though clearly there are word studies that are poorly applied, as we find in the literature on gay issues. Crude assumptions of uniform meaning, statistical counts to determine meaning, and blatant blindness to context, all exist. We all just need to take care that we do not fall into any such error.¹⁶⁸

Exegesis

The first actual task is what Fee and Stuart term “exegesis”, and Klein et al (1993) p.133 as “definition of textual meaning”:

...that which the words and grammatical structures of that text disclose about the probable intention of its author/editor and the possible understanding of that text by its intended readers.

Some general issue to address in this are:¹⁶⁹

- (1) *The Historical Context*: What was the background culture of the writer and/or recipient of the passage? Issues of perspective and mindset will be important to understanding.
- (1) *The Literary Context*: What is the writer’s train of thought?
- (2) *The Literary Genre*: Is this intended to be eg poetry, narrative, wisdom utterance, prophecy or instruction? What kind of communication seems to be intended (remembering

¹⁶⁸ Klein et al (1999) pp.189ff give useful guidelines for this.

¹⁶⁹ Fee and Stuart give a short schema for this, Klein et al a much more detailed exploration of issues of context, word meaning etc.

- that sometimes one genre is embedded in another – eg poetry within narrative)?
- (3) *The Words*: What do we know about the range of definitely known meanings for the words used in parallel contexts – preferably in similar grammatical structures?
 - (4) *Grammatical-Structural Relationships*: Does a particular meaning make best sense within the actual sentence(s) used?

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics follows exegesis. The first hermeneutical task is to see the meaning of a passage in the context of a Jesus-centred approach within a Christo-centric theology. Thus, as we noted in sections 1.4, 1.6 and 1.7, Jesus and his apostles saw issues of diet and symbolism as secondary, not important in themselves but only in what they signified to those involved. Thus whether it is an OT ordinance, or Paul advising on meat offered to idols, there is a wider theological framework for the immediate message. Discerning this, of course, requires both Spirit-filled spiritual discernment, and a general framework of messianic theology and eschatology.

The second hermeneutical task is the reapplication within our own various present situations and cultures of whatever general principles are involved. God has, in general, chosen not to give us abstract principles, but to deal with actual people in their historical settings. We need, therefore, to seek a Spirit-led abstraction and reapplication to other specific situations. There is inevitably an element here of interpreter-interaction, but this does not mean that any application is as good as any other.¹⁷⁰ Churches must surely have something wrong, for example, if they insist on the wearing of modern hats whilst women pray and prophesy in meetings (based on 1 Cor.11:5), but then forbid them to pray or prophesy anyway (based on 1 Cor.14:34). Unless Paul was a complete

¹⁷⁰ As a parallel, according to the prevailing critical-realism in the philosophy of science, all scientific laws are interpretive – but this does not mean that any idea is as good as any other.

muffin unable to spot contradiction, even their exegesis must be wrong – let alone their hermeneutic!

What this is saying is that, whilst there may be some uncertainties in hermeneutics, we cannot have recourse to the mere existence of disagreement to conclude that definite conclusions are impossible. With sensible hermeneutics, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can be fairly certain of at least some aspects of the meaning for us today of a Jesus-centred, Christocentric, Christian faith.

Appendix 2: Homosexuals and Science

Introduction

In section 1.6 we noted the claim by McNeill in Siker (1994):

Only a sadistic God would create hundreds of thousands of humans to be inherently homosexual and then deny them the right to sexual intimacy.(p.53).

We noted his four basic assumptions:

- (1) Homosexual inclination is inborn.
- (2) Homosexual inclination is unchangeable.
- (3) Homosexual inclination (perhaps unlike eg being born blind) is part of God's design.
- (4) Sexual intimacy is a right for all people whether or not they feel capable of, or inclined to, permanent monogamous male-female marriage

This Appendix looks in detail at the first two of these.

The Science of Homosexuality

Jones and Yarhouse (2000) distinguish “essentialists” (who believe homosexuality is a given core of some people's being – like being female) and “constructionists” (who think it is socially constructed – like being a socialist). Essentialists are much more common, and often genetic factors are presumed to be determinative – some even speaking of a “gay gene”. As it happens I am well qualified in statistical and scientific methodology¹⁷¹ and read with careful interest the basic original

¹⁷¹ I hold an M.Sc. in theoretical statistics and scientific methodology, have taught advanced statistical theory to undergraduates, and published a statistics textbook with Holts in 1982. Some of the criticisms made of these studies by commentators (eg Cohen (2000)) are flawed because they do not really understand what statistical significance means.

articles together with various commentaries on them. There have been some appalling methodological blunders, biased selection, etc. and Jones and Yarhouse's summary on p.90 is worth giving here in full:

- Proponents for change caricature traditionalists as arguing that homosexuality is a “perverse lifestyle choice” rather than an “innate characteristic.” By framing the debate in these terms any scientific evidence is support of a more robust view of homosexual orientation as enduring, universal characteristic, perhaps tied to various biological antecedents, will make the caricature of traditionalists look scientifically uninformed.
- Gender nonconformity in childhood seems to be related to adult experiences of homosexuality. There appears to be evidence in favor of both psychological/environmental theories and genetic and prenatal hormonal theories for the origins of same-sex attraction.
- Many of the psychological/environmental theories for the origins of same-sex attraction are grounded in theories that implicate the parent/ child relationship or other environmental factors such as childhood sexual trauma. The considerable amount of research supporting these theories has been largely ignored (rather than refuted) because of recent attempts to find support for a biological theory.
- The biological theories (genetic/prenatal hormonal) receive much more attention today. Some of the studies cited to support these theories have not been replicated, have been of small sample sizes or have serious methodological flaws. The best recent study of genetic causation, the new Bailey study, suggests that genetics may not be a significant causal factor. More research is needed in these areas to further our understanding of the viability of the biological theories for the origins of same-sex attraction. Many experts in this area agree that an "interactionist hypothesis" is probably the best explanation for the origins of same-sex attraction.
- The church's moral concern is not with homosexual orientation but with what an individual does with his or her experiences of same-sex attraction.

The “interactionist hypothesis” they define as:

...where various psychological, environmental and biological factors, together with human choice, contribute to different degrees that vary from person to person.(p.84).

We all recognise, of course, that human choices are conditioned and limited by our genetics, background etc. There is, however, an approach to psychology which argues that *all* human action is *totally* predetermined by physiology and environment, discounting human freewill in any meaningful sense; in Marston & Forster (2001) there is a detailed critique of this approach.¹⁷² In any event, though, this is an “all or nothing” line. If human predispositions and hence lifestyles are *totally* predetermined by genetics and/or environment with no element of any but the so called “compatibilist” free choice (which means a lack of *external* compulsion), then this applies to thieves, psychopaths, rapists, serial killers and paedophiles – not just to homosexuals. Homosexuality cannot logically be made into some kind of “special case”, in which people uniquely “cannot help” themselves, whilst other behavioural tendencies are considered non-determinative. We should be either consistent “interactionists” (as defined above) or consistent “determinists”. My own view is that consistent determinism implies the meaninglessness of morality altogether – though there are Christians who argue otherwise.¹⁷³ A *general* determinative psychology has *not* currently been demonstrated, but *if* it is accepted then it has to apply to *all* behavioural tendencies not just to homosexuality.

Three particular studies led to the present widely repeated claim as “scientific fact” that homosexual orientation is inborn and genetically determined.

The first was LeVay (1991), which identified structural differences in the Hypothalamus between gay-men and non-gay men and women in 41 cadavers. Speculation was that hormonal

¹⁷² Taken eg by Dennett (1991), Blackmore (1999).

¹⁷³ Eg Mackay (1980), Brown (1998).

influences in the womb might determine whether a person was “born gay”.

In a second much-cited article, Bailey & Pillard (1991) found that amongst 52 identical twin brothers located through the gay community, there was a “probandwise concordance” of 52%. Since in the general population there are reckoned to be some 2-3% homosexually orientated (using Kinsey scales), this looked overwhelming, and they did a similar study in 1993 for females.

In a third article, Hamer et al (1993) located 114 homosexuals, again through the homosexual community, and identified a statistically significantly ($p < 0.001$) higher than normal incidence of homosexuality in their maternal male relatives. They then did a linkage analysis on 40 pairs of homosexual brothers, finding a linkage in Xq28. Although the authors were cautious (adding “as with all such linkage studies, replication and confirmation of our results are essential”) the article was widely hailed as the discovery of the “gay gene”. All this seemed conclusive: the inborn predisposition was proven and the gay gene found!

In fact, however, there were serious methodological flaws in all these studies. LeVay (who is gay) apparently began his work determined to find physiological bases, but this would not have invalidated his work had it been scientifically sound. Unfortunately, it actually had obvious methodological flaws. Firstly, the differences were statistically significant, but the size distributions overlapped – ie the differences were not consistent in direction so any causal effect is probably not strong. Even a high significance does not necessarily indicate a strong effect. Secondly, brain structure and lifestyle are known to be interactive. The most extreme demonstration of this is in the so called “wild child” accounts, where severe childhood deprivation of human society can lead to a brain apparently inadequate to acquire normal language skills.¹⁷⁴ In adults, Maguire (2000) showed eg that London Taxi Drivers measurably affect their brain physiology by

¹⁷⁴ See eg http://www.channel4.com/science/microsites/S/science/body/bodyshock_wildchild.html for further references.

learning vast numbers of street names. Thus brain specialist Sandra Witelson (with LeVay) has speculated that atypical levels of sex hormones may shape the brains of homosexuals in the womb or during childhood, though she does not rule out environmental influences. She holds that eg a certain brain structure could be a predisposition to homosexual behaviour that requires a certain environment to be expressed, also asserting:

It’s a very sensitive and still very controversial area ... There are many people in society who feel that this [homosexuality] is a matter of choice and many who feel it is completely biological... It’s probably a combination of both.¹⁷⁵

We may, as brain science progresses, find all kinds of correlates between brain structures and predispositions, but in general the relationships are unlikely to be simple or deterministic even for predispositions let alone for behaviour.

Bailey and Pillard (1991)’s article seemed to imply that the brother of a gay man has 52% chance of being gay, rather than the 2-3% incidence for the general population. There were, however, two basic flaws in the paper:

- (1) The sample involved self-selection and so massive selection bias.¹⁷⁶
- (2) The figures do not allow for similarities in nurture for most of the 52 pairs.

Various studies mostly failed to replicate the finding (at least to anything near this level).

For twins brought up together, in general the genetic and environmental factors are confounded. However, identical (monozygotic) twins have more or less 100% similar genes, whilst non-identical (dizygotic) twins share only half on average. There are therefore two good ways to distinguish between the factors.

¹⁷⁵ Reported on http://www.jewishhamilton.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=93119

¹⁷⁶ Bailey himself accepts this in Bailey (2000) p.525, speaking of “volunteer bias”.

The first is to compare identical twins brought up together with those who are split at birth. This is impractical for the present subject as numbers of these are few. The second method is to compare proband rates for identical and non-identical twins – in instances where they share the home environment. There are still problems with this because identical twins tend to be treated more alike than non-identical ones, and may also have genetic copying factors.

Later, Bailey himself produced an Australian survey (Bailey (2000)) that had no self-selection bias because a general register was used. On this register they found 27 pairs of identical twins in which at least one was self-declared homosexual (on the Kinsey scale), and of these in 3 pairs both were self-declared homosexual. Bailey reports this as a “probandwise correlation” of about 20% (not the supposed 52% of his earlier study), whilst Jones & Yarhouse (2000) note that the “concordance rate” (ie the percentage of pairs with at least one homosexual which actually contain two) is 11% (ie 2/37). Both these statements are correct, but with what may they be compared? Suppose that we accept that about 3% in the general male population are homosexually orientated, what would we then make of this study?

Firstly, suppose that homosexuality were simply a result of choice by 3% of individuals, with no genetic or nurture effect. This would imply that we would expect on average to find about 1.55% of pairs containing one homosexual would contain two – and this may be compared with the 11% actually found in this sample. Secondly, if we were to select at random an individual there would be 3% chance of him being homosexual, whereas if we were *given that* his identical twin is homosexual, then in this study there would be a 20% chance that he would be. In either event, the percentage estimates from the sample means a sevenfold increase in chance of homosexuality.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ This means we must reject the simplistic assertion made by Jones and Yarhouse (and repeated by others) that the authors “double counted” because they counted individuals not pairs. It is based on a fallacy well known in classic Bayesian analyses.

There are, however, a number of things to add here:

- (1) It is quite possible that those whose twin brother is also gay are more willing to self-identify as homosexual themselves, and so it might in reality be (say) 4/50 rather than 3/27.
- (2) As it stands the effects of genetics and nurture are confounded – the identical twins also shared the same upbringing.

Both these points could be allowed for to some degree if we compare probandwise rates for identical with non-identical twins, but even this is not entirely foolproof. Because identical twins are usually more alike in character, parents will be likely to treat them more similarly than they would non-identical twins.

- (3) The figures themselves are subject to sampling errors. The “true” figure for general probandwise correlation could be anywhere between about 4% and 30% (with 95% confidence) based on this sample.
- (4) The figures clearly **refute** any notion that there is a “gay gene”. If there were such a gene (either recessive or dominant), then the probandwise correlation would be 100%.

Are the results “statistically significant”? This means: “is it plausible to suggest that really the apparently high probandwise correlation arose by chance, and actually in the long run would turn out to be around 3%?” The test applied does try to take into account the comparison with non-identical twins, and concludes that there is some statistical evidence that it differs from 3% - though the level of evidence (significance) is not very high.

What, in short, the latest study shows, is that there probably is a measurable effect on the likelihood of homosexuality that is due to genetics. This effect, however, is far from overwhelming, and effects of nurture and choice still seem to play a larger role.

The Hamer (1993) “gene linkage” study was questioned even at the time eg by King (1993) who noted various design problems and said:

Several times in the recent history of human gene mapping, linkage results at this level of significance [$p < 0.001$] have turned out to be artefacts of poor experimental design or of coincidence.

Another scientific critique appeared in the same journal, led by a Yale biostatistician, Risch (1993). This criticised the technique, pointed to small sample size, and said that actually the results were not statistically significant. Hamer replied in Hamer (1993b), asserting:

We did not say that Xq28 “underlies” sexuality, only that it contributes to it in some families. Nor have we said that Xq28 represents a “major” gene, only that its influence is statistically detectable in the population that we studied.

He added however:

The question of the appropriate significance level to apply to a non-Mendelian [that is polygenic, multiple factors influencing expression] trait such as orientation is problematic

If determining a significance level is “problematic” how can one tell it is significant as he claims? In any event he specifically denied (as he must) that anything like a Mendelian gene exists here.

Rice is generally regarded as a key figure in statistical genetics and Rice et al (1999) repeated a similar gene study using 52 pairs of Canadians and found that overall their own study and others since 1991 “would suggest that if there is a linkage it is so weak that it is not important.” The *Science* editorial (p.571) suggested that “the ‘gay gene’ linkage may be suffering a similar fate” to other supposed linkages which have “fallen apart under further study.” The others, of course, have seldom been so politically charged.

For various other issues (eg alcoholism), such genetic-linking as there is seems much more complex than a simple “gene for it” approach would imply. Jones and Yarhouse well describe the current state of scientific evidence. No particular individual “gene” has been reliably identified associated with male homosexual tendencies (even less for female). A man with a homosexual identical twin may have some increased chance of being homosexual, but it is hard to quantify the relative influences

of genetics and nurture and it is far from a determinative relationship.

Let us make this clear. Sadly, Huntington’s Disease *is* apparently caused by a dominant allele (genetic alternative) on a single gene. Haemophilia and cystic fibrosis are caused by recessive genes (ie you get the illness only if you inherit the gene from both parents). *No* geneticist (Hamer or anyone else) imagines that homosexuality is determined by a single Mendelian dominant or recessive gene, which you either have or not. Not only is there no evidence *for* this, but the evidence clearly shows that this is not the case. If you want to ask in lay terms “Is there a Huntington’s Disease gene?” the answer is simply “Yes” - and if you have it (ie the allele) there is presently absolutely nothing you can do about it. If you want to ask in lay terms “Is there a gay gene?” the answer is simply “No.”

The more general scientific evidence about whether one is “born gay” is considered in Wilson & Rahman (2005). Something of their approach is revealed when in their preface they tell us:

Although psychiatry no longer regards homosexuality as a deviation or mental disorder...there are many religions around the world that regard gays as stubbornly ‘sinful’ people whose behaviour is an affront to the divine plan (p.9).

In this, of course, they confuse the orientation and the behaviour (even if born with the orientation no one is born with the lifestyle) as well as begging all kinds of issue about the fitness of politicised American psychiatry to pronounce on such moral issues. They take some higher figures from some smaller samples to conclude: “About 2-3.5% of men are completely gay, and 0.5-1.5% of women are completely lesbian.” but do usefully inform us that *bisexual* orientation, determined physiologically, is rare, and:

homosexual people (like most heterosexuals) are possessed on a ‘mosaic’ style of brain comprising a mixture of male and female attributes. (p.11)

So what is their view of the genetic influence? They assert

There is a widespread myth that parents are responsible through their upbringing for the way their children turn out despite overwhelming evidence that they have minimal influence on

their children's personalities or abilities beyond that of the genes they pass to them... The evidence that leads to this conclusion is detailed on page 46. (p.29)

So they claim there is "overwhelming evidence" of "minimal" non-genetic effects. But when we turn to page 45-6 we find:

In nearly all human behavioural traits that have been studied, a substantial proportion of the variance seems to be genetically determined. In the case of intelligence and abilities it is something like 70% down to the genes, for personality traits, psychiatric disorders, and social attitudes it is more in the region of 50 per cent. This means that roughly half the variation in a trait can be attributed... to various aspects of the environment. (p.45-6) Less than half the variation in sexual orientation can be ascribed to genetic differences between individuals (p.55)

Is 50% really "minimal"? Or is this a phenomenon they also note:

Steven Pinker points out that as an oddity in current thinking amongst many academics and lay people alike: people all of a sudden lose their ability to distinguish 50 per cent from 100 per cent.... (p.55)

Odd to note it and then apparently do the same themselves. They recognise, of course, there is no "gay gene", but conclude:

Homosexuality is probably not down to one or two particular genes; more likely there are dozens of gay genes; that is, human sexual orientation is polygenetic.

If the genetic effect is actually underwhelming, to conclude that people are "born gay" they try to find other *pre-birth* biological factors. Is it eg hormonal? They say:

Homosexual and heterosexual adults cannot be reliably distinguished as regards circulating hormone there are no reliable differences between heterosexuals and homosexuals in the levels of sex hormones in adults, what leads us to believe there are differences earlier in foetal life? (p.71)

The only answer they seem to give is behavioural experiments on injecting guinea pigs. They also note that CAH causes females to be subjected to large amounts of prenatal male sex hormones – yet

Given the large amounts of prenatal androgens levels these women had been exposed to (often in the male typical range) it is surprising that large shifts in orientation were not reported. (p.75)

Gay men report earlier puberty but "pubertal timing is very complex and poorly understood" (p.89). They also say (p.113)

Research found no variation in ARs [androgen receptors] between the post-mortem brains of young straight and gay men.

Disarmingly they admit:

Many of the research findings outlined above will appear confusing to the lay reader. In that case it may be reassuring that the scientists responsible for them are almost equally confused, for indeed the facts are complex and we are far from any firm conclusions... p.126

None of this, however, seems to damp their dogmatism:

Clearly, whatever the precise mechanism, these influences must have their effects on the developing brain of the "pre-heterosexual" or 'pre-homosexual' individual forming in the womb. After all, it is the brain that generates all our behaviour (not some wisp behind our heads called "the mind" which we carry with us like a balloon)... (p.107)

Having dismally failed to identify any clear physiological determining factor, they conclude that there "must be one" because everyone knows we are purely biologically determined anyway. Any view that we have a "mind" distinct from (though not separate from) the brain is rubbish in the most "straw man" fashion. "The brain" (somehow distinct from "us" because no one is consistently physicalist) "generates all our behaviour". *Where* exactly in the brain? Wilson & Rahman conclude:

There is more likely a network or circuit of brain regions (in which the hypothalamus is key) responsible for sexuality, involving other structures such as the amygdala, as well as "higher" cortical regions." (p.108)

This (once you discount their philosophical physicalism) does not seem to challenge our basic conclusions already made, ie that homosexual orientation is complex in origins.

None of this, of course, is to suggest that homosexuality is just down to some kind of continuing perverse choice – to suggest any such thing would be to fly in the face of all evidence. It *is* to say that genetics, environment, experiences, *and* choice, all go to form how someone develops. The simplistic assertion that some people are unalterably “born homosexual” (leaving aside the metaphysical religious issue of whether or not this is by deliberate divine design) is *against* presently known scientific findings, in spite of its frequent repetition as though “fact”.

Changing Orientation

We may now turn to the second of McNeil’s assertions above: that only very rarely can someone change his or her sexual orientation.

Now if homosexuality were genetically pre-programmed, then (as no one can presently change their genetics) it would be unalterable. If, however, it is due wholly or partly to childhood experiences (and/or choices), it is at least *in theory* a possibility that suitable action and therapy could reverse the effects of these. So what are the facts?

As we have seen, the idea that homosexuality is genetically pre-programmed is demonstrably a myth. Even for identical twins (who are genetically identical and also presumably shared the hormonal conditions in the womb) only about 11% correlate – so at most “genetics + womb-hormones” cause an increased tendency. We cannot, then, dismiss the possibility of change *a priori* as do McNeil and many other pro-gay-partnership writers – we have to look at the actual evidence as to whether there is any “therapy” which works, and whether people can in practice change orientation.

Obviously there are some homosexuals who have no desire to change, and who are offended at the idea of “healing”. But what about those who *have* wanted to change orientation? Again, we are faced with dogmatic assertions that “science has proved that a homosexual cannot change his/her orientation through therapy”. Again, as Jones and Yarhouse show, the actual methodology behind this assertion is patchy, statistically invalid, and often based on anecdote. Words like “homophobic” are often peppered

pejoratively around, and any counter instances are discounted. One cannot help but be reminded of David Hume’s approach to miracles: having appealed to experience as the only guide to truth, Hume then discounted all the many human testimonies to actual miracles as either lies or delusion.

First, then, we need to define terms:

- (1) Is “healing” defined only as a change in orientation, or would a happily adjusted celibate homosexual count?
- (2) Does it mean a total lack of any homosexual attraction, or just that heterosexual attraction predominates?

Anecdotes vary. For example, Virginia Mollencott struggled to be heterosexual in an environment where “shock-horror” accompanied any thought of homosexuality¹⁷⁸, and the family model was unbiblically patriarchal and authoritarian.¹⁷⁹ Unsurprisingly, when she abandoned the attempt, it felt like a resurrection freedom, and other active gays of both sexes have similar testimonies. On the other hand, Howard (1991) relates how various lesbians (often having had bad experiences of men) achieved varying degrees of “healing”. By selecting anecdotes and discounting counter-instances, one could build a picture either way. Of course all those who claim to have been “healed” *could* be lying or deluded – but, as Jones and Yarhouse say, on this basis practically everyone healed of *any* depression or unwanted psychological state could be faking it. It is odd how some writers suddenly become sceptical when they don’t like the conclusions. Interestingly, Dr. Robert L. Spitzer (a psychiatrist at Columbia University in New York) led the task force that in 1973 removed homosexuality from the official list of mental disorders contained in the APA’s diagnostic manual – he was then convinced that a gay orientation could not be changed. Then Spitzer did a study of

¹⁷⁸ This is, sadly, a repeated testimony of gays of either sex, pro or anti-gay-partnership.

¹⁷⁹ Described in Siker (1994). My own godly parents were, actually, also Brethren, but I could not conceive my father exercising the kind of authoritarianism it sounds as though poor Virginia suffered.

200 people in 2001 and changed his mind, to conclude that change was possible.¹⁸⁰ Clearly there was massive selection-bias in his sample, so assessment of “success rates” was impossible. On the other hand, he found so many who *did* testify coherently to change, that to maintain their “no change possible” dogma, critics had to argue that the subjects were consciously or unconsciously deceiving others and/or themselves – a classic *ad hoc* conventionalist stratagem to avoid taking counter-evidence seriously, as already noted. Wilson & Rahman (2005), for example, rubbish the findings because

No physiological measurements that might detect deception, deliberate or unconscious, were reported. Some gay men and lesbians may have deluded themselves...this was not a representative sample of gay men and lesbians... (p.40)

Well, firstly, this assumes that orientation is defined purely by physiological reaction. Secondly, the authors are suddenly suspecting of deception – when right throughout their book self-reporting eg of the stage of onset of gay feelings or early parental treatment of twins is accepted as gospel truth. Thirdly, *of course* the sample was not “representative” of gays in general – the issue was whether those *who wanted to change* orientation were able to do so. Wilson & Rahman then absurdly claim that a “true test” would be whether *straight* people could change *their* orientation: apparently assuming (i) that psychologically and physiologically the different directions of change are equivalent and (ii) that any spiritual effects or divine help (claimed by the participants) would work equally well in either direction. Having discounted any counter evidence at all costs, they then dogmatically assert a certain and absolute immutability of orientation.

No one, of course, should imagine that (whatever the “causes” of homosexual orientation) it is *easy* to change it. On the other hand, Christians who believe that God can (and sometimes does) heal a person born blind would surely accept that God can *sometimes*

¹⁸⁰ The paper is online at <http://www.newdirection.ca/research/spitzer.htm#source>.

change an unwanted orientation. Aardweg (1985)¹⁸¹ for example, gives results for his psychoanalytic method (described in Aardweg (1997)) with 37% radical or satisfactory change, and only 9% failure after persistence. Jones and Yarhouse suggest more conservative “success” rates of about 33% – though there are enormous problems in actually getting such estimates. Cohen (2000) again describes a number of cases of “healing” including his own, and again is difficult simply to dismiss – though he gives no indication of “success rates”.¹⁸²

In summary, the biological/psychological evidence is that homosexual orientation is a result of genetic, social/environmental, and lifestyle choices. It is not predetermined and unalterable, though no one should underestimate the difficulty – perhaps for some impossibility – of changing that orientation. The present writer is not qualified to advise anyone wishing to change orientation as to the “best method”, or “best therapy”, but churches which see homosexual acts as wrong must at least recognise that some kind of “therapy” may be needed for an orientation to change.¹⁸³ This is no more a denial of belief that God *can* sometimes miraculously act to change orientations and desires, than using medicine implies disbelief in the possibility of divine physical healing. Churches must also recognise that (as with the use of medicines) therapy is not certain or even highly likely to work. Whatever pastoral programs or approaches they take, these have to be based on reality and not wishful thinking.

Two more general points here arise from Jesus’ Matt 19 teaching. First, whilst God said “it is not good for man to be alone”, Jesus indicated that those who cannot undertake permanent, committed, heterosexual marriage, may choose to stay celibate for the sake of

¹⁸¹ Aardweg controversially defines homosexual orientation as a “neurosis” and is sceptical of the durability of most gay relationships, but it is hard to believe that *all* his claimed “successes” are lies or delusion.

¹⁸² Cohen sees homosexuality as arising from a “Same-Sex Attachment Disorder”, treatable with adult-child and other emotional therapy.

¹⁸³ The Free Methodist Church specifically does this in section 6.30.2.8 of the Canadian manual, also adopted by the American/UK conference in 2003.

the Kingdom of Heaven. He did *not* assume that everyone had a right to the intimacy of sex, even if they felt unable to make this marital commitment. Secondly, erotic passion in marriage is desirable, but not its essence – and Jesus is quite clear that “falling in love” with someone else is not a basis for ending a marriage.

For heterosexuals, Jesus offers a choice of caring, permanently committed, heterosexual marriage, or celibacy. I know some who would have loved to have found life-partners, but have not – and whether this leaves them (as it sometimes does) as wonderful balanced and happy people or people with a sense of loss, we cannot offer sexual-intimacy in eg a context of “caring promiscuity” instead.

Analogously, there may be some whose orientation is homosexual but who can successfully enter a caring, committed affectionate heterosexual marriage (as witnessed by figures like Gene Robinson and Roy Clements who did this before leaving their wives for their gay-partners). Others may choose celibacy, in line with Jesus’ words, without any need for a sense of “shame” or lessening of their human or Christian value. But, analogously to heterosexuals, we cannot offer a gay sexual-intimacy alternative.

Conclusions

The first two, then, of McNeil’s assumptions with which we began this Appendix are unlikely. In section 1.6 we noted the last two are even harder to maintain consistently. The trouble is that the same logic of argument would apply to various other “natural orientations”. Suppose, eg, it were shown that genetic/environment factors predisposed certain people to promiscuity. Actually, the same team in the same journal as Bailey (2000) produced evidence to show that promiscuous behaviour was indeed genetically linked (and Richard Dawkins might even be able to find us a suitable neo-Darwinian explanation!). Could promiscuous people use this to also argue that they should follow out their God-given characteristics, and that surely God would not be cruel enough to deny them sexual intimacy? Suppose it were

shown that genetic/environmental factors were strong in creating a paedophilic orientation.¹⁸⁴ Logically exactly McNeil’s same points (3) and (4) would ensue. The problem is that McNeil could apply his line of argument consistently only if he concluded that God intended us to follow up *all* inherent tendencies (including promiscuity, paedophilia, sadism, etc etc). If, however, we assume that *all* impulses we have are right to follow, then effectively there is no morality at all, it effectively means that anything we feel like doing is right. Philosophers call attempts to derive morality from nature the “naturalistic fallacy”, and the attempt must fail.

In this light we read eg Wilson & Rahman (2005), who say:

Although we are not ethicists... Nevertheless we would argue that if homosexuality is inborn or innate (as we have shown) then certain social policy consequences might reasonably follow... It does not appear to make any sense to deter people from acting on innate dispositions that harm no one else and are not contagious to others... we know that homosexuality is “immutable” insofar as it is highly resistant to attempts to change it... the fact that homosexual feelings cannot be reversed or totally eliminated shows that they are completely natural for gay people. p.148

Well, firstly their book falls very far from “showing” that homosexual orientation is 100% innate. Secondly, it begs the question of whether a person pursuing *presumably with others* a homosexual lifestyle is doing them “harm”. If it *is* wrong, then it *is* bringing them harm – so we cannot use this to determine whether or not it *is* wrong. Thirdly, what does “natural” mean? Could eg paedophilic feelings also be “natural”? Fourthly, if they are “natural” then does this make it right to follow them?

It is, of course, perfectly legitimate to ask whether a particular orientation/impulse is right or wrong, but this decision cannot be based simply on whether or not we have the impulse. As Jeffrey John in John (1993) rightly remarks:

¹⁸⁴ Again it should be noted that this point is *not* about any supposed link between homosexuality and paedophilia, but just that the same kind of justifying logic would apply.

...even if the origin of homosexuality could be shown to be genetic or psychological (and it is just as likely to be both), that would not tell us whether the phenomenon of homosexuality is good or bad, willed by God or not.(p.22).

On this, at least, we can fully agree with Canon John.

Appendix 3: Leviticus & Male Same-Sex Acts

Holiness and Canaanites

The gods of polytheism were generally part of the natural order, sexually driven, amoral, and manipulated through magic and priestcraft. Oswalt (1999) details some of the basic contrasts between these and the transcendent, personal and *holy* God of the Hebrews. Otto (1928) set out factors in the *idea* of the *holy*: awe-fulness, overpoweringness, urgency, “wholly otherness”, and compelling fascination – to which Gammie (1989) adds majesty and purity. Holiness is a key and frequent OT term, and Harrison (1992) notes that it is not one attribute of God but his “quintessential nature”.

The context of the laws and ordinances is that God has, purely of grace covenanted with Israel. Fulfilling them is not to “earn” God’s favour, but to live out the covenant and safely approach the holy God.

Gammie emphasizes the focus of the OT priestly tradition on “ritual purity, right sacrifices, separation”, compared with the prophets on “purity of social justice” and the Wisdom literature on “cleanness of individual morality” (p.1). We may, however, note that the two great commandments identified by Jesus, include “love your neighbour as yourself” from the middle of the Leviticus Priestly code. Because El/YWH is a *moral* God, both what we would call morality and pure ritual are therefore involved in approaching and dealing with him. The code writers did not clearly distinguish what we might see as:

- (1) *truly ethical* (“love” – ie cherish – your neighbour)
- (2) *culturally applied ethics* (leave some grain in fields for the poor to glean)
- (3) *pure symbolism* (do not mix wool and cotton in garments).

What are we to make of the “pure symbolism”? Even without, as some modern Christian do, distorting the code to mock it more

effectively,¹⁸⁵ we may wonder at the strangeness of some of the laws. Some have suggested they are “really” hygiene laws, though it would then seem odd for Jesus and NT Christians to apparently suspend them. Others have suggested they are purely arbitrary, a kind of “test of obedience”. Most plausible is the suggestion of Douglas (1966), adapted by Wenham (1979), that the laws reflect an emphasis on symbolic “wholeness and normality”.¹⁸⁶ God’s “separation” of sky, earth, and sea, was followed by creation of animals suitably designed to populate each element. Douglas explores how “forbidden” animals are not “true to type”, or (like eg birds of prey) eat flesh with the blood (representing the life) still in it, as forbidden to the Israelites. This is not to suggest that these animals differ from how God made them, but that the ordinances were a constant reminder to the Israelites of the principles of normality, wholeness, etc, which they were to follow. We “follow” them in the New Covenant by following the principles: “normality” and “wholeness” for us is what God has revealed to us, not necessarily *everything* that exists in nature. It is, Douglas suggests, a mistake to try to interpret the codes “linearly” as post-enlightenment thought tends to, rather than on a “ring” model. It is a mistake to look at individual laws (eg why not eat hares?) and not at what the overall code was meaning to convey.

The Israelites, then, have a special covenant:

³For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. You shall not eat any “abomination” (*tô’ēbā*).⁴These are the animals which you may eat... they are unclean for you.⁸Also the swine is unclean for you.¹⁰And whatever does not have fins and scales you shall not eat; it is unclean for you...

¹⁸⁵ Eg taking “uncover the nakedness” to be about mere nudity, or provisions for excusing newlyweds from military service/public duties for a year to mean they can do no work at all (Kader (1999) p. 43.)

¹⁸⁶ Douglas (1966) p.53ff., Wenham (1979) p.169. Some of the later Douglas (1999) is helpful, though overstated.

²¹"You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; you may give it to the alien who is within your gates, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner; for you are a holy people to the LORD your God. (Deut 14:3-21)

Deut 14:3 is the *only* verse where *tô’ēbā* (abomination) is applied to dietary laws, which are more commonly dealt with in terms of *ṭm* “unclean” and “clean” *ṭhr*. The passage, however, seems to make it clear that these are rules “for you”. Other nations are not castigated for eating “unclean” animals. This attitude is also reflected in the many references to “strangers” or foreign immigrants dwelling later amongst the Israelites. These benefit from social and welfare provisions including Sabbath rests (Ex.23:12; Lev.23:22 etc). They have to keep basic laws – like not blaspheming or eating the blood which represented life (Lev.17:10; 24:16 – note Acts 15:20) – and any sacrifices they make have to be done right (Lev.17:8; Num.15:14). They are not, however, forced to be circumcised unless they *choose* to keep Passover (Ex.12:48; Num.9:14). Though repeatedly included in social/moral laws, there is never indication they have to keep dietary law and in one case they are specifically excluded (Deut.14:21).

Canaanites, like “strangers”, are never castigated for not keeping Jewish dietary laws, but in contrast:

⁹ "When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations.¹⁰There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer,¹¹ or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.¹²For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you. (Deut.18:9-10)

Child sacrifice and witchcraft are wrong not because they get the rituals wrong, but because they are inherently immoral acts. Obviously idolatry is also an “abomination”, but again this is something moral not ceremonial – it is placing something else above God.

Lev.18 again makes clear that the Canaanites are an “abomination” not just for wrong ceremonies, but for their works in general:

²“Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: “I am the LORD your God. ³According to the doings (*ma^aśeh*) of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings (*ma^aśeh*) of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. ⁴You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the LORD your God...

²⁴“Do not defile (*ṭm*’) yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled (*ṭm*’), which I am casting out before you. ²⁵For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. ²⁶You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations (*tô’ēbâ*), either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you ²⁷(for all these abominations (*tô’ēbâ*) the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled), ²⁸lest the land vomit you out also when you defile (*ṭm*’) it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you. ²⁹For whoever commits any of these abominations(*tô’ēbâ*), the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people. ³⁰“Therefore you shall keep My ordinance, so that you do not commit any of these abominable customs which were committed before you, and that you do not defile yourselves by them: I am the LORD your God.”(Lev 18:2-30)¹⁸⁷.

The writer refers to both the “ordinances” or statutes and to the “doings”. Of “doings” Carpenter writes: “all types of human works/actions are designated by the noun”¹⁸⁸, it refers not only to rites or ceremonies but works in general. When God relented as he saw the “works” (Jn.3:10) of the Ninevites, it was their repentance and turning from evil – not some adoption of Jewish ceremonial. Grisanti writes that “abominations” (*tô’ēbâ*) “denotes the persons,

¹⁸⁷ Cf Also Ezra 9:11.

¹⁸⁸ VanGemeren (1996) vol.3 p.550. See eg in Gen.20:9 or Ps.62:12.

things or practices that offend one’s ritual or moral order”¹⁸⁹. Grisanti rightly notes the Canaanite cultic context for much of Yahweh’s pronouncement of *tô’ēbâ*, but also notes issues that are more general condemnations of deceit and immorality. *Tô’ēbâ* is a strong word, only used once in Deuteronomy to describe the merely ritually unclean animals¹⁹⁰ and that is in ch.14 which as we saw emphasizes that this is just for the nation of Israel. More usually, and consistently in Leviticus, it seems to concern what we would think of as inherently “moral” issues.

In Lev.18 *tô’ēbâ* refers in general to:

- (A) Various kinds of incestuous sex¹⁹¹ (18:6 then 18:7-18)
- (B) Sex during menstruation (18:19)
- (C) Adultery with a neighbour’s wife (18:20)
- (D) Child offering to Molech (18:21)
- (E) Male gay-sex acts (18:22 cf 20:13)
- (F) Bestiality (18:23)

Canaanites are castigated for all these activities but never criticised for not keeping dietary laws. This would seem to indicate that the moral objection to all of them is more basic than mere symbol or diet. This, then, includes sex during menstruation, and Gagnon (2001)’s suggestion (p.138) as to why this particular law was given is pure speculation and his repeated assertion (eg p.121) that it “no longer has force today” seems to lack any real rationale.¹⁹² Having said this, it is clear that the things pronounced *tô’ēbâ* are not on an equal level. The death penalty is pointedly *not* suggested for sex during menstruation, so, although reprehensible, it plainly was not considered as serious as the others. The male

¹⁸⁹ VanGemeren (1996) vol.4 p.315.

¹⁹⁰ Gagnon (2001) p.119 notes that unclean animals are “abhorrent things” but eating them is not said to be an “abomination” – and Canaanites are not castigated for eating them.

¹⁹¹ “Uncovering the nakedness” is a euphemism for sex.

¹⁹² My Marston (1980) p.52 took this view, and I have seen no reason to change it.

same-sex acts, moreover, are singled out in Lev.18:22 to have the epithet *tô'ēbā* applied to them – just to re-emphasize the point.

Leviticus and Gay-Sex Acts

In section 2.3 we considered how Lev.19 is a core part of the holiness code, full of laws relating to social justice, fair trading, concern for the poor and needy, disabilities rights, and just measures including the command to love one's neighbour as oneself. Either side of this great passage we read:

With a male (*zākār*) you shall not lie (*shakav*) the lyings of a woman (*'iššā*). It is an abomination (*tô'ēbā*) (Lev.18:22).

If a man (*'iš*) lies (*shakav*) with a male (*zākār*) as he lies with a woman (*'iššā*), both of them have committed an abomination (*tô'ēbā*). They shall surely be put to death.(Lev.20:13).

We noted in section 2.3 that the Hebrew phrase is a very general one for male-on-male sex-acts. We noted that the LXX faithfully translated Lev 18:22 and 20:13 as “bed a male” by *arsen* (male) and *koitē* (bed), so in 20:13 it reads as: *arsenos koiton*. In Numbers 31:18 and Judges 21:11-12 women who have not known lying with men (*koiton arsenos*) just means “virgins”, not the non-promiscuous or those who have avoided some particular form or frequency of sex. Both Hebrew and Greek, then, speak generally about a man having sex with a man as though with a woman/wife. In this appendix we may now note in more detail the various rather spurious claims made by some pro-gay-partnership writers about these passages.

Some suggestions about the acts involved

Kader (1999) (who has reputedly widely lectured on campuses) does some bizarre word analyses, apparently based on Strong's concordance:

For the Leviticus author to say that a man should not lie with a man, just in general, both men listed would be #376, *man*, in the Old Testament. Instead it says that a *man* [#376] who lies with a *mankind* [#2145]...” (p.49).

Kader argues from this that it “really” means that a man “especially remembered” should not be used like a harlot.

Actually the second word means “male” not mankind (in spite of KJV but as NKJV) – a word used some 75 times in the OT consistently with that meaning. It is the word in Gen 1:27 and 5:2 “Male and female he created them”. It does not mean “someone specially remembered”, and there is no more general word for “male” available.

Hopper (w2004) suggests:

And if the New American Standard Bible is correct, the literal translation of Lev.18:22 is 'you shall not lie with a male, as those (plural) who lie with a female (singular)'. This clearly implies prostitution. But the case is strong without this.

Actually the NASB only gives the plural in 20:13, it is singular in 18:22. Milgrom (2000), p.1569, explains it is plural simply because an illicit relationship is envisaged. Hopper really is clutching at straws.

Some pro-gay-partnership writers do accept that the Leviticus verses “unequivocally condemn homosexual behavior”.¹⁹³ This is really undeniable. The phrase is the most general one could imagine for male-on-male sex, and attempts to restrict it to special types of sex are unrealistic.

“Abomination” and the “cultic context”

The words “have sex with a male as with a female” are very general. But could this only be “wrong” because it was occurring within a cultic context? Two issues are relevant to deciding this:

- (1) Were the activities abominated (including male same-sex acts) a part of Canaanite cultic rites?
- (2) Were they abominated purely because of associations with these?

So were gay-sex, incest, adultery and bestiality all parts of Canaanite rites? The pro-gay-partnership Douglas (2000) gives credence to the idea that the central idea is rejection of Canaanite cultic practice. She argues that:

¹⁹³ Wink (1999) p.34.

If they were intended to provide guidance for the organisation of marriage, the choice of marriage partners, or about right and wrong conduct of family life and sex, they would have to be judged strangely inadequate. (p.236).

This is an odd argument. Is she suggesting that as part of cultic practice close family members had sex, or committed adultery with neighbour's wives? She cites examples of incest in Egyptian Royal families, bestiality in Pan worship and Vedic practice, but all this is remote and there's no evidence any of it took place in Canaanite cults.¹⁹⁴ In any case, is Douglas saying that *all* these things are OK today as long as caringly done and not in a "cultic" context?

Many sources, some of them neutral, suggest that male and female prostitution were part of Canaanite cultic practice. Gagnon (2001) pp.48ff, for example, cites various references from Nissenen (1998) to conclude strongly that the Mesopotamian *assinu* were effectively male cult prostitutes. Nissenen himself, however, casts doubt on this (pp.33-35), and the pro-gay-partnership Bird, in Balch (2000) (p.159) cites Nissenen to argue that:

- Ugaritic and Hittite literature has no clear homoerotic reference.
- Egyptian texts contain only one reference *disapproving* pedaresty and one of humiliating anal aggression.
- Assyrian law gives harsh penalties against same-sex acts between equals.
- Mesopotamian sources refer to male cultic persons (*assinnu*, *kurgarrû*, *kulu'u* and *sinnišānu*) although "their role in homoerotic encounters is disputed and evidence for their sexual activity is almost exclusively inferential."

Bird rejects the frequently suggested association of the homosexual prohibition in the OT with Canaanite religion. This is because:

¹⁹⁴ Milgrom (2000) likewise finds *some* incidence of bestiality and incest in contemporary cultures, but not in Canaanite.

- (1) Homosexual activity "makes no sense" as part of a fertility cult.
- (2) The *assinusi* "do not provide a model for homosexual practice condemned in the Hebrew Bible."(p.161).
- (3) The attempt to link it to Canaanite religion through the language of "abomination" actually "fails to distinguish a host of other rejected practices". As Bird believes the writing/redaction of the code to be much later, she believes it contains little real detail of original Canaanite practice.

Hall in VanGemeren (1996) vol.1 reads:

In several places the words *qādēš* and *qēdēšâ* are commonly translated as sacred or shrine prostitutes (Gen 38:21, 22; Deut 23:17(18); 1 Kgs 15:12; 22:46[47]; 2 Kgs 23:7). But recent research has suggested there was no such class of people in ancient cultures, if we mean indiscriminate sex for hire, and that this class of people is better understood as some kind of (not clearly understood) cult functionary.(p.1124).

The Genesis passage is indicative because Judah thought she was a common harlot (*zônâ*), but his Abdulhamite friends thought he was looking for a. There is no indication, of course, that Judah thought he was engaged in a cultic fertility rite, but the mistake may imply that sexual availability was involved in being a *qēdēšâ*. Hos. 4:14 speaks of those who go aside with prostitutes (*hazzônôt*) and sacrifice with the *qēdēšôt* – again linking the two. Whether the male *qādēš* had any similar role we cannot really know.

Schmidt (1995) p.92 claims Job 36:14 (*qēdēšîm*) "may represent an early connection between homosexuality and passionate excess", but the text gives no such connection. Gagnon (2001) p.103 follows Schmidt, and unconvincingly suggests that the apparent ascription to *qēdēšîm* of short lives can be explained only if they led lives involving "profligate sexual acts". Gagnon, consistently with his approach, sounds notes of caution but then simply speaks of *qēdēšîm* as "homosexual cult prostitutes" parallel to his view of the *assinnu*, *kurgarrû* and *kulu'u* in Mesopotamia. He addresses the question (p.108) as to whether, in this case, cultic prostitution has anything to do with modern loving homosexual partnerships, and responds that actually the "*most* acceptable form

of same-sex intercourse... was precisely (that) conducted in a religious context". If even these, he argues, were contemptuously rejected as "dogs", then other forms of male same-sex acts would be seen even more negatively. All this may be true, but there seems too flimsy an evidential base to assert it so dogmatically.

Actually, it really does not matter that we do not know exactly what a *qādēs* did. Supposing that their function did, in fact, involve same-sex acts - the main point is that had Lev.18 and 20 intended to ban such specifically cultic sexual activity then the text would have surely specifically said that no one should become a *qādēs*, rather than use the most general term possible for male gay-sex acts? The whole wording and context of the ban seems to imply general practice, not specifically cultic ceremonies.

Abominations and commentaries.

What exactly is abomination (*tō'ēbā*)?

Grisanti, writing in the reference work Gemeren (1996) p. 315, says "*tō'ēbā* denotes the persons, things or practices that offend one's ritual or moral order". Fundamentally it is something found offensive. Grisanti rightly notes the Canaanite cultic context for much of Yahweh's pronouncement of *tō'ēbā*, but also notes issues that are more general condemnations of deceit and immorality. The article states: "Yahweh also loathed homosexuality (Lev 18:22; 20:13)" and although "it is apparent that homosexuality was a prominent part of Canaanite practice, most likely as an element of their worship (cult prostitution)" the article gives the more general explanation that:

This practice of a man lying with another man "after the manner of lying with a woman" (Levine 123) was abhorrent to Yahweh because it perverted the heterosexual relationship ordained by him (Gen 2:24; 4:1).

Wenham (1979) p. 258 describes Lev.18 as "Other Canaanite Customs to be Avoided". He says *tō'ēbā* is "a term of strong disapproval in Hebrew... something detestable and hated by God", and "Homosexuality [one presumes he really means same-sex-acts] is condemned throughout Scripture."

Harrison (1980) concludes:

Homosexuality was uniformly condemned in the OT as *an abomination*... It violated the natural order of sexual relationships, and catered to perverted lust rather than procreation.(p.192).

Gerstenberger (1993) p.245 claims chapters 18-20 "deal only marginally with cultic matters."

Budd (1996) p.261 admits that in eg Proverbs *tō'ēbā*" generally has kind of ethical content" but adds "It often refers to religious or social praxis which is alien to a particular group (c.f e.g. Gen.43:32, 46:34; Ex.8:26)." Actually these three are not selected examples as "e.g." might seem to imply, but the *only* clear cases for this, and they refer to pagan not divine attitude. On this basis, however, he asserts:

The use of the text as an argument against homosexual relations today would necessitate, in the interests of hermeneutic consistency, a similar attitude to the issues raised in e.g. Deut.14:3-8; 22:5 where **abomination** is also identified.(p.261).

He is right about 22:5 and transvestitism,¹⁹⁵ but we have noted that Deut.14 contrasts with Lev.18 in that on at least some of the diet issues strangers are specifically excluded, whereas for the sexual deviations the Canaanites are castigated and the land said to vomit them out. He does not state whether he believes that the censures eg on incest and bestiality can be similarly put down to mere religious aversion.

Milgrom (2000) states:

The Bible allows for no exceptions; all acts of sodomy are prohibited, whether performed by rich or poor, higher or lower status, citizen or alien.(p.1566).

Paradoxically, Milgrom (a liberal rabbi), later in his book sees this as directed *only* to Israel, and contradicts his earlier comment by suggesting "homosexual relations with unrelated males are neither prohibited or penalized". Since he takes it that it is all about

¹⁹⁵ This is, however, about symbolism; the writer presumably did not have pantomime dames in mind.

procreation, he suggests Jewish gay-partners simply adopt children to increase the nation.

Bellinger (2001) p.113 takes it that 18:22 “prohibits sexual intercourse between men”. He notes “interpreters have suggested that this prohibition enables Israel to demonstrate its distinctiveness as Yahweh’s people.” This would seem to place it on the same level as not wearing mixtures of wool and cotton. Bellinger adds, however, that “there may be more to it than this”, and that the priestly concern for “boundaries” may see an infringement of boundaries set for male and female in Genesis 1. He then adds “The other factor is probably the wasting of semen...” Bellinger gives, however, no reference to indicate that wasting the “life force” in semen was a concern for Israelites, nor that it had any relevance here.

Ross (2002) p.346 says: “homosexuality is clearly prohibited here (18:22) and elsewhere in Scripture”. He takes it that the *qādēš* and *q^odēšā* are “holy ones” involved in male and female Temple prostitution – though he gives no supporting references for this. He notes, however, that:

This passage does not mention any connection to pagan worship (and the passage has already included the prohibition against ordinary adultery). The text simply refers to Canaanite practices that must be avoided – and one of them is homosexuality. It is called a detestable act because it is out of harmony with nature.(p.346).

It is not uncommon for commentators to make up supposed rationales for the ban. To Gerstenberger (1993) p.254 the gay-sex ban “presumably involved demonic fears” – he does not tell us what evidence there is for this. More popularly (as noted for Bellinger) it is suggested that it is all about procreation or semen emission. Milgrom claims for *all* the bans “they involve the illicit emission of semen... resulting in illicit or lack of progeny.” (p.1567). In fact even the euphemism used (“uncover the nakedness”) seems to point to something other than semen as crucial and the actual text gives no indication that this is the primary concern. Milgrom himself notes (p.1568) that the condemnation of non-procreative expenditure of semen occurs in

Jewish literature only in very late Talmudic sources probably influenced by Zoroastrianism.

Wink (1999) suggests (and Hopper (w2004) says something similar) that the reasoning behind the gay-sex ban is really that:

The Hebrew prescientific understanding was that male semen contained the whole of nascent life. With no knowledge of eggs and ovulation it was assumed that the woman provided only the incubation space. Hence the spilling of semen for any nonprocreative purpose – in *coitus interruptus* (Gen 38:1-11), male homosexual acts, or male masturbation – was considered tantamount to murder.(p.34).

The only actual verse Wink cites for this is Gen.38:9, where it is very clear that what displeased the Lord was Onan’s deliberate and deceptive avoidance of fulfilling the Levirite duty (insisted on by his father) to bring up a child in a deceased brother’s name. To take this as any *general* denouncement of contraception would be an absurd inference, and it is noteworthy that there are absolutely no bans of or even references to either *coitus interruptus* or masturbation anywhere in the Hebrew Bible (whereas if it really is “tantamount to murder” one would expect nothing less than the death sentence). Whilst in general “arguments from absence” are dangerous, this passage shows that Hebrews were perfectly well aware of this method of contraception, but no ban was thought appropriate. Wenham (1994) p.367 suggests that “it seems unlikely that the OT would approve of systematic contraception”, but the verses he cites¹⁹⁶ indicate no more than that ancient people thought many children a blessing and that God intended them to populate the earth. This does imply neither that semen was “sacred” and should not be “wasted”, nor that everyone was bound to have as many children as possible. Actually, although Philo (and Josephus) did seem to view at least the possibility of procreation as central, some early rabbis allowed contraception and second century rabbi Meir accepted *coitus interruptus* if pregnancy was undesirable.¹⁹⁷ The supposed “pre-scientific” ideas

¹⁹⁶ Gen.1:28; 8:17; 9:1,7; Ps 127,128

¹⁹⁷ Instone-Brewer (2002) p.91 n.22.

Wink ascribes generally to the Hebrews would surely have impelled the Torah to place a ban on *coitus-interruptus* within marriage? Wink's suggestions, moreover, also seem totally at odds with Scripture speaking of "the seed of the woman" (Gen 3:15) if actually she provides none, and Wink gives no proof at all that Hebrews held such views. Though I have no reason at all to doubt his sincerity, all this looks like a mixture of special pleading and wild claims that are strange for a Professor of Biblical interpretation if he is really trying to discover the truth and meaning of Scripture.¹⁹⁸

Dawson, (w2006), on the LGCM website, argues similarly. First he claims that *tô'ēbâ* essentially means "ritually unclean" – but rather carelessly cites Lev.7:21 as a key evidence for this although the Hebrew word used here is *sheketz* and not *tô'ēbâ*. However, Dawson adds:

I believe that the Levitical compilers condemned the practices not just because they were pagan, but because they thought they were contrary to the will of God. They disapproved of all practices which did not conform to the pattern apparently laid down by God at the creation and which could not lead to child birth, the principle purpose of sex. Homosexual activity was seen to be a rejection of the normal family structures which was the only basis for community life. Structures which were begun and sanctioned by God at the Creation.

The part of this that is untrue is the suggestion that "the principal purpose of sex" was childbirth. There is no indication of this either in Gen.1-3 or anywhere else in the Bible – though the pro-gay-partnership lobby often argue this. The purpose of creating the woman was to be an "ally suitable for him" – hardly necessary if procreation was the main aim. A subservient docile creature would have well sufficed for procreation (and possibly avoided all the trouble with the tree and serpent later on!). The primary purpose of the woman/wife (*'iššâ*) was as ally-companion, and sexual

¹⁹⁸ Gagnon (2001) pp.448ff contains further analysis of the inconsistency and eccentricity of Wink's exegesis.

bonding is seen primarily in terms of knowing-intimacy, not as for procreation. NT references bear out this understanding.¹⁹⁹

Other pro-gay-partnership theologians vary in their approach to circumvent the apparent meaning of the Leviticus laws. Scroggs suggests that the original context may have been "cultic heterosexual prostitution", but he later admits: "...the laws in Leviticus are unequivocally opposed to male homosexual activity."²⁰⁰

Clements (w2006) is another who claims the word is "usually implying an idolatrous offence or some breach of ritual purity", and tries to restrict its scope to the purely local issues of Israel and the cult.

Hopper (w2004) concludes:

the Leviticus references, like the others in the Old Testament, are linked with the hated Canaanite cults in which young men and women were recruited for temple prostitution.

We have seen that there is no extra-biblical evidence for this, and if the Biblical word *qādēs* really indicates it, then it is odd that the Leviticus writer used a very general phrase for male same-sex acts rather than use the word *qādēs* itself.

Conclusions on Leviticus

The Leviticus 18 and 20 verses occur in a list of the sins of the Canaanites, some of which concern their cultic worship but some of which concern personal sexual morality. The ban on a "man lying with a male as with a woman/wife" is the most general description that could be given on any and all male gay-sex acts. Unlike (eg) dietary laws, there seems to have been a judgment on the Canaanites for such practices. Unless Jesus or Paul gave some particular indication otherwise, we might expect that it would be likely that this would continue to apply to us today. On its own, however, the difficulties of interpreting OT Laws for today might

¹⁹⁹ Eph.5:32; 1 Cor.6:16.

²⁰⁰ Scroggs (1983) p.99.

make us wary of insisting on taking it as binding on all Christians. I do not “admit”, I “assert” that, *on its own*, the Leviticus ban would be inconclusive. For Christians the key issue is the attitude of Jesus and the NT, through which we view the OT and its regulations. As the main text of this work has made clear, Paul makes fairly obvious reference to Leviticus, whilst both Paul and Jesus interpret the creation accounts in Genesis as implying that male-female permanent marriage bonds are the only context God intended for sexual activity.

Appendix 4: Exploring Some Alternative Exegeses

Arsenokoitia

This present work argues that the meaning of the Greek *arsenokoitia* is any kind of sex of a man with another male. Here we explore in more depth various challenges to this conclusion, from different pro-gay-partnership theologians.

The pro-gay-partnership Martin, in Brawley (1996) pp.117ff notes how English translations render *arsenokoitēs* very differently (though why this is relevant is unclear as we all know there is no equivalent English word). He discounts any relevance of the identical verbal form in the LXX of Lev.20:13 because the words *arsēn* and *koitēs* are used but “not joined” – though this is odd since the LXX Lev.20:13 text says “*arsenos koitēn*” and both the LXX and early Epistle copies were in Greek Uncials which rarely have spaces between words. He assures us, however, that the known meanings of *arsēn* and *koitēs* are irrelevant, and claims that to find what *arsenokoitēs* “really” means we must “analyse its use in as many different contexts as possible”(p.119). Martin is, of course, right that conjoined terms *can* assume a different meaning as a compound word becomes common, although even then, some rationale for the change of meaning can often be identified. The problem here is that *arsenokoitia* is *not* a common term, the Corinthian epistle connection with the Leviticus sex laws eg on incest is clear, and the Levitical use is the only known pre-Pauline use of the term – “joined” or not. Martin suggests that “really” *arsenokoitia* means only “economic exploitation by means of sex” – homo or heterosexual. For such a radical departure from the obvious natural meaning of the terms, and the meaning when they are used together in Leviticus, he would surely require reasonable evidence? His main “evidence”, however, is nothing more than *where* in some later lists of vices the term is put. He first cites a list in the Sybelline oracle (*Sib.Or.* 2:73) – though actually this seems anyway to be a later insertion in the oracle, with heavy

Levitical association, and is unlikely to have altered the term from its Levitical meaning.²⁰¹ Martin's second main reference is to the 2ndC Gnostic *Acts of John*, which lists "the poisoner, sorcerer, swindler, *arsenokoitēs*, the thief and all of this band..." Surely, however, this list no more implies that *arsenokoitai* are objectionable only because they exploit, than that sorcerers are similarly regarded and so "non-exploitative" sorcery would be OK? Martin's only other two references are in the Christian fathers Theophilus (late 2ndC) and Hippolytus (early 3rdC), and do not fit his argument very well. Theophilus, inconveniently for Martin, lists *arsenokoitia* right next to *porneia* in one of his two lists, and Hippolytus describes how *moicheia* (adultery) and *arsenokoitia* (which he links) came into the world together according to a Gnostic myth. But why let the evidence spoil a good argument? Martin also dismisses a quotation in the 4thC Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospel* (vi.10.25):

From the river Euphrates, and as far as the Ocean towards the East, he who is reviled as a murderer, or a thief, is not at all indignant: but he who is reviled for sodomy [*arsenokoitēs*] avenges himself even to the death: among the Greeks, however, even their wise men are not blamed for having favourites [male lovers].

This is ostensibly a quotation from the 2-3rdC Bardesanes, and is given here in the Gifford 1903 translation.²⁰² Gagnon (p.319) places the last line in brackets and notes its omission in some versions, which leads some to suppose it was Eusebius' own comment. The context, however, is one where "Bardesanes" is comparing pairwise a series of differences in sexual ethics between cultures, the whole passage is meaningless without it (or something like it), and the meaning is clear. Extreme Eastern horror of being accused of "*arsenokoitia*" is contrasted with Greek acceptance of male lovers. In his *Demonstration of the Gospel* (i.6.67) Eusebius also attributes to "Moses" the command not to

²⁰¹ See Gagnon (2001) p. 318.

²⁰² Presently available on line on http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius_pe_06_book6.htm.

"commit adultery nor *arsenokoitein* – which is surely a reference to the LXX of Leviticus where the terms are used?"

Gagnon further notes (p.320) that in works attributed to Origen, Theodoret of Cyrillus, Cyril of Alexandria, Nilus of Ancyra, and John of Damascus, *porneia* (general sexual immorality) *moichaeia* (adultery) and *arsenokoitia* are listed together

Martin's is a classic "exegesis of desperation". Discount the most obvious LXX link; try to apply linguistic approaches suited for common idiomatic terms to a rare one; and finish by implying that actually no one can possibly know what it means – so best ignore it. The simple fact is that all the evidence points to general male-on-male sex as the meaning of *arsenokoitia*.

The pro-gay-partnership Countryman (1988) pp.200ff argues that in Timothy *arsenokoitais* "really means" prostitutes, because it is next to *pornoi* which, he claims, implies a use of prostitutes, and so he believes that some kind of greedy ingratiation was also involved. The pro-gay-partnership Scroggs (1983) pp.118ff, in contrast, argues that in Timothy the *pornoi* are the male prostitutes and the *arsenokoitai* are the ones who use them. In both cases the most abstruse reasoning is used. Wright (1984), amongst others, has demolished these kinds of arguments. Scroggs claims that "in normal Greek usage" *pornos* means "male prostitute". The word is used 10 times in the NT²⁰³ - and in verses like 1 Cor.5:9, or even more Heb.12:16 and 13:4 the meaning "male prostitute" rather than simply "immoral person" seems wildly unlikely. Its (only) use in the LXX, Sirach 2:16-18, just as clearly means an immoral person, not a male prostitute. "This is not the place" says Scroggs, "to address the general usage in the New Testament and Sirach..."(p.119). Why not, since his argument depends on the meaning of a NT use of the term? Overall Scroggs argues thus: In 1 Cor.6, placing *arsenokoitai* next to *malakoi* implies that *malakoi* are male prostitutes and *arsenokoitai* those who use them. This is flimsy, as *malakoi* were not necessarily prostitutes, and there is no need to suppose that *arsenokoitai* is connected with them anyway.

²⁰³ 1 Cor.5:9; 50, 5:11; Eph.5:5; 1 Tim.1:10; Heb.12:16; 13:4; Rev.21:8; 22:15.

Even more flimsy is Scroggs' next argument that placing *pornoi* next to *arsenokoitais* in Timothy implies a similar meaning and relationship. He is inviting us to ascribe meaning based on positions in not obviously well-ordered lists – rather than on either obvious meanings in the LXX known to Paul or contemporary NT literature. It all smacks, again, of an exegesis of desperation.

The pro-gay-partnership Hopper (w2004) accepts that in using the term *arsenokoitai* “Paul is pointedly referring back to Leviticus 20:13”. Since Hopper has argued that in that context it referred exclusively to the cultus of 2nd millennium BC Canaanite Temple male prostitutes, it seems a bit odd for Paul to be using it in the first century. Hopper, however, goes on to conclude:

The same-sex sexual acts that Paul writes about in Corinth all involve abuse and perversion. They may be committed by homosexuals, heterosexuals or both. They are acts which undermine the worth and dignity of those involved. But again, this does not fit the case of responsible, loving, faithful gay and lesbian Christians...

Hopper, then, takes Paul – even though he is using a very general term for man-on-male sex taken from an OT source which seen by rabbis to be very general in application – to be writing *only* about abusive Corinthian gay-sex (presumably pederasty?). The only real “proof” he brings for this is to point to the experiences of modern gay and lesbian Christians.

Boswell (1981) pp.341-353 actually argues that the first part of *arsenokoitai* is subjective, so it simply means “a male having intercourse” ie a male prostitute.²⁰⁴ As, however, Scroggs rightly points out, since the word does not occur in Greek literature, we have to understand its origin in terms of the LXX of Leviticus. In that context there is absolutely no doubt that the “*arsen*” (male) is the object not the subject, and it means a male having sex with a male. Boswell (who is a historian not a linguist) must surely be mistaken; again this is an exegesis born of desperation.

²⁰⁴ Boswell (1981) pp.341-353.

Others have also tried to present the word as being “uncertain” or “problematic, and the various translations of it are again presented as “proof” of this.²⁰⁵ Again this is unconvincing. Often there are words in one language for which there are no exact equivalents in another. The Hebrew and Greek languages had no word for “homosexual”, whilst we have no English word for “*arsenokoitai*”. Moreover, all such terms are parts of “semantic fields” in which different words associate and give nuances of meaning and extended meanings. The fact that we have no actual English term for *arsenokoitai* (let alone its semantic fields) may give translators difficulties which they try to solve in a variety of ways²⁰⁶ – but this does not alter the fact that the Greek word itself is simple, perfectly general, and unambiguous. Scanzoni & Mollecott (1978) p.67 again suggest that “The original intent seems to have been to single out specific *kinds* of same-sex practice that were considered deplorable.” No serious proof is advanced for this, and on the basis of pure conjecture it is said that it “may refer to sodomites,” or “could refer to male prostitution”. But if the apostle of Christ deliberately chose a general word (“go to bed with a male”), then we are surely not at liberty to arbitrarily suggest some limited meaning for it?

Dawson (w2006) considers various suggestions that would make *malakoi* a narrowly technical term and says:

If this is Paul's meaning it is odd that he didn't use a more technical term. The lover ‘*erastes*’ the boy ‘*eromenos*’, or ‘*paidika*’, to give the body for purposes of intercourse ‘*charidzesthai*’, even the literal ‘lover of boys’ ‘*paiderasteia*’ was common enough.

‘*Arsenokoitos*’ may mean more generally ‘sodomite’ though it suggests also promiscuity, ‘*koitos*’ in Romans 13:13 means sexual excess. A correct translation of ‘*arsenokoitoi*’ may be ‘promiscuous homosexuals’.

²⁰⁵ GCM (1977) p.3; Scanzoni & Mollencott (1978) p.66, also Hopper does this, and Martin as we saw.

²⁰⁶ Gagnon (2001) p.321 n99 outlines some of the problems involved.

Dawson's first comment is right and obvious, Paul does not use *paidēasteia*, because his meaning was not restricted to pederasty. But Dawson's second statement is not supportable although others have also tried to argue that Rom.13:13 means that *koitos* can mean "sexual excess".²⁰⁷ Actually, in Rom.13:13 the plural word *koitais* is joined under the same verb with a word for "excesses": "not in beds and excesses". The word itself simply means to "bed", which is a euphemism for having sex, and can mean the "undefiled marriage bed" as in Heb.13:4. In itself (like the word "sex") it has no implications of any "excess" or promiscuity unless the context itself indicates this. This is like the English "I went for drugs, sex and rock and roll" where it is the context which indicates that regular marital sex is not what is in mind. Unless good reasons can be given, *arsenokoitai* just means men who "bed with" males. In the LXX of Num. 31:18 and Jdgs. 21:11-12, for example, it speaks of women who have not known "*koitē arsenos*" (= lying with male). This does not mean non-promiscuous women or women who don't have sex often, it means virgins. There is no linguistic reference to "excess" or to the number of partners. It applies, as in Leviticus (and as all rabbinical sources took it) to any and all forms of "lying with" (ie having sex with) males, and in using it Paul surely meant a general reference to all homosexual acts. As Field (1979) once put it (in words that resemble Dawson's own):

Paul could have chosen more specific terms such as *paidēastes* ('lover of boys') or *paidothoros* ('corrupter of boys') or *arrenomanes* ('mad after males'). But he went for the most general word available."(p.22).

Bonnington and Fyall (1996) rightly say:

The word *arsenokoitai* appears again in 1 Timothy 1:8-11. Verses 8 & 9 indicate explicitly that the OT law is in view and provides confirmation that Paul and others had Leviticus in view in using the word *arsenokoitai*. Such behaviour is not only contrary to the law but to the 'sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel' (1 Timothy 1:10-11).

²⁰⁷ GCM (1977) p.3.

If we needed a simple modern counterpart for *arsenokoitai* then 'men who sleep with other men' would retain both the generality and the euphemistic quality of the word. Arguments that in using *arsenokoitai* Paul must have had a specific cultural model in mind (like pederasts) are dealt a decisive blow with this simple recognition that Paul's categories were both Jewish and biblical. Because Leviticus uses the analogy of sex with a woman, the word can be taken as a rather general one for sexual activity between men and cannot be narrowed down to (say) anal intercourse.(pp.22-3).

Any attempt to restrict Paul's meaning is artificial. Any attempt to claim that as *arsenokoitai* is supposedly "uncertain" or "problematic" we had better ignore it, is based on flimsy linguistic arguments and wishful thinking.

Alternatives on Romans 1.26ff

In this section we will consider various different arguments made by pro-gay-partnership theologians (or at least those of them who don't simply discount Paul as prejudiced) to explain the Rom.1 passage as meaning something different from simple disapproval of any same-sex acts. This analysis is independent of Gagnon (2001), where similar ranges of special pleadings are considered.

Was Paul speaking only of pederasty or exploitative gay-sex?

We can fairly easily discount the suggestion that "really" Paul was speaking only of the exploitative pederasty rife in Greek culture, which was about gratification of the older man rather than mutual love and pleasure. Dunn (1989), for example, in his commentary, is right to deny the credibility of Scroggs in this respect. For one thing, such pederasty was not the norm for women and Paul actually speaks first of what we call lesbian sex (for which the women on Lesbos were famous).²⁰⁸ For another, Paul notably does *not* use the word "pederast" - a Greek term (adapted into Latin)

²⁰⁸ Actually the pro-gay-partnership Brooten (1996) makes the same argument against Scroggs.

linking *pais paidos* (boy) and *erastēs* (lover). He must have known the term, yet he speaks in much more general terms of homosexual acts of both sexes. Again, it is artificial to suggest that “really” he is objecting to cultic or Temple prostitution. Heterosexual activity in this context was far more rife (eg in worshipping Aphrodite in Corinth), and Paul admonishes the Corinthians both about heterosexual incest and against a heterosexual union with a prostitute. There would be no reason whatever, if he wanted to refer to cultic sex, to target same-sex acts. Finally, his introduction of the idea *via female homosexuality* nullifies another suggestion that he thought only of male rape as a sign of conquest, for again this did not apply to lesbians. His very general words seem to apply to *any* homosexual acts, male or female, pronouncing such acts wrong and unnatural.

Was Paul objecting to same-sex acts involving marital unfaithfulness?

Some have argued that the word “exchanged” (*metēllaxan* verse 26) and “leaving” (verse 27) restrict Paul’s meaning to those who have previously been in heterosexual marriages, and have therefore personally left these for same-sex activity.²⁰⁹

This, however, would be a “literalism” which ignored all context. It would be like taking verse 23 to refer only to those who *personally* changed from monotheistic faith in God to idolatry. Paul is not speaking of the decline of individuals but of the effects on *society* of deifying Nature rather than worshipping God. The argument is about cultures, not individuals.²¹⁰ In this respect, as in other points, Paul follows the ideas of the inter-testamental LXX “Wisdom of Solomon” (cf eg chs.13-14).

Had, moreover, Paul really meant his censures to primarily refer to their marital infidelity, he would surely have used the terms *andres* (men or husbands) and *gynaikes* (women or wives) and not *arsenes* (males) and *theleiai* (females). The use of *arsenes* may

²⁰⁹ Actually this fits exactly what eg Gene Robinson and Roy Clements have done, so for pro-gay relationship theologians to suggest this seems odd anyway.

²¹⁰ Hays in Siker (1994) well makes this point.

well be a deliberate echoing of the Greek version (LXX) of Leviticus 18:21. This in turn reflects the words in the creation accounts, Mauser in Brawley (1996) rightly remarks:

Paul chooses words for “men” and “women” in those verses that are otherwise not used in his letters, except in Gal.3:28. The words “*thēlaiai*” and “*arsenes*” derive from the storehouse of creation terminology in Genesis 1:27, in which one human species (*anthrōpos*) is said to exist in the union of two (*arsen kai thēly*). There is for this reason, a strict analogy between the exchange of the Creator for the creatures and the exchange of the Creator’s act in ordaining the union of male and female for the union of members of the same sex.(p.12).

Had the issue been simply lack of *faithfulness* rather than the homosexual acts, Paul could surely have said so?

The whole suggestion, in short, is wildly implausible.

Was Paul objecting to lustful rather than loving same-sex relationships?

Some pro-gay-partnership theologians have argued that Paul’s reference to “lusts” (verse 24) excludes loving homosexual relationships. This is equally misleading, for the word used (*epithymias*) is a general word for a deeply felt desire.²¹¹ As such, the term would fit admirably the instance of a person “drawn to someone of the same sex for the sake of love”,²¹² it carries no necessary suggestion of either a passing fancy or a mere desire to experiment. The other word used (*orexei*) occurs only here in the NT, but in Wis.16:2-3 it means a legitimate strong desire for quail meat – in itself it has no bad connotations. Strong desire is “lust” only if its object is illicit.²¹³

²¹¹ Eg Lk. 22:15; 1 Tim.3:1; 1 Pet.1:12; etc.

²¹² Scanzoni & Mollencott (1978) p. 62.

²¹³ Gagnon (2001) p.238 gives further evidence for these points.

Is it “passion” as such Paul objects to, rather than the same-sex activity?

Fredrickson in Balch (2000) pp.199ff (following Martin (1995)) argues this, relying heavily on the assumption that in the terms “use” and “contrary to nature” Paul was simply mirroring contemporary philosophers. Fredrickson cites the Stoic Diogenes Laertius that “passion, or emotion, is defined by Zeno as irrational or unnatural movement... or again as impulse in excess”, and adds that “What makes an action wrong and against nature is the presence of passion in the agent.”(p.206). He then argues that the “Most likely parallel to Paul’s usage is the philosophic interest in the problem of self-control in the face of erotic love.” He concludes:

Romans 1:24-27 is not an attack on homosexuality as a violation of divine law, but a description of the human condition informed by philosophic rejection of passionate love... We also see that ἀρσενοκοιτία is treated as an example of unjust, violent behaviour of the person lacking self-control, and it has a hybristic intent. it seems likely that with this term Paul is picking up a thread of Greek and Jewish tradition which regard pederasty as an illegitimate form of erotic love not only because of the lover’s loss of self-control but also because of the younger man’s disgrace in being penetrated.(p.220).

The problem with this argument is that Paul was not a Stoic, nor even a Middle-Platonist after the style of Philo or Clement. Later Greek Church Fathers (like Clement) saw both God and the sage as “impassive” (*apathēs*: ἀπαθής), but there is no evidence of this in Jesus, in Paul, or in the apostles.

Jewish thinking did *not* reject passionate erotic love and Paul was a Jewish rabbi with some knowledge of Greek philosophy, not a Stoic pretending to be Jewish. The OT Song of Songs celebrates passionate erotic love, using positively many of the words that are considered evil in the contexts of wrong relationships elsewhere in the OT. Likewise Proverbs advises:

Let your fountain be blessed and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times and always be enraptured by her love. For why

should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress? (5:19-20).

In general it was the object and context of a passion which determined its morality, not the strength of its feeling. The passion of marital love and sex, even after years of marriage, should (says Proverbs) equal and excel that felt in sex done purely for gratification. So would the rabbi Paul really abandon all this? To believe it would require significant evidence.

Turning then to Paul, Fredrickson identifies the main words used, so let us look at them.

- **desire** (*epithumia* – 1.24): The verb is used 16 times in the NT, and can mean “bad” desires (Mt.5:28; Acts 20:33; Rom.7:7, 13:9; 1 Cor.10:6; Gal.5:17; Jas.4:2) good desires (Mt.13:17; Lk.17:22; 22:15x2; 1 Tim.3:1; Heb.6:11; 1 Pet.1:22) and those which are morally fairly neutral (Lk.15:16; 16:21; Rev.9:6). Thus it can mean heterosexual lust (Mt.5:28) but also the passion with which Jesus desired to eat the Passover (Lk.22:15).²¹⁴ In 1 Tim.3:1 it speaks of desire to be a bishop/overseer as “*epithumei*” for a good thing. The noun *epithumia* is used 37 times, mostly negative, with just Lk.22:15; Phi.1:23; 1 Thess.2:17 denoting positive desires. There is no indication that to have passion is itself wrong – it is the wrong object of a desire (eg another person’s spouse) that makes it wrong. This is clear in 1 Thess.4:5 where “passion of desire” is in context of 4:6 which shows it to be *adulterous* desire.
- **passion** (*pathos* – 1.26): this appears only in Col 3:5 and in 1 Th.4:5 where lustful heathen passions for adultery are compared with marital conjugal relationships (cf Proverbs above). But are passions in themselves wrong? “We are”, says Paul, “men of like passions to you” (Acts 14:15); this just means just common human feelings, not sinful desires. 1

²¹⁴ Moore (2003) p.93 incorrectly says that the word is “used negatively” where it means “passion’ rather than ‘suffering” – in Lk.22:15 it means *passion* not suffering.

Maccabees 2:21 claims: “at the time when God created man, he implanted within him his passions and moral nature.” Reasoning, Maccabees frequently proclaims, should be *master* of the “passions” or human feelings, but there seems no indication that these in themselves are evil. Reason and the moral nature determines when to follow feelings and when not.

The implications of Fredrickson’s thesis would be that passionate erotic love within a marriage relationship would (according to Paul) be wrong. There is, however, no evidence either that this was a Jewish view, or that Paul or Jesus, ever held it, and Jesus-centred Christians today would regard it as an aberration. Obviously “husbands *love* your wives” refers to a love-cherishing, which is the core of marital commitment, but this is not to deny that erotic passion is seen as good. Fredrickson’s attempt to transform Paul into a serene Platonist, Stoic philosopher (or a Buddhist sage) is counter-evidential. In any case, if Paul really regarded passion as such as evil, why focus on homosexual passion? Paul should rather have compared passions *of any kind* with the *apathēs* of the sage. Fredrickson’s whole approach fails to put Paul in context and in any case makes no sense of the actual text.

Is the whole thing something morally neutral?

We have noted that, in themselves, *epithumia*, *pathos*, and *orexei* are all morally neutral terms, that is, they denote desire and passion which can be good or bad and it is not passion *as such* which Paul objects to. Countryman (1988) pp.111ff has argued from this that the Romans 1 passage is not really about sin at all, but more about ceremonial uncleanness as a result of idolatry. Schmidt (1995) p.71, in a desire to refute this, seems to far overstate a case for a negative sense for the words in themselves. Whilst it is true, eg, that *epithumias* more usually does mean negative “lusts”, it has to be the context that determines its meaning – not (as Schmidt almost implies) some kind of statistical ratio of word use. Countryman is right that Paul does *not* use the word sin (*hamartia*) in the passage, and right that the various words for “desire” can be neutral or positive. His argument,

however, that uncleanness (*akatharsian*) really means “greed” is nonsense. No such meaning is given by any Lexicon or Dictionary.²¹⁵ The term is used in the NT 10 times (plus 30 times as an adjective), always negatively. In Eph.4:19 it is linked with greed, though in Gal.5:19, Eph.5:3, Col.3:5 etc linked to sexual impurity (*porneia*). More basically, the whole Rom.1 passage is negative. Rom 1:18 begins with a wrath of God revealed against men who suppress truth in ungodliness and unrighteousness. Their reasonings became futile and their hearts (the key to everything in Jesus-Pauline theology) became insensible and darkened (1:21). Professing wisdom they became fools (1:22). They became idolaters (1:23) and it is in this context that God “gave them up” to desires/lusts (*epithumais*) of their hearts to uncleanness (*akatharsian*) to dishonour their bodies. All this, surely, is not about mere ritual uncleanness or the development of inconvenient habits? The word uncleanness (*akatharsian*) cannot mean mere ritual uncleanness – the whole point of the New Covenant understanding (as noted for Jesus, Peter and Paul above) is that it is moral heart-uncleanness that is crucial. Paul will declare soon after in Romans that some Gentiles do by nature the things of the Law – meaning fulfilling the real underlying meaning – not ritual purity in which he is disinterested. In fact, in Rom.14:20, he specifically recognises that in terms of symbolism and diet “all things are clean” (*kathara*), and would hardly be likely to be concerned that Gentiles were ritually unclean. The result of God “giving them up” is, moreover, not merely homosexual acts, but all kinds of unrighteousness including *porneia*, evil, greed, malice, envy, murder, deceit, etc as listed in 1:29 – things deserving death and divine judgement. Any suggestion that *all* of this is morally neutral would be ludicrous, and the description of the homosexual activity is an integral part of it. Countryman’s is an exegesis of desperation.

²¹⁵ See eg Brown (1986) pp.102-108.

By “unnatural” does Paul mean “against inbuilt orientation”?

The basic argument, on this interpretation, is that for heterosexuals it would, indeed, be “unnatural” to indulge in same-sex acts, but for those born as homosexuals it would be perfectly “natural” to have same-sex intimacy in a committed partnership. Either, then, Paul knew this and meant to exclude “true” homosexuals from his censures, or he didn’t know it but had he known it would have accepted the argument and condoned permanent gay-partnership intimacy.

One advocate of this is Furnish, whose moral relativism we consider elsewhere, and who says in Siker (1994) p.31 that Paul “presupposed that everyone is “naturally” attracted only to the opposite sex.”²¹⁶

From a less extreme perspective, John (1993) also seems to be saying something along these lines:

(Paul) takes it for granted that homosexual behaviour is a free perverse choice on the part of ‘naturally’ heterosexual men and women. This is perfectly clear in his statements that homosexuals “gave up” or “exchanged” heterosexual relations in verses 26 and 27.(p.15).

Now certainly Paul believed that homosexual *behaviour* (as, indeed, behaviour in general) was a result of choice. It is also likely that the great majority if not all those voluntarily engaging in gay-sex would have been married – though whether their gay-sex started before or after the heterosexual marital-sex would vary, and we have already noted that Paul’s focus was on society-culture rather than individuals. What is not clear is how Jeffrey John supposes that the term “exchanged” implies that they chose to do it *against their inbuilt inclinations*. Surely, if it really did refer to individuals, “exchanged” would imply a change of action,

²¹⁶Siker himself (in Brawley (1996) p.142) makes exactly the same kind of statement – together with three other equally unlikely assumptions about Paul’s thinking for none of which Paul’s text affords any evidence.

not action against inclination? Jeffrey John’s suggestion involves at least three basic implausibilities:

Firstly, he assumes that Paul never met people who preferred their own sex. This is implausible because Paul had toured widely the Graeco-Roman world and lived in close contact with Gentiles before he wrote Romans in the mid 50’s. In the earlier 1 Cor.6.11 Paul had asserted that some of the Christians were previously *arsenokoitai* – did *none* of them actually prefer gay-sex and talk to Paul about it? Since modern gays assure us that there have *always* been those with this orientation it seems highly unlikely. Paul is believed to have written the letter to Rome whilst staying at Corinth amongst these very people.

Secondly, Jeffrey John assumes that by “natural” Paul meant “according to inbuilt inclination”. With Paul’s view of fallen humanity (as already noted) it is very unlikely that he would base what is “natural” on inbuilt feelings or orientations.

Thirdly, he seems to assume that Paul sees gay-sex behaviour as a “perverse” choice because it is against what they “really” want. This would be like the character Daniel in the existentialist Sartre’s novels, who tries to assert his “freedom” perversely by killing the cats he loves and marrying a woman he despises although he is gay. But the ascription of this kind of bizarre thinking to a first century Jew seems highly unlikely.

Whether Paul might have been “mistaken”, and whether we can now correct his ethics, will be considered below. At this point we need only note that this understanding of what Paul *did* believe is highly implausible.

Is Paul using a Stoic concept of “natural”?

It is sometimes suggested, in similar vein, that Paul is here using the word “natural” in the sense developed by the Stoics. Chrysippus, the early Stoic, maintained that it was right to live “according to nature” and so Stoics defined the “right” as the natural. But, though some Stoics had a strong idea of God, in general their system was pantheistic. There was no concept of a verbal revelation from God, so to base morality solely on Nature (i.e., the observable world) could lead only to the conclusion of

the Stoic Emperor Marcus Aurelius: “*Whatever happens, happens rightly.*”²¹⁷

Thiselton (2000), however, points out that:

The Hebrew OT does not speak of “nature” in the stoic sense, but of God’s ordering of the world by his command.(p.845).

This follows eg Cranfield (1975) p.125 for whom “nature” is the *intended* order of creation and Fitzmeyer (1993) p.286 who says that often the word denotes “the order intended by the Creator.” Other modern commentaries like Hendriksen (1980), Morris (1988) or Dunn (1988) see it as reflecting what God intended for sex between husband and wife.

Stoic (and Platonic) usage is interesting, but we need care in transferring either to Paul. As we have seen, Paul believed human nature to be “fallen” and the created world to be in bondage to decay, groaning in travail, so he surely would not have based morality uncritically on observed biological nature. To do so would come near to “worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator”. To Paul, idolatry would be placing anything else above the specific God who said: “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt... you shall have no other gods before me...” Our *assurance* as to what is right is founded rather on this God’s verbal revelation – Paul was a Hellenistic Christian Jew, not a stoic philosopher.

Plato and “Natural”

Some have argued that Paul was basically adopting Middle-Platonist ideas of “natural”, so it will be useful here to examine Plato’s ideas on this.

Firstly, Plato believed that from the physical world could be deduced:

...that there are gods, that they are mindful of us, that they are never to be seduced from the path of right.(*Laws* X.907).

²¹⁷ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 4: 10.

The world (according to Plato’s *Timaeus*) was made by an Artificer (*Demiurge*), He explains that the physical world only approximates the ideal one because the creator (or ‘demiurge’) impressed form and order on things found in a state of chaos. Thus:

...the generation of this cosmos was a mixed result of the combination of Necessity and Reason.

The physical reflected the “ideal forms” which were its pattern only imperfectly, even of the stars he says in

Those intricate traceries in the sky are no doubt, the loveliest and most perfect of material things, but they are still part of the visible world, and therefore fall far short of the true realities – the true movements in the ideal world of numbers and geometrical figures which are responsible for these rotations. These, you will agree, have to be worked out by reason and thought, and cannot be observed... Accordingly we must use the embroidered heaven to illustrate our theories. (*The Republic* Bk.7).

To the imperfect reflection in the physical of the ideal was added the unreliability of our senses. Of the physical, then, we could have only *pistis*=belief. The ideal forms were arrived at by philosophical abstraction, and of them we can have *epistemē*=knowledge.

To Plato:

...the life of temperance is uniformly gentle... its pains and passions are never furious, but mild; whereas that of profligacy is uniformly rash; the pains and pleasures it offers are alike violent...(*Laws* V.734.)

Temperance is a wise choice because actually, in the end, it brings a greater balance of pleasure; wicked men (he insists) do not have a pleasant life. Plato’s *Republic* is actually a parable of the mind ruling the passions. The person still *has* passions – but the mind rules them, chooses which are right to follow, and keeps them temperate.

It is hard to get an entirely consistent picture of Plato’s attitude to passion in sex. Near the end of *The Timaeus*, it was the Artificer (or “the gods”) who:

...created in us the love of procreation...in men the organ of generation becoming rebellious and masterful, like an animal disobedient to reason, and maddened with the sting of lust, seeks to gain absolute sway; and the same is the case with the so-called womb or matrix of women... thus the generation of animals is completed.

In general, however, he disapproved of such passions. He noted of the “matter of sexual indulgence, common to mankind with animals at large...”:

...this pleasure is held to have been granted by nature to male and female which conjoined for the work of procreation; the crime of male with male, or female with female, is an outrage on nature and a capital surrender to the lust of pleasure. (*Laws* I.636).

Plato later said:

Were one to follow the guidance of nature and adopt the law of the old days before Laius – I mean to pronounce it wrong that male should have to do carnally with youthful male as with female, and to fetch his evidence from the life of the animals, pointing out that male does not touch male in this way because the action is unnatural, his contention would surely be a telling one. (*Laws* VIII.836).

I said I knew of a device for establishing this law of restricting procreative intercourse to its natural function, by abstention from congress with our own sex, with its deliberate murder of the race, and its wasting of the seed of life on a stony and rocky soil, where it will never take root and bear its natural fruit, and equal abstention from any female field whence you would desire no harvest ... It is dictated, to begin with, by nature’s own voice. leads to the suppression of the mad frenzy of sex, as well as marriage breach of all kinds, and all manner of excess in meats and drinks, and wins men to affection for their wedded wives... (*Laws* VIII.839)

A number of things about this may be noted:

- Plato sees procreation as central both to the reason for the Divine Artificer placing the sexual urge in us, and as the rational basis for insisting (in his utopia) on marriage and

children because these are undertaken for the city rather than from personal inclination, and the city must continue.

- He does not imply that marital sex is *only* for procreation (indeed he expects affection to be involved) but says that heterosexual acts should not take place if pregnancy is definitely unwanted.
- The “seed” is not sacred, though in male same-sex it is “wasted”. Read carefully, he does not say that same sex acts are wrong *because* the seed is wasted – he actually puts the wasting of seed as a feature of male-same-sex acts. He also objects to lesbian acts – which involved no wastage of seed or risk of unwanted pregnancy – because these too are “unnatural”.
- The argument from animal heterosexuality he oddly places not as his own argument but as one which “would be telling” if someone made it. Had he known (as we now know) that there *are* some instances of animal same-sex activity, this would have been unlikely to change his view because (after all) physical things imperfectly reflect ideal forms and the perfect intentions of the Artificer.
- At one point Plato seems to be speaking particularly of pederasty, but elsewhere he is implying that *any* sexual activity outside heterosexual, monogamous, marriage, is wrong.
- He never suggests that people do same-sex acts *against* their inbuilt inclinations, and the idea that any such inbuilt inclinations would make it right to do them would have seemed to him absurd. The whole point is that reason must rule over desires and passions, and we know what is natural (although the world imperfectly reflects the ideal forms) by philosophical abstraction.
- Plainly same-sex acts cannot be motivated by a desire to procreate, so “lust of pleasure” is very logically identified the root cause of same-sex activity. Although, however, he mentions the “frenzy of sex”, a lust for pleasure does not necessarily have to be “frenzied” to be wrong. It is wrong

simply because it is uncontrolled desire for something “unnatural”, not *because* it is frenzied.

All this forms a background to the consideration in section 4.2 of this work of Paul’s views of “natural”. Plato, like Paul, is often misunderstood on the relationships of “natural” and sexual expression. How far the two concur may be judged by comparing the above with the examination of Paul’s views in section 4.2. Obviously there are some similarities, but also some differences, between the philosophical abstraction of Plato and the God-saturated vision of reality of the rabbi Paul.

Appendix 5: Hermeneutics – a Study Review

Introduction:

Appendix 1 gave a general framework within which exegesis and hermeneutics should take place. In 2001 a book was published *Slaves Women and Homosexuals Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* by Prof William J. Webb. Not only is its subject matter central to our present concern, but the book contains some more specific suggestions for hermeneutical criteria. This present Appendix is therefore a study review of that book, though it should be noted that the issues dealt with here are important in themselves, and one does not have to have read the book to follow the points made in this review.

Webb’s book is not primarily about the issues as such, but about the proper hermeneutics involved in arriving at views on them. As Alvin Plantinga and other Christian philosophers would rightly insist, “knowledge” is not just arriving at correct statements, but at having proper warrant for doing so.²¹⁸ It is on this level that the book seems to have serious shortcomings, and positions that are shored up with faulty “warrant” are insecure positions – even if they are basically “right”. Not only do the hermeneutical criteria as he orders them have serious shortcomings, they do not securely justify him in taking an “egalitarian” view of women but a critical view of gay-partnerships. No personal criticism whatsoever is intended of the author (for whom I have a natural sympathy²¹⁹) but the hermeneutical methodology he advocates simply cannot support his final position.

²¹⁸ Cf eg Plantinga (1993)

²¹⁹ Especially in view of his respect for F.F. Bruce who wrote forewords to two of my previous joint-works.

General:

The book's aim is to consider various hermeneutical "criteria", ie the principles upon which biblical interpretation on such issues should be made. His criteria 1-5 and 17-18 are classed as "persuasive", 6-13 "moderately persuasive" and 14-16 "inconclusive". To sustain these classifications Webb in each case gives first "neutral" examples (with which he supposes we will all agree), then more contentious ones, and then a final assessment of the criterion.

Ch.1 is a general introduction to culture, rightly distinguishing cultural from kingdom values. The three alternatives on women's issues (hard patriarchy, soft patriarchy and egalitarianism) do not, however, cover all the possibilities. My own marriage would probably be described as soft-patriarchy, accepting that a wife should "be subject" = *hypotassomenoi* (though it should be noted that this is distinct from the word "obey", which the NT does not direct wives to do). In our *church* situation, however, we are in his so-called egalitarian viewpoint, and I have had no problems with my wife²²⁰ being on the church board when I am not, because Paul is clear that "being subject" to constituted authority in church life is mutual and area-specific (Eph.5:21-2).²²¹ All this is fully defensible from a NT perspective²²² (and is in line with my own evangelical Free Methodist church's position), but Webb does not give it as an option, which tends to limit his analysis.

In ch.2 Webb introduces the "redemptive-movement hermeneutic". The core concept in this is that God is dealing with people where they are, moving them in the right direction but not necessarily trying to do too much at once because God is showing "wisdom". Much in this section can be agreed. Clearly there is a movement from OT to NT which Jesus himself indicates: eg

²²⁰ Who incidentally also earns more than I do and is incomparably better looking!

²²¹ Actually 5:22 which talks of wives "being subject" does not contain the actual verb, it relies on the verb in verse 21 which is general church mutual subjection.

²²² It is examined at length in my *Women in Marriage and in Church Leadership* (2006).

moving from "an eye for an eye" (which was better than taking of a life for an eye) to "turn the other cheek".²²³ There are, however, major flaws with this foundational section.

The first major flaw is that Webb takes no account of the facts about Jesus as the uniquely divine incarnation, noted above in section 1.4:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, **but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son**, whom the appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe. The son is the radiance of God's glory...(Heb 1:1-2).

There seems no concept in Webb that Jesus is God's "final word". Jesus' teaching seems to be just one more stage in the "redemptive movement", even on moral issues, a notion seemingly more conducive to Islam or Bahai than Christianity. Now clearly Jesus had (as we have) to speak within his culture and using language that they could understand. Clearly we still need "hermeneutics" to apply his teachings today. What we must, however, reject (if we take the incarnation seriously) is any idea that somehow we today are more enlightened than Jesus – whether eg because we have advanced science (Webb criterion 18) or because on issues like slavery we have thought a bit more. What this present book advocates is a "Jesus-centred" hermeneutic. As explained, this is not only "Christocentric" in apocalyptic terms, in that the Messiah is focal to history, but also involves teaching centred on the historical Jesus of Nazareth (the one we have knowledge of in the gospels) and his chosen apostles. Jesus' own ethics were neither flawed nor in need of enlightened development – only in need of reapplication depending on cultural context.

Associated with this is Webb's tendency to speak of "Scripture" with no special recognition of NT Kingdom ethical changes. Thus eg his tables on pp.46-7 supposedly illustrate:

...the lack of any ultimate social ethic within the women texts as well as the culture-entrenched nature of such passages.

²²³ Webb himself argues this on pp.61ff.

The tables themselves contain two column headings, and Webb comments that:

By initiating some improvements to the right hand column it would not be difficult to forge a social ethic that far exceeds Scripture (at least “Scripture” in the sense of its isolated words alone).

When we look at the tables, however, we most frequently find that the *right hand* column is not “Scripture” but OT laws and ideas that have already been clearly reinterpreted in the Kingdom Values presented in the NT. Thus eg:

Already Some Movement	Needing Further Movement
women initiate divorce in one Jesus saying (Mk 10:12) and one Pauline text (1 Cor 7:10-16)	divorce legislation disadvantages women in initiation process and especially in settlements (Deut 20:10-14...)
Jesus and Paul (contra Old Testament and rabbinical emphasis) have female disciples	daughters of secondary importance in the passing on of Torah tradition (Deut 4:9-10...)
protective measures for women captured in battle... (Deut 21:10-14...)	...women as more easily deceived than men (the traditional interpretation of 1 Tim 2:14; see criterion 18 appendix B).

Actually some 95% of the verses supposedly showing “need for further improvement” (presumably needing improvement from the time of Jesus?) are from the OT not the NT. Of only five from the NT, two are Lk.1:27 Mt.1:18-19 to supposedly show double standards on expectancy of virginity – neither of which indicate the Kingdom values which Jesus clearly enunciated without any double standards eg in Mt.19:9 (a passage Webb does not even cite on his LHS on this issue). Two other NT refs are 1 Tim.5:13 and Tit.2:5. In these, remarried young widows are to be “despots of their households” (a phrase which not used of men in the Pauline corpus – the idea of men as either head of, or despot of, the household is absent from Paul). Interestingly, in many instances Pauline churches met in houses wholly or partly owned by women. The Romans one is in the house of “Prisca and

Aquilla” (Priscilla is named first and by an affectionate diminutive), the Corinthians one is also in their house, the Colossians one is in the house of a woman Lympha, and the Philemon one in the house of “Philemon, the beloved Apphia and Archippus”. In every case the church meet in a house with a woman in part or (in Colossians) whole ownership. Paul, *totally breaking any rabbinic custom or expectancy*, set up his base in the household of a Gentile businesswoman in Phillipi (Acts 16:15). Paul apparently relied for information on members of the household of a woman (Chloe) in Corinth (1 Cor.1:11). To Rome (16:1-2) he recommends that the woman minister Phoebe be received “as befits the holy ones” (seemingly making it a sign of spirituality that women ministers should be accepted), adding that she has been a great help to many including himself. Any suggestion that Paul disapproved of women who worked outside the sphere of a male dominated home is frankly absurd and would be a foolish interpretation of the two texts cited as “needing further movement”.²²⁴ The *only* other NT verse on Webb’s RHS is 1 Tim.2:14 as cited above. The verse itself, however, (even without the supposed scientific enlightenment of Webb’s criterion 18) does not say that women are more easily deceived, and had Paul believed this he would hardly have relied on Chloe for information and been persuaded by Lydia to break all rabbinical rule and tradition by going to her house as the first Christian convert in Europe. The NT writer can hardly be blamed for absurd “traditional” interpretations, and we don’t need a “redemptive movement hermeneutic” to see their absurdity. In short, Webb’s whole table is a confused obscuring of the basic theological truth that God’s final word in Jesus developed much OT ethic in a “redemptive movement way” to a stage where we need only to apply its stated principles. Webb apparently covers himself with the weasel clause: “at least Scripture in the sense of its isolated words alone”, but this is unconvincing. Who could possibly ever have sensibly thought that either Jesus or Paul intended their teaching to be taken in this kind of literalistic and entirely

²²⁴ See also my *Women in Marriage and in Church Leadership* (2006)

localised way? What kind of sensible hermeneutic would restrict, or would ever have restricted, application to “the isolated words alone”? But to re-apply the same principles to different cultural situations is not at all the same thing as to develop those principles further in a supposedly similar direction because they are somehow defective or less than ideal.

The development from the OT to Jesus’ words: “But I say to you...” is clear. Webb rightly describes this in terms of a “redemptive movement”, and the associated hermeneutical divergences between approaching the OT and NT are implied by Jesus himself. NT Kingdom-principles are a clear and cross-centred development from the OT principles embodied in the Law and the Prophets. In their times, of course, both OT and NT principles required application. For the OT, indeed, this was the purpose of rabbinical oral law – although Jesus was critical of many of its features in practice. For the NT, Paul evidences application of the principles set forward by Jesus. But applying the same principles to disparate situations is very different from developing new principles. The need to reapply NT Kingdom values to modern issues like eg cloning, is apparent. This is far from implying, however, that somehow further advance (or redemptive movement) for the principles themselves is needed post-Jesus. We should, for example, emphatically reject any suggestion that “Jesus and Paul approved the institution of slavery but now we have thought about it more and know better”. Webb seems to confuse together three different things:

- (1) The redemptive-movement of divine interaction from the OT to more enlightened post-cross Kingdom Values.
- (2) The need to apply any given principles to different practical situations.
- (3) A supposed redemptive-movement from the first century NT principles and instructions to modern day greater enlightenment.

Acceptance of the first two in no way implies acceptance of the third.

Returning to Webb’s table, in similar vein he comments about what he calls modern “soft patriarchy” that: “the brand of patriarchy, though better than that of Scripture, has potential for significant advancement...” The idea that we can “improve on Scripture” (even allowing for the term “Scripture” as though generic) has to imply that we now know better than Jesus or Paul. If it does not mean this, then what does it mean? Nothing he presents (even later in the book – let alone in these tables) indicates anything of the kind. My own marriage of “soft patriarchy” (or perhaps in Webb’s terms it is “ultra-soft patriarchy”, I’m not sure) does not “improve on Scripture”, and I only wish I could live up properly to the demands Jesus and Paul put on husbands. To love my wife *as Christ loved the church !!!* - does Webb really think we can improve on that? Christ’s love is not overbearing, demeaning, patronising, or restricting in any way. Christ’s love treats his disciples as friends destined to become fellow sons as we conform to his image.

The earlier table on slavery on p.44 is even worse as there are no NT verses cited at all on either side of the suppose divide. Webb ignores altogether Paul’s instructions to masters (and individually to Philemon), which by any sensible reading sounds a death-knell for slavery as an institution where Christians control any society.

Along with this apparently cavalier disregard of the NT as against OT values, many statements are made by Webb as though undisputed fact which are far from it. Thus he refers to: “the assumptions within the biblical texts that the male owned the female(s).”(p.64) This is, to say the least, highly disputable. Where is any such assumption justified even in the OT – and how can it possibly be sustained into the NT? The only NT reference I can think of (1 Cor.7:4) is specifically egalitarian in this regard. Again Webb’s statement “only centuries later do we find out that men can be infertile as well as women”(p.65) is simply mistaken and incorrect as we will see, it is based on incorrect statements he makes about “barrenness” concepts in the OT.

The idea itself of a “redemptive-movement hermeneutic” has obvious validity. Clearly Jesus and his chosen apostles showed that Kingdom values go beyond many OT values, and the “but I

say to you” element in Jesus’ teaching is plain. What, however, Webb has totally failed to show is that we need to continue the process, and that God has not *finally* spoken to us through an incarnate Son, but maybe through some prophetic figure or synod as yet unreached in the ongoing process of enlightenment. Certainly he has not shown it in this introduction, and we shall see that he also fails to show it later in the book when many of his supposedly uncontroversial “neutral examples” are anything but neutral or even plausible.

After a brief road map in ch 3, Webb then moves on to various proposed “criteria” for determining whether particular elements of Scripture are “culturally bound” or “transcultural”. He is, at times, aware that this is not a simple question. When eg Jesus says “go then and do likewise” (Lk.10:37) not even the crassest literalist assumes he means we should all take out Samaritan nationality and hang about on the Jericho road to see if any Israeli travellers need rescuing. So is this parable of Jesus “culturally bound” or “transcultural”? Plainly it is both. The details are culturally bound (we need to know something about priests, Levites, Jews and Samaritans to understand it properly) but the principles it clearly intends us to take are transcultural. Because God deals with real people rather than give us abstract philosophies, all divine revelations and instructions come within particular cultural settings. All therefore have culturally bound elements – if only because they are expressed originally in different languages using words with different semantic fields. But there may be some very specific transcultural principles clearly intended by the writer – to be applied in our modern culture with discernment but without any need for greater (or scientifically based) enlightenment.

The Criteria:

Webb gives seven of what he calls “persuasive” criteria for deciding between what is culturally bound and what is transcultural. In each instance he considers supposedly “neutral” examples (a number of which in practice are disputable or even demonstrably wrong) to demonstrate the criterion before moving on to more contentious ones, and a final assessment of the criterion.

Criteria 1

A component of a text may be culturally bound if Scripture modifies the *original* cultural norms in such a way that suggests further movement is possible and even advantageous in a *subsequent* culture”(p.73).

Criteria 2

A component of a text may be culturally bound if “seed ideas” are present within the rest of Scripture to suggest and encourage further movement on a particular subject.(p.83)

Nearly all Webb’s examples of C1 concern the OT provisions compared with ancient cultures. Only in 9 does he refer to Paul’s “softening of the household codes” within which Webb says Paul “assumes the status quo for women, however he pushes the boundaries for men with the direction of his command” (ie to love their wives etc). This seems naïve. Given the revolutionary command to love a wife as Christ loved the church, how could this possibly leave the status quo for women as before? Christ loves the church by calling us “friends” rather than servants (Jn.15:15), and God wants us to develop fully as Sons, heirs, and as “brothers” to Christ who is to be the “firstborn” of many brethren who reach their full potential (Rom.8:29). He does not want to keep us like dolls in Ibsen’s “Dolls House”. As already noted, his love is not overbearing, demeaning, patronising or restricting, he wants us to reach our full potential and beyond.

For C2, on slavery, Webb cites various Pauline passages and quotes F.F.Bruce on Philemon: “What this letter does is to bring us into an atmosphere in which the institution (of slavery) could only wilt and die”.(p.84). Bruce was absolutely right, but in what sense is this really just a “seed thought”? A Jesus-centred hermeneutic holds that Jesus and his chosen apostles enunciated kingdom values that moved far beyond OT laws. In this sense clearly there should be a “redemptive movement hermeneutic” – but it was complete when God spoke to us in these last times through a Son. So when Webb speaks of Paul’s words as a “seed idea”, does he mean:

Either: (1) that Paul approves of slavery as an institution but we today can see that taking his instructions further we can banish it entirely?

Or: (2) that Paul clearly did not approve of slavery as an institution, effectively demolished it within the church, and undermined it for any situation where Christians could control legislation?

Actually the NT *nowhere* approves of the institution of slavery, though pro-gay material often asserts that it does. Thus Dawson on the official LGCM website, for example, cites Paul's advice to slaves in Colossians and Philemon and says "Clearly however Paul supported the status quo." Now we might first ask Dawson what advice he would have given had he been Paul. In Roman Law a runaway slave if captured was subjected to horrific punishment. Would Dawson have urged all slaves to skive, sulk, and run away if they possibly could, and Onesimus to stay "on the run"? Would Dawson have urged them to revolt against Rome – like Spartacus – and finish up crucified en mass? What *practical* advice would he have given to contemporary slaves? Well, Paul in Col.3:22-23 and Eph.6:5-8 enjoins them to be upright, honest, not play-acting hypocrites, doing well the work they have to do and turning what they have to do anyway into a joy to do it "as for the Lord". In 1 Cor.7:21 he urges them to make the best of it if they are slaves (because they are free in Christ), but if they get the chance to be free then take it. Could we really have improved in our present modern enlightenment (and our total abhorrence of slavery as an institution) on this advice in that context? Then to the masters what does Paul say? Dawson complains: "Paul begs Philemon to take Onesimus back not just as a runaway slave but as a Christian brother. However, he is still a slave." This is naïve. Paul says he is sending him back "my very heart", "no longer as a slave but beyond a slave a brother beloved to me and more to you in the flesh and in the Lord... receive him as me". What could Philemon do in receiving such a letter? Whatever accuracy is in the early church tradition identifying the freed Onesimus with the later spiritual bishop of that name in Ephesus, the tradition shows that the church drew the obvious inference from Paul's words. Paul's versions of the then common "household codes" instruct

masters in Eph.6.9 and Col.4:1, commanding them to "forbear threats" and to treat slaves bearing in mind their own "master in heaven". To Paul, everything relates back to the centrality of Christ; power and authority, in Paul's versions of "household codes", bring self-sacrifice. Christ is like the husband of the bride the church, so husbands have to love their wives in the same self-sacrificial way. Paul is the "slave of Christ" – a "master in heaven" who loved him so much that he sacrificed himself for Paul. Again, this relates to the teaching of Jesus himself. Paul does not "condone" slavery as an institution within the church, he transforms it and so effectively demolishes it. A Christian master must have at heart the "best interests" of the one over whom (in that culture) he has power. If, for the welfare and self-development of a slave, it is best to free him/her then the Christian master must do this; if it is best to keep him/her in a non-threatening honourable position as a "slave" then so be it ("freed slaves" without resources may actually be worse off). Actually, in first century Rome, slaves could be materially well off, and slave freeing or "manumission" was also common. How could anyone reading Paul possibly treat slaves as, for example, they were treated as insignificant chattels in the pre-civil-war American south? Paul does not support slavery as an institution but undermines its whole basis, and figures like Richard Baxter, John Wesley, William Wilberforce, B.T.Roberts and others amongst my spiritual ancestors, who spoke openly against slavery as an institution, understood Paul full well.²²⁵ Paul revolutionises from within, without suicidally confronting the Roman Empire. People have, of course, sought to justify both "an-eye-for-an-eye" and slavery from the OT – but this is to fail to understand the way in which Jesus and Paul regarded OT provisions transformationally. The cross-centred gospel often implies a "But I say to you..." Thus "love your neighbour as yourself" is from Lev.19:18 and specifically applies to strangers and foreigners, but Jesus identifies even natural *enemies* as "neighbours". Jesus transforms the "eye-

²²⁵ This is also considered in my *Women in Marriage and in Church Leadership* (2006)

for-an-eye” justice to a love-based attitude, just as slavery is transformed by Paul (and by implication by Jesus) so that the whole thing is undermined. This is not some vague “seed idea” which with present greater enlightenment we can see can be developed further. Within the church Paul’s words sounded a death knell for slavery, and when the church could determine society it was only simple logic to ban the institution as a whole. Webb later (p.186) cites pro-slavery advocates: “Slavery was viewed as an abiding and eternal principle because the Bible portrays Christ as a slave/servant in the texts that discuss slavery.” This argument, however (which Webb does not, of course, accept) is much more fatuous than Webb recognises because the servanthood of Christ was voluntary (Phil.2:7) whereas the human institution of slavery is not. We do not need to speak of “seed principles” or any such notion to destroy fatuous exegesis in support of the insupportable.

The same kinds of arguments apply to Webb’s comments on women. None of what he cites from Paul concerns vague “seeds” which in modern times of enlightenment we can develop, and identifying isolated verses from Paul as “seeds” does not seem to me a sensible hermeneutic. Paul is not generally dealing with issues of the social equality of women *in society* – an issue over which he has no control – though he seems very easy with the social equality eg of Lydia and other women in whose houses the churches met (as above). Neither in the household over which my wife has for over 30 years been despot, not in my (Free Methodist) church (in which my wife has been on the board when I was not) would we accept that in any way we have departed from a Pauline pattern or initiated “significant advancement” from Scripture. The “seed” concept is simply not relevant.

Only Webb’s comments on C2 and homosexuals seem reasonable, perhaps precisely because he argues that his criteria does not apply.

Criterion 3

A component of a text may be culturally confined if the social norms reflected in the text are completely “broken out of” in other biblical texts.

Again here there is no concept of OT vs NT, and it is not clear what is meant by “social norms reflected in the text”. There is a lot of difference between an indication of divine intention and a simple reflection of what was the case in a society. Thus his supposedly “neutral” example of “left-handedness” is really unconvincing. The OT language indicates nothing other than the fact that most people in the world are right-handed; we may still today speak of a “right hand man” without implying that left-handedness is a “liability” (let alone morally reprehensible). His next section on long-hair is also confusing. Paul does speak of “nature”²²⁶ in 1 Cor.11.14; but how does it help to see Samson and Naziritic vows as “breakouts” from this? Webb comments that Deborah is a “breakout” from male leadership, but where does God in the OT proclaim that leadership in general is to be male? Webb’s acceptance of the possible comparison to God using Samson “in spite of his failings” is unconvincing because (assuming we believe in human freewill to accept or reject the grace of God working in our lives) Samson’s failings were neither inevitable nor unchangeable – whereas Deborah’s gender was both. Webb rightly points out the roles of Huldah, Priscilla, Junia, etc, though these are only “breakouts” if one thinks of the *biblical* norm as forbidding female roles, which it does not.

Criterion 4:

A component of a text may be culturally bound if by practising the text one no longer fulfils the text’s original intent or purpose.

This is obvious, though his actual examples are misguided. He suggests that the “holy kiss” should be restricted to

²²⁶ That this complex word does not simply mean biology is shown in section 4.2 of this work.

Hellenistic/Roman culture. A “holy kiss” is a unisex Christian embrace, and in most British churches (Pentecostal, Baptist, Free Methodist, Anglican) evangelicals often practise it today; we certainly do in my own Church. His interpretation of Tit.2:9 that slaves are to obey etc just to win others to Christ” is highly dubious: “to adorn (*kosmeō*) the teaching of our God and Saviour” is surely about much more than evangelism? The advice to slaves is for their own good and psychologies; Paul is not simply obsessed with evangelising others.

Webb also claims that: “Peter tells wives to obey their husbands so that unbelieving husbands “may be won over without words.” (1 Pet.3:1). Neither Peter nor any other apostle tells women to “obey” husbands, but to “be subject” (*hypotassomenai*) which means accepting *proper* authority rightly exercised. Peter cites the example of Sarah who called Abraham “master and Lord”, but does not suggest that contemporary wives use the same language – and in any event anyone reading the case of Sarah could hardly see a downtrodden wife since she could and did talk Abraham into things against his better judgement. Of course both Peter and Paul point out that unbelieving spouses may be won over by loving wifely behaviour – but neither say that this is the only reason for subjection and Paul explicitly commends wives in Christian marriages to do the same thing. This can be seen as an example of C4 only if we take these verses as isolated and out of context of the general apostolic writings. Then Webb claims:

For today’s unbelieving husband who values his wife as a completely equal partner and who happily functions within a mutual-deference and mutual-honor framework, this kind of unilateral patriarchy-type submission may actually repulse him.(p.107).

This is again unconvincing. “Subjection” in NT terms does not mean creepy doormat-likeness (however much it may do in some modern works that speak oilily of “joyful submissiveness”). As Webb elsewhere admits, in the “soft-patriarchy” understanding of the “subjection” issue (the only one I give any credence to):

The husband has the *theoretical* right to exercise authority in decision making over his wife, yet this should only be used on rare occasions if at all.(p.27).

An ultra-soft patriarchal husband would hardly notice his wife’s “submission” except that, on the very rare (if at all) occasions when they failed to reach agreement, she would go with his view rather than prolong the argument or go for divorce. To suggest that any normal modern man would be “repulsed” by this is absurd. A Priscilla-Aquila marriage would certainly be no more “repulsive” today than in first century Ephesus, but it must surely have conformed to what Paul meant by subjection in Eph 5:21-2.

Criterion 5:

A component of a text may be transcultural if its basis is rooted in the fall of humanity or the curse.

This is a good criterion, and Webb is entirely right to point out that we should not deliberately perpetuate the effects of the curse. He is rightly critical of the “traditional” interpretation of 1 Tim.2:14 that women are more easily deceived than men, and that there are “no clear or explicit statements forming a hierarchal relationship between man and woman until after the fall.”(p.115). I also agree with his comments on the use of clothing – God himself provided for this as a means to overcome some of the effects of the fall.

Criterion 17:

A component of a biblical imperative may be culturally relative if the pragmatic basis for the instruction cannot be sustained from one culture to another.

His key word here is “pragmatism”, and it seems to me self evident that God is pragmatic within Scripture. When God tells Abraham to “listen to your wife and get a divorce from Hagar” this is a pragmatic way out of the mess Abraham is in. But, again, some of Webb’s examples are odd. When Jesus told his disciples to “wash one another’s feet” only the most crass literalist would take it that this was literally all he meant. Webb’s second example is that of “Children obey your parents” which apparently some

Christian teachers take to mean “that adult children should ‘obey/submit to’ their parents for the whole of their lifetime.”(p.212). Frankly, this is an absurd interpretation of the text, it was certainly not what Paul meant, it was not the norm in Jewish, Roman or Greek society, and it is in blatant contradiction to the OT principle: “For this cause shall a man *leave* his father and mother and *cleave* to his wife...” This does not, and never did, mean simply move into another house – it implied and implies that there comes a point at the end of childhood where obedience no longer applies. For Jesus himself this seems assumed in adulthood even without marriage (compare Lk.2:51, Mt.12:48-9). Children are, of course, always to “honour” parents – but the suggestion that adults should obey their parents is not something which is no longer pragmatic in our culture, it is a misunderstanding of what was meant in the first place as many other biblical texts make clear. Not only the hermeneutic but the exegesis is wrong. Needless to say, Webb’s characterisation of the “subjection” of wives to husbands as no longer relevant in our culture is also unconvincing. The supposed pragmatic reasons Webb suggests for “subjection” in the first century society are: (1) lack of education (2) lack of social experience (3) lack of physical strength (4) economic dependence (5) marital age difference. Surely, however, Paul – who, as we noted, recognised over 50% of churches as meeting in joint male-female or purely female households – must have known marriages in which every single one of these was untrue? There were educated business women like Lydia, tent makers like Priscilla, and impressive women like Phoebe and Junia. On (3), 1 Pet.3:7 does refer to women as “the weaker vessel”. This could relate to general power in that culture, or more likely (in view of the term “vessel”) be a purely physical generalisation or even a figure of speech.²²⁷ In either event it would be absurd to suggest that in the first century they knew of *no* marriages where the woman was both physically and psychologically stronger. Webb’s careful explanation that today a

²²⁷ Modern reference to the “fairer sex” implies neither that all women are beautiful nor that all men are ugly. It is just a figure of speech.

featherweight martial arts person can be more powerful than a strong inexpert, or that today skills are more important than strength, seems simply irrelevant. He makes no serious case either that the apostolic injunctions to wives and husbands are based on these things, or that today things are so radically different.

Criterion 18:

A component of a text may be culturally confined if it is contrary to present-day scientific evidence.

This seems to me a very dangerous criterion – what exactly does he mean? Is it that:

(1) where a biblical text contradicts modern science it must be “culturally confined”?

or (2) where an interpretation of a text contradicts modern science we know it must be wrong?

As noted, the concept of “redemptive movement hermeneutic” is perfectly OK in moving from OT to NT Jesus-centred teaching. But Jesus never said: “You have heard it said... but now in the light of more recent scientific evidence I say unto you...” I find it hard to see how “science” affected the movement from OT to NT. Where components of biblical texts are indeed “culturally relative” it seems to me that we should be able to find indications in the texts themselves. Where, eg, Paul is giving advice on meat offered to idols, he himself puts it into an absolute vs cultural setting. But to know this we hardly need modern science to inform us that the chemical composition of the meat is unaltered by it being offered to idols – Paul already indicates it. I have a 40-year interest in science-faith issues and teach university courses on them, but really cannot think of anything in the NT that is shown to be culturally relative by science.

Webb’s supposedly “neutral” examples on this issue (ie ones we all supposedly accept) are mostly demonstrably historically wrong, and his philosophy of science resembles nothing known to me in professional literature (although I currently teach a university degree module on the philosophy of science and originally studied this under Karl Popper, Imre Lakatos and Paul

Feyerabend). Webb claims: “Scripture depicts a geocentric or earth centred model of the universe”(p.222) He then cites the various biblical verses that refer to biblical cosmology, though does at least add:

A geocentric universe accurately portrays a metaphysical or theological reality in terms of God’s care and providence for his people. Also, at least in part these texts reflect phenomenological language (what a person actually sees) God’s Spirit worked in the production of the text through language common to everyday people.(p.222).

This is absolutely true. Scripture is really not concerned with cosmology as such,²²⁸ its concern is with the metaphysical and theological realities and its language is that of the everyday. To say “God made all physical reality” there was no other language available than: “In the beginning God made the skies and the earth (=what is under the sky ie land/sea)”. But in what way does this show that “in the beginning God made the heavens and the earth” is “culturally confined”? All it shows is that we now know much more about what the “skies” and “earth-land-sea” involve.

Webb then proceeds to some common but factually incorrect myths. The quality of his source material is perhaps shown in that on p.112 he actually cites as a source A.D.White’s *A History of the Warfare of Science With Theology in Christendom* for the supposed truth of an assertion that someone was burnt at the stake for using pain medication. He cites p.62 of the Dover edition (he cites it as 1960 – actually this is a reprint of the original edition in 1896). I have never researched the stake story, but White associated it on the same page with a claim that Simpson “met with a storm of protest” for his work on anaesthetics – an assertion which certainly *is* based on fantasy. I know of no modern historian of science (and I know quite a few) who would regard White as a serious source, and his book is frankly propaganda not history.

²²⁸ This means, as explored in Marston & Forster (2001) pp.296ff, that it contains neither anachronistically advanced cosmology nor wrong cosmology, it is simply not about cosmology. The mainstream church always recognised this.

Perhaps it was from such sources that Webb drew his first “neutral” example:

For many years the cultural component of biblical cosmology remained inextricably bound together with the phenomenological and theological components.(p.222).

This is simply not true and at no stage in Jewish or Christian history was it so. This fact is followed through in great detail in our work *Reason, Science and Faith*. Origen was withering in his statements on biblical literalism, seeing in the text itself clear indications that Gen.1-2 were *never intended* as chronological scientific accounts. Augustine, Aquinas, and the scholastics (arguably excepting Lombard) emphasized the “literal meaning” of Scripture, but were not biblical literalists in the sense modern Americans have given the term, and clearly stated (in spite of popular myths about the scholastics) that the theology did not depend on the physics and that the latter should be empirical. Webb footnotes:

Luther, Calvin, Melanchthon, Owen etc anchored their geocentric and stationary earth views on biblical statements.(n.8).

Actually Luther made no known statement on geocentricity, modern statements about his opposition are based on a reported after-dinner remark in a book someone else wrote years later. Calvin clearly tells us that the Bible is not to teach astronomy, and makes no statement on geocentricity – though a nineteenth century writer on the supposed “conflict” of science and faith made one up for him and inserted it in his book. Melanchthon did believe that the earth was stationary, but was a patron of Rhaeticus who wrote a summary of the Catholic Canon Copernicus’ seminal sun-centred work and then edited his great book itself. In Melanchthon’s Tübingen, Maestlin read Copernicus and openly taught Copernicanism at the end of the sixteenth century, passing it on to the devout Lutheran Johannes Kepler who first discovered the elliptical planetary orbits. As for Owen, in general Puritans (like the Keplerian Jeremiah Horrocks who first observed the

transit of Venus about three miles from where I presently live²²⁹) were not even aware that there was an issue with the heliocentricity. Even the Catholic Cardinal Bellarmine, who indirectly warned Galileo in 1616 not to teach the heliocentric system without proof, clearly recognised that it was an empirical issue and that if proof were produced the theology would be adjusted. All this was about interpreting Scripture, not cultural limitation. Webb states:

2. Flat earth versus round earth: The combined explorations of Columbus, Cabot, da Gama, Vespucci, Drake, Cortez and others, eventually proved the earth was round (p.223).

Here Webb is a victim of the 19th century American biographer of Columbus who spiced up his account with flat-earth nonsense, for actually: “no educated person in 1492 believed the world to be anything other than a sphere.”²³⁰ Educated people – including all leading churchmen – knew *from ancient times* that the earth was round, and Erasthenes had measured its circumference fairly accurately in ancient Greece. Augustine and Jerome, for example, disagreed on whether there were people living in the antipodes (neither thinking even this to be an article of faith). It was also believed throughout that the earth was small in comparison to the universe. All this is not a matter of opinion, but of historical fact. Webb’s statement is simply wrong.

Webb then states:

In time, the findings of Copernicus, Galileo, Columbus and others forced the church to recognize that Scripture accommodated itself to the cosmology of its day.(p.223).

This is really misleading. Columbus was irrelevant – no scholar had believed in a flat earth for millennia and his voyage said nothing about whether the earth moved. Before Copernicus, Cusanus and Oresme had already considered heliocentric ideas – there was no church opposition to overcome – and the ideas were

²²⁹ I was privileged to observe the transit in June 2004 from the probable site, Carr House, where Horrocks made his brilliant first observation.

²³⁰ Chapman (2002) p.243 – any serious modern history book would show this.

around in Europe as Copernicus studied. Hoskin (1997) points out that Albert of Saxony (sometime Rector of Paris in the 1350’s) had summarised heliocentric ideas (and why they were empirically improbable) in his *Questions*, which were reprinted six times during Copernicus’ lifetime. What Copernicus did was to formulate a mathematical system that removed the need for equants. The Galileo affair was not to do with science vs faith but whether laymen should interpret Scripture during the counter-reformation – coupled with a personal fallout with a pope who had previously been a great fan. Galileo had no proof at all that the earth moved, his main proof (the tides) was mistaken, and his book was twenty-three years out of date because it ignored Kepler’s already published elliptical orbits. In northern Europe, Kepler – a devout Phillipist Lutheran and open Copernican – received powerful protection from the Jesuits and three increasingly anti-Protestant Catholic Holy Roman Emperors who kept him as imperial mathematician during the worst of the thirty years war. In Britain, the Puritans seem not even to think there was a biblical issue. The idea that such people “forced” the church to accept some kind of cultural relativism is simply mistaken. Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler etc explicitly stated that Scripture was inspired – and that the argument was about correct interpretation. All of them argued not that science had proven cultural relativism but that Scripture never intended to imply a particular cosmology.

When Webb turns to women issues his examples are no more convincing. He begins:

Women as reproductive gardens. The Biblical model of reproduction is heavily influenced by its agrarian culture. A woman provides the “soil” into which a man planted the “seed” of the miniature child (*homunculus*) to grow for nine months (Gen 38:9; Lev 15:16-18, 32). As in the harvesting of crops, at birth the child is known as the “first fruits” (Ps 78:51; 105:36) or “fruit” of the wife’s garden/womb. Furthermore infertility is always connected with the woman (not the man). A woman’s barren womb was equivalent to desert-like soil conditions. The church was very slow to accept the emerging scientific evidence about reproduction because the agrarian model was so deeply ingrained...(p.223)

Much of this seems misleading or plain wrong. The Hebrew word “seed” can mean male sperm (as it does in the verses he cites Gen.38:9 and Lev.15:16-18 and 32) especially when specified as “seed of copulation”. Plainly women do not emit any obvious “seed of copulation”, but does this mean that they cannot have “seed” in the far more usual sense of descendants? No it does not. The very *first* use of the word “seed” in Scripture is the seed *of the woman* in Gen.3:15. Hannah prays (1 Sam.1:11) for “seed of men” (ie a male child), whilst Elkanah is not promised fertile ground for his seed, but “seed of this woman” (1 Sam.2:20).²³¹ The adjective “barren” (or infertile) is used eleven times in the OT. Four refer to Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah – in all of whose cases their husbands had children by other women so the infertile partner (in modern terms) may be reasonably identified as them. The two references to Samson’s mother in Jdgs.13:2&5 do identify her as barren (though presumably the Lord knew where the infertility was without the need for modern science to help him). Three references are poetic, though probably refer to women as barren. One verse, however, says: “there shall not be male or female barren among you” (Deut.7:14), and the remaining one (Ex.23:26) is non gender-specific. At least 10%, then, of references are to male gender barrenness – in spite of Webb’s clear assertion that barrenness in Scripture is exclusively female. Webb then switches to the church’s supposed reluctance to accept emerging science, based on this biblical agrarian picture. Now Aristotle had taught that the woman provided the material in reproduction, whilst the male the stimulus to set it going. This was the general view – but on “scientific” not on Scriptural grounds. The Genevan Huguenot Charles Bonnet (1720-93) put forward a version of “emboîtement” in which the seed was passed on *from mother to daughter* – without any felt need to consider Scripture. Likewise the Italian experimentalist Lazzaro Spallanzani (1729-1799) knew of the sperm in semen but did not believe they were part of reproduction – again there were no Scriptural issues. Webb’s version of the history of science is myth. The scientific reputation of Aristotle (or

²³¹ The LXX also reads: seed out of (*ek*) this woman.

Galen) sometimes did prevent progress, but this was nothing to do with supposedly incorrect science in Scripture.

Webb states: “As on other occasions Christians had mistakenly invested too much transcultural or absolutized meaning into the text...”(p.224). This is mistaken in the present instance, and he can produce no other examples. Even he seems to admit that his “women as poor leaders” example from Is.3:12 is thin. Perhaps in Isaiah’s days lack of education etc *did* mean that women were poor leaders – if Isaiah is perhaps not PC in his use of language this is far from stating any kind of principle with divine backing.

Webb’s final example is 1 Tim.2:14 for which he claims that “what Paul has in mind...probably differs little from what Isaiah had in mind... in Isaiah 3:12.”(p.228). Assuming Paul’s authority is indeed behind 1 Tim. this seems highly unlikely rather than “probable”. The New Covenant prophecy was that sons *and daughters* would prophesy (Joel 2:28). Paul expected women to lead church worship in prayer and prophesy, carrying the sign of their own “authority” to do so. The word in 1 Cor.11:10 is *exousian*, the usual Greek word for “authority”, it cannot mean someone else’s authority, let alone a “mark of subordination” as some have wrongly claimed.²³² The word usually translated “usurp authority” in 1 Tim 2:12 is a very rare word *authentēin*.²³³ This appears nowhere else in the NT, nor in contemporary literature. The word seems to imply a violent seizure of authority - as eg when in Euripides’ play the Greek who seizes Andromache as a slave/concubine after they kill her beloved husband Hector is called an *authentēs*. This is not the constituted authority (*exousian*) given Corinthian women prophets, nor the teaching role of a Priscilla teaching rising church leader Apollos. To such authority we are to be subject (*hypotassesthai*) – but seized domination (*authentēin*) is right for neither women nor men. 1 Tim.2:8-9 admonishes women, like the men, to “lift up holy hands

²³² John (1993) p.9 eg wrongly claims that the head covering was a sign of “subordination”– the Greek *exousian* (authority) cannot mean this.

²³³ The word is looked at in depth in my *Women in Marriage and in Church Leadership* (2006)

without wrath and doubting” when leading public prayer. The further admonitions in 2:9-10 and 2:11-12 must relate to some local situation, in which a group of women in Ephesus were dressing provocatively and seizing a directing authority rather than submitting to the apostolic teaching. Winter (2003) presents some detailed evidence that women throughout Roman provinces (like Ephesus and Corinth) did see dress code as indicative of sexual licence, and in this instance anti-apostolic heresy seems to have been associated with this. We cannot be sure what the heresy was, nor how it might have related to some form of gnosticism, but the point made seems to be about priority. The apostles to whom Jesus gave authority were all Jewish men – but the principle “to the Jew first but also to the Gentile” did not mean that Gentiles were never to become teachers following that authority. To first “learn in silence”, submitting to the recognised apostolic authority and doctrine, is contrasted with the deception of Eve because she ignored the words of instruction given in the account to *'ādām*. Yet, says the writer, “she will be saved by *the childbearing* if they continue in faith, love, etc”. The switches from third person singular to plural show that this is not about general motherhood, bearing “the child” means the Messiah. This was uniquely a work of a woman – no male seed was involved – and through it the salvation in the New Covenant implies that both sons *and daughters* prophesy because in Christ there is no male or female, Jew or Gentile. Both Gentiles and women, having learned²³⁴ in silence, can have authority (*exousian*) – not seized violently (*authentain*) but properly given and a part of mutual “subjection” (Eph 5:21) to proper authorities in the church. “They will be saved” in 1 Tim 2:15 is not just about a ticket to heaven, but that present salvation which outworks from the death-resurrection of the messiah, being fully a part of the people of God and acting as the body of Christ in the world.²³⁵

²³⁴ Remembering that many rabbis did not think it right for women to learn Torah at all.

²³⁵ Again, please see details in my *Women in Marriage and Church Leadership*.

Whether or not this understanding of the passage is accepted, it makes no sense for later commentators on 1 Tim.2:14 to use it to ascribe to Paul a belief that women are always more easily deceived. If Paul really held such a doctrine then how could it be that it was on Chloe’s household (1 Cor.1.11) that he relied for accurate reports and assessments of the problems in Corinth? The other examples of Lydia, Phoebe, Junia, Priscilla etc also indicate that Paul was far from imagining such women easily deceived. Indicative are the words of the clever though prayerful Gentile businesswoman to the rabbi Paul: “If you believe me faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my house” – to which Luke adds wryly “and she persuaded us”.(Acts 16:15). As a Jewish rabbi, Paul’s reputation would be in tatters if he went - but Paul had Kingdom values! He did not refuse to listen and be persuaded on the grounds that (in woeful pre-scientific ignorance) he thought Lydia was a woman and therefore “easily deceived” as to what was the right course of action. Paul did not need modern science to put straight misunderstandings in 1 Tim.2, however many incorrect interpretations have since been read into it.

In short, not a single one of the examples Webb produces of the supposedly “persuasive” use of modern science to correct scientific inaccuracy in Scripture is historically accurate. Ironically, having argued that the Biblical ethics on the role of women is now to be superseded because modern science has undermined its biblical pseudo-scientific basis, Webb then argues that, in contrast, on the homosexual issue scientific biological findings cannot tell us anything about sexual ethics. This is just not consistent. Either we *can* derive ethics from scientific findings or we *cannot*. In my view we consistently cannot.

We now may turn to criteria 6-9 which according to Webb are only “moderately persuasive” in comparison to the supposedly “persuasive” ones like the mistaken science we have just considered.

Criterion 6:

A component of a text may be transcultural if its basis is rooted in the original creation material. Gen 1:1-2:25 provides us with an account of the creation of humanity.

Since God designed everything within creation to function in a good and harmonious manner, one might expect that the creation material would yield an ongoing pattern and purpose.

Now a Jesus-centred hermeneutic accepts exactly this point, noting that both Jesus and Paul referred to just this passage – to both the creation passages were crucial to understand God’s intentions for marriage.. Webb actually begins by noting this passage of Jesus in Mt. 19:4-6, but to him it carries little general weight and he then proceeds to try to demolish the criterion.

Webb’s first point is that:

Eden portrays man and woman in a marriage or covenant relationship (Gen 2:14). If the creation material provides a tightly ordered paradigm... most Christians would view departure from creation pattern as an acceptable option.(p.124).

Actually Gen.2:24 says nothing at all about a *covenant* relationship (this is an idea imported by moderns, including some who want eg to extend it to a covenant between two males in a gay-partnership), but in Gen.2:18 God himself said: “It is not good for *the man* to be alone, I will make an ally corresponding to him”. Either God was mistaken or it is indeed “not good” for man to be alone, and in marriage the *’iššâ* is restored to the *’iš* to remake the whole human unit. However, Jesus himself, in Mt.19, noted that whilst marriage might be the ideal, yet for someone who felt unable to enter a permanent, monogamous, male-female relationship on the pattern of Genesis, then voluntary singleness/celibacy was the better option. Of course a pre-fall expression of what is “good” cannot form a “tightly ordered paradigm” in a post-fall world – whoever would imagine it could? But Jesus did clearly think that the creation passage was crucial to understanding what was in the heart of God on marriage and sexuality.

Webb’s next two supposed points – farming as an occupation and walking as transportation – are hard to take seriously. Even assuming that the semi-poetic and highly symbolic language used in the passage really was meant that literally, they were expelled from the garden anyway in ch.3, and how do we know that God

hadn’t provided them each with a bicycle along with the skins? Webb’s number 6 is a more serious claim, ie that Gen 1:28 means that birth control “breaks with creation pattern”. However, Gen 1:28 reads: “fill the earth and subdue it”, it does *not* read “everyone have as many children as possible” – even though many pro-gay writers argue the present irrelevancy of the creation passages on the assumption that it does. Birth control does not prevent humanity filling the earth (we fill it already) and subduing it (which we do with technology not by overwhelming it with numbers). The apparent pre-fall vegetarian diet was God’s intention, though later supplementary provisions by God are confirmed explicitly by Jesus and Paul and we are taking a Jesus-centred hermeneutic. Finally, Webb argues “most Christians today depart from the Sabbath pattern in significant ways”. However, few would actually take literally the idea that God needed a rest, and, again, the creation passages do not lay down any requirement for a human Sabbath at all. The *Israelites* (as Webb rightly says) were given the Sabbath, and the reason given *them* connected it to creation accounts. Jesus, however, did not take this later connection literally, for he said that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for a divine memorial Sabbath. Paul taught that Sabbaths were a matter of personal conviction (Rom 14:5), and we do not depart from “the creation pattern” but from Jewish Law if we choose not to keep the seventh day Sabbath. Obviously, of course, there is a sensible *principle* involved in setting aside regular time for God – but this is a different issue.

Given the above problems in Webb’s supposedly “neutral” examples of departures from creation intentions, we cannot approach with any confidence his ensuing comments on ways in which on women’s issues we should likewise depart. However, in practice what Webb shows is not that we should depart from the creation patterns but that patriarchalists have read into the passages things which are not there. This is something very different, and I see nothing in his points on this with which I would disagree. The Genesis language; “for this cause does a man leave... and cleave...” of course implies that a woman likewise leaves and cleaves – but for those to whom it was written the active role was generally that of the male. Readers were well

aware, for example, that Rebecca was asked whether she was willing to leave her father's house and cleave to a man she had not yet even met. There is no basis here for strong patriarchy. When Webb deals with the homosexual issue, however, the treatment is weak because he makes no reference to Jesus' Mt.19 deliberate linking of the "male-female" of Gen.1 to the "leaving and cleaving" of Gen.2. He bases the argument purely on his own feeling that it is an unacceptable "jump" from accepting celibacy rather than heterosexual marriage, to accepting gay-partnership rather than heterosexual marriage. For a Jesus-centred hermeneutic, however, the words of Jesus are crucial to the point – not whether "the interpreter establishes a dialogue between the creation story and other criteria" (presumably like his misguided criterion 18).

Criterion 18 figures in his next criteria on primogeniture. Now we find that: "current sociological studies have demonstrated that primogeniture and its resultant social structures are the products of culture-locked, time bound concerns." (p.145).

This is a very dangerous kind of argument. Presumably some sociologist will come up with a study that "explains" the origins of the idea of God – does this mean that we then abandon it? Here Webb assumes that sociology can inform us about ethics - debunking ethics by showing a naturalistic origin. Later, in his criterion 18, Webb argues that any biology and sociology of gayness can tell us nothing about ethics. Webb is just not consistent. Either we *can* derive our ethics from sociology, and naturalistic origins undermine any ethical principle (whether primogeniture or gay-partner-rejection), or we *cannot* derive ethics from sociology and to do so is what philosophers recognise as the "naturalistic fallacy".

There is no need to go into all details on Webb's remaining criteria. The suggestion that the NT statements about being subject (*hypotassesthai*) to "those in authority" favours monarchy as against democracy seems untenable. Paul's concern eg in Rom.13 is that civil authority *as such* has a divinely given function of keeping law and order – the phrase "those in authority" has no particular type of government in mind. On p.168 Webb asserts

"one has to admit that we no longer apply the menstrual-intercourse prohibition today". One "has to admit" no such thing. In my own books *God and the Family* and *The Biblical Family* in the 1980's I noted the positioning of this prohibition in Leviticus, and argued that it should indeed still be taken seriously – just as should the incest laws based in the same passage. The fact that many people don't abide by it is no proof that a divine restriction no longer applies, and if incest (in these days of contraception) were to become popular this would be no proof that such restrictions no longer apply either. Paul implies that incest restrictions still apply in 1 Cor.6 for a man and his stepmother, and it seems logical to extend this to types of incest on which the NT is non-specific. No logical hermeneutic should depend on a popular vote or what "everybody knows". Sex during menstruation is not, of course, a big issue (in Leviticus it is not a capital offence as are eg homosexual activities – Webb reflects this in criteria 12, but sees it as indication of cultural relativism rather than just not being serious) – but surely Christians cannot cavalierly write off its relevance simply because people today ignore it? Plenty of people today ignore the ban on homosexual acts that comes in the same section of Leviticus. Plenty of Christians (Catholic and Protestant) in the sixteenth century burned or drowned Anabaptist believers – this did not make it right.

Postscript:

Webb is making an attempt in his book to address genuine issues. We do, indeed, need to try to develop consistent hermeneutics in dealing with issues like slavery, women and gay-partnerships today. Jeffrey John, for example, rightly asks in John (1993):

On what possible hermeneutical principle is "incompatibility" discovered in one case [ie accepting remarried divorcees] yet not the other [accepting gay-partners]?"(p.8).²³⁶

²³⁶ Jeffrey John's point is effectively answered in my work *Christians, Divorce and Remarriage (2006)* which shows that my understanding of Jesus' words to imply rejecting remarried divorcees is mistaken.

Webb's kind of piecemeal development of criteria, however, is unconvincing. A truly Jesus-centred hermeneutic maintains a structured and coherent approach which does answer John's question. Webb's extension of a "redemptive movement hermeneutic" to suppose that we can today "forge a social ethic that far exceeds Scripture" does not. Some of his criteria, particularly criterion 18, are based on incorrect history, and he does not and cannot apply them consistently and proclaim an entirely "egalitarian" model for marriage whilst rejecting gay-partnerships. Much as one may sympathise with his intentions, his book, as it stands, does not succeed in fulfilling them.

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