

A COMPREHENSIVE AND CRITICAL REVIEW
ESSAY OF *HOMOSEXUALITY, SCIENCE, AND THE*
“PLAIN SENSE” OF SCRIPTURE, PART 2

ROBERT A. J. GAGNON

rgagnon@pts.edu

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, PA 15206-2596

www.robagnon.net

The following is a continuation of the review published in HBT 22:2 (Dec. 2000): 174-243. This review essay treats articles by biblical scholars in Homosexuality, Science, and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture (ed. David L. Balch; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000): VI. Christopher Seitz; VII. Robert Jewett; VIII. David E. Fredrickson.

*Not treated here are the articles by Phyllis A. Bird and William R. Schoedel. My analysis of Bird’s article will be published separately in a forthcoming issue of Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft under the title “The Old Testament and Homosexuality: A Critical Review of the Case Made By Phyllis Bird.” As for the article by William R. Schoedel, I refer readers to pp. 392-95 in my book *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), “A Note on Schoedel’s Study of Ancient Causation Theories.” Elsewhere I discuss further the implications of “orientation” theory in antiquity for study of Paul’s discussion of homosexual practice: “Does the Bible Regard Same-Sex Intercourse as Intrinsically Sinful?” in *Christian Sexuality: Normative and Pastoral Principles* (ed. R. Saltzman; Minneapolis: Kirk House, 2003), 106-55, specifically pp. 140-52.*

David Balch’s own essay in this volume (pp. 278-304) consists of a general, often oblique, discussion of some interpretative issues, followed by an overview of some modern Jewish interpretations. Balch’s own analysis is thin and, in my estimation, his overall con-

tribution insignificant. Accordingly, instead of treating Balch's article in the Eerdmans volume, I have chosen to critique his efforts at reviewing my book for a regional meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. Balch's review gives a much clearer presentation of his own argument for discounting the biblical witness against homosexual practice.

VI. Christopher Seitz, "Sexuality and Scripture's Plain Sense: The Christian Community and the Law of God"¹

Historical-Critical Method versus the Plain Sense of Scripture

Christopher Seitz begins his essay with skepticism regarding the application of historical-critical method to the study of the Bible and homosexual practice. According to Seitz, the church must give top priority to hearing the "plain sense" of individual texts "interbiblically, according to the rule of faith," rather than to "reconstructions of an 'original,' historical sense argued to be at odd with [this plain sense]." The historical-critical method tends to eschew plain-sense readings, emphasizing as it does the novel, progress, original authorial intent, and socio-cultural circumstances. But deconstructionist hermeneutics have exposed the historical-critical method's claims to objectivity.²

The bottom line for Seitz is that the plain sense of Scripture on homosexual behavior is, well, plain. "If it were not for massive changes in sexual behavior over the past decades, I doubt that we would be considering this issue on the grounds that *it is one contested within Scripture itself.*" Seitz rejects the hope that the contemporary church can resolve its differences by staying "in dialogue" long enough and doing "more historical-critical work."³

¹Pp. 177-96. Seitz is professor of Old Testament at University of St. Andrews, Scotland.

²Ibid., 177-80.

³Ibid., 180-82.

While I am sympathetic to Seitz's views, I do not agree that the historical-critical problems raised by prohomosex interpretations⁴ can be ignored. I will have more to say about this later, at the end of my assessment of Seitz.

Seitz on Jesus

In the second third of his article, Seitz argues that a christological lens does not do away with the law's content (cf. Gal 5:23 and John 8:11), despite the problematic of distinguishing normative "moral" elements in the law from non-normative "civil" and "ritual" elements.⁵ That Jesus spoke to the issue of adultery but not same-sex intercourse is attributable to the fact that "adultery was a more prevalent sin in Israel than homosexual behavior among men." Moreover:

That the prohibition against adultery, together with the death penalty, appears in the same context in Leviticus as the prohibition against homosexual behavior (Lev. 20:13) might lead one to conclude that Jesus would have reacted in exactly the same way [as in John 8:1-11] if the scribes had brought to him the unusual case of a man accused of "lying with a male as with a woman."⁶

Referring to Jesus' appeal to Gen 1-2 in his debate with Pharisees over divorce in Mark 10:6-8, Seitz appropriately asks:

⁴The term *homosex* is now in use by some advocates of homosexual behavior. It focuses on the behavior of same-sex intercourse rather than on homosexual persons per se and can be utilized as a shorthand adjective or noun by analogy to the term *sex*. I prefer to use it in such expressions as *pro-* or *anti-homosex* rather than to make use of *pro-* or *anti-homosexual*. The latter expressions are open to abuse because the term *homosexual* can also be used of a homosexual person. The present debate about homosexual practice is not a debate about whether one should be for or against homosexual persons. To oppose a person's self- and other-destructive behavior is not the same thing as opposing the person. Indeed, to support a person's self- and other-destructive behavior is to oppose the person, albeit unwittingly.

⁵*Ibid.*, 184-85, 187.

⁶*Ibid.*, 186.

How could any departure from this teaching . . . be anything less than a similar instance of human hard-heartedness? If what God revealed to Moses was an accommodation to human sinfulness and not what God fully intended . . . then how could the church depart from this will of God and speak not of hardened hearts, but of actual blessing and positive endorsement?⁷

In these observations Seitz is on target. Alleged analogies for disregarding the biblical witness to homosexual practice are not, in fact, good analogies.⁸ Furthermore, despite embarrassing attempts by some to co-opt Jesus for the homosexual agenda (e.g., “Jesus acted up!”), it is clear that attempts to view the historical Jesus as either neutral or even friendly toward committed homosexual relationships represent revisionist history at its worst. All the evidence we have indicates that Jesus would have been unequivocally opposed to every form of same-sex intercourse.⁹

An Intertextual Echo to Sodom in Romans 1:24-27

In a concluding observation in the last third of the article, Seitz makes a novel suggestion that Paul’s reason for singling out same-sex intercourse as a sign of God’s judgment in Rom 1:24-27 has in mind the cataclysmic destruction of Sodom:

Paul chooses homosexual behavior not because he regards it as a worse sin than others, but because the judgment of God on it was

⁷This observation is made in the last third of the article (p. 191).

⁸Cf. my discussion in: *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 441-51, 460-69; *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 43-50 (with online notes in “Notes to Gagnon’s Essay in the Gagnon-Via Two Views Book,” at <http://www.robgagnon.net/2Views/HomoViaRespNotesRev.pdf>); “Are There Universally Valid Sex Precepts? A Critique of Walter Wink’s Views on the Bible and Homosexuality,” *HBT* 24 (2002): 72-125.

⁹See my discussion of the witness of Jesus in: *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, ch. 3 (pp. 185-228); *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 50-53, 68-74 (with online nn. 21-22, 59-73).

such a visible manifestation of his wrath against ungodliness, patient and deserving of attention by natural man.¹⁰

I agree that, along with intertextual echoes to Gen 1:26-28 and Lev 18:22; 20:13, there probably is an intertextual echo to the Sodom story.¹¹ The prime evidence for such a connection, not cited by Seitz, is the strikingly similar description of Sodom's sin found in *Testament of Naphtali* 3:3-4. Here is the text in context:

²Sun and moon and stars do not alter their order; thus too you yourselves should not alter the law of God by the disorder of your actions. ³*Gentiles* (or: nations), *having strayed* (or: wandered, erred) *and left the Lord, altered their order and followed after stones and sticks, having followed after spirits of straying* (or: wandering, error). ⁴*But you yourselves [are] not [to be] like that, my children, having known* (or: recognized, discerned) *in the firmament, in the earth and sea and all the products of workmanship, the Lord who made all these things, in order that you might not become like Sodom, which exchanged the order of its nature.* ⁵And likewise also the Watchers exchanged the order of their nature, on whom also the Lord pronounced a curse at the Flood.

Both Rom 1:19-27 and *T. Naph.* 3:3-4 (1) couple the sin of idolatry with the sin of male-male intercourse;¹² (2) treat creation and nature as

¹⁰"Sexuality and Scripture's Plain Sense," 195.

¹¹For intertextual echoes to Gen 1:26-28 in Rom 1:23-27, see my critique of Fredrickson on pp. 207-13 below (also pp. 194-95 of the Seitz article); for intertextual echoes to Lev 18 and 20 see: pp. 232-33 below (esp. n. 115); *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 122; and "Notes to Gagnon's Essay," n. 55.

¹²Mention of the Watchers in 3:5 has led some to speculate that the motif of Sodom exchanging "the order of its nature" refers to sex with angels rather than male-male intercourse. However, it is not likely that a reference to male-male intercourse is excluded. Cf. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 88-89 n. 121; and especially my "Response to Prof. William Countryman's Review," part V (pp. 9-13), at <http://www.robagnon.net/Reviews/homoCountrymanResp.pdf>.

roughly equivalent;¹³ and (3) view same-sex intercourse as an “exchange” of the natural order given in creation for a behavior that contravenes the natural order. Since the Sodom story often figured prominently in Jewish critiques of homoerotic behavior or immoral sexual behavior generally,¹⁴ it would not be surprising if Paul had this story partly in view in Rom 1:24-27—especially since Paul mentions Sodom and Gomorrah later in the same letter in Rom 9:29.

The significance of an intertextual echo to Sodom in Rom 1:24-27—a significance not noted by Seitz—is that it would provide one more ancient witness for reading the Sodom narrative as an indictment of male-male intercourse *per se* and not as an indictment only of coercive forms of male-male intercourse. Clearly Paul’s critique of homoerotic relations primarily has in view non-coercive forms (“inflamed with their yearning for one another, males with males,” Rom 1:27).

Although there probably is an echo to the Sodom narrative in Rom 1:24-27, it is not likely that Paul chose to highlight homosexual behavior in Romans 1 mainly and merely “because the judgment of God on it [at Sodom] was such a visible manifestation of his wrath against ungodliness” (*pace* Seitz).

First, Rom 1:18-32 focuses on a more subtle manifestation of God’s wrath in the present time—“for the wrath of God *is being* revealed

¹³The mention of things “made” by the Lord (*T. Naph.* 3:4) is a clear allusion to creation. The reference to “*its* [viz., Sodom’s] nature” alludes to the gendered essence of the men of Sodom; that is, to essential maleness given by “the Lord who made all these things” at creation. Philo makes a similar point: The men of Sodom “shake off the yoke of the law of *nature*” by “mounting males, the doers not standing in awe of the *nature* held in common with those who had it done to them. Then, little by little, [they] accustom[ed] those who had been *born men* to put up with feminine things . . . , not only feminizing their bodies with softness . . . but also . . . their very souls.” Concerned for the preservation of the human race, God both “gave increase . . . to the unions of men and women that are in accordance with *nature*, existing for the sake of the procreation of children, and, detesting the alien and unlawful unions, extinguished [the latter]” (*Abr.* 135-37; emphases added). There is a misogynistic overlay to Philo’s argument but the main emphasis is on male-female complementarity, anatomical and procreative, given at birth and ordained by God at creation.

¹⁴See *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 79-91.

from heaven" (1:18)—than the cataclysmic manifestation of God's wrath illustrated at Sodom. God is depicted in Rom 1:18-32 as "giving over" people to their "self-dishonoring passions" (1:27). This is the initial "payback" that they "received back in themselves" and which was "necessitated by their straying" (1:27). Yes, the commission of such "indecent" heaps up sin to a point where it precipitates cataclysmic destruction at the end (so 1:32). But the main point is that individuals are already experiencing the negative effects of their decisions, being made foolish and pitiable in the present time, even before any lightning bolt strikes.

Second, and more importantly, in the context of Rom 1:24-27 Paul is showing why humans, particularly Gentiles *who do not have access to Scripture*, nonetheless "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (1:18). Where are humans expected to find such truth? Not in Scripture but in creation/nature. The first mention of sin, the sin of idolatry in 1:19-23 (with resumptive statement in 1:25), stresses that the "truth of/about God" (i.e., God's anti-iconic quality) is visibly and intellectually transparent in *creation* (i.e., in the material structures created by God and still intact). This truth-in-creation leaves pagans¹⁵ "without excuse" when they worship idols in the image of humans or, worse, animals (1:20, 23). The second mention of sin, the sin of sexual uncleanness in general and same-sex intercourse in particular in 1:24, 26-27, emphasizes that the truth about our sexual selves is visibly and intellectually transparent in nature (i.e., in the intact material structures of human bodies, first shaped at creation).

Paul chose to pair idolatry (1:19-23) and same-sex erotic intercourse (1:24-27) because both behaviors require a massive override of the revelation of God in creation/nature—exhibits A and B respectively of culpable and egregious pagan suppression of the truth about the Creator (vertical dimension) and the Creator's creation (horizontal dimension).¹⁶ The array of vices cited in 1:29-31 perhaps can also be brought under the heading of a suppression of truth in nature. But for Paul and

¹⁵I use the term "pagan" in a non-pejorative sense to refer in a shorthand way to persons who are neither Jew nor Christian.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 264-70.

early Judaism generally the vice of same-sex intercourse provided a particularly clear, and thus abominable, violation of natural revelation in the crucial area of human sexuality. Those who commit acts of same-sex intercourse are culpable even in the absence of any knowledge of Gen 1-2 (creation), Gen 19 (Sodom), and Lev 18 and 20 (sex laws).

Third, “contrary to nature” arguments in antiquity, even those raised by Jews, are not predicated on the Sodom story. Indeed, to predicate them on the Sodom story inverts the logic of both the narrative and its subsequent interpretation in pre-exilic, exilic, and Second Temple Judaism. The visible manifestation of God’s wrath at Sodom is itself based on an unnatural, heinous violation of sexual being, a sexuality given at birth and having self-evident implications for the choice of sexual partner. God brings cataclysmic destruction on Sodom because the inhabitants flagrantly dishonor the gender integrity of visitors, treating maleness as if it were femaleness. So the intertextual echoes to the Sodom story, like those to Gen 1-2 and Lev 18 and 20, reinforce how bad a deliberate transgression of God’s transparent will in creation/nature same-sex intercourse is. While these echoes could not be heard by most pagans, they could be heard both by the imaginary Jewish interlocutor concocted by Paul in Romans 2-4 and by the real audience of Gentile believers at Rome. But the primary reason for Paul’s pairing of same-sex intercourse with idolatry in 1:19-27 is the deliberate suppression of truth in creation/nature by those who *lack* knowledge of Scripture, not by those with access to Scripture (for the latter see Rom 2:1-3:20).¹⁷

¹⁷Most recently Philip F. Esler has argued: “It seems highly likely that Paul intended Sodom to form the master metaphor in this section of the letter and that his readers, some of whom must have been reasonably familiar with Israelite tradition . . . would have realized this” (*Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul’s Letter* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003], 148-50; quote from p. 150). He apparently makes the argument in detail in a forthcoming article (“The Sodom Tradition in Romans 1:18-32,” *BTB* 34 [2004]). I agree that there are intertextual echoes to Sodom, as again to the creation stories and the Levitical prohibitions. But the expression “master metaphor” overstates the case. The criticisms made against Seitz’s overemphasis apply to Esler’s argument as well.

Esler goes further than Seitz in that he rejects any allusions to the Genesis creation account in Rom 1:18-32. Esler does so on the grounds that Rom 1:18-32 does not tell

Is Same-Sex Intercourse No Worse Than Other Sins?

This also calls into question Seitz's other conclusion; namely, that Paul did not choose homosexual behavior because he regarded it "as a worse sin than others." The fact that Sodom became, in Jewish tradition, a byword for extraordinary divine judgment suggests the extreme nature of its sins, including and especially the sin highlighted in Gen 19:4-11, namely, that of flagrantly disregarding the gender integrity of the male visitors. Seitz himself states that ranging male-male intercourse with incest, bestiality, and adultery as capital offenses in Lev 20:10-16 shows that it is not "just one [sin] among others, of equal character, in the Old Testament."¹⁸

But Seitz sees the New Testament as leveling all sin as equally harmful.¹⁹ He is partly dependant on an observation by Richard Hays

the story of the Fall of Adam (but, *pace* Esler, neither does it tell the story of Sodom). However, Esler cannot successfully discount the eight points of correspondence between Gen 1:26-27 and Rom 1:23-27, just as he cannot explain away the explicit references to "the creation" and "the Creator" in Rom 1:20 and 1:25 respectively. Esler fails to make a distinction between (1) Paul discussing the Fall of Adam in Rom 1:18-32 (which Paul does not do here) and (2) Paul treating idolatry and same-sex intercourse in Rom 1:19-27 as a suppression of the truth about God and human sexuality established at creation and still transparent in nature (which Paul does do here). See further the critique of Fredrickson and Balch below, pp. 207-13 and 243-46, respectively.

Esler thinks the Sodom "master paradigm" helps him explain why Paul mentions same-sex intercourse between women. Esler argues that Paul was thinking of the mention of the daughters of Sodom in Ezek 16:48-50, the text where Ezekiel refers to the sins of Sodom. This reference is a stretch, for two reasons. First, there is no tradition in Jewish literature of the women of Sodom engaging in same-sex intercourse. Second, the reference to Sodom's "daughters" is merely a metaphor for surrounding satellite towns, not a literal description of women. There are better reasons for explaining Paul's mention of female-female intercourse in Rom 1:26 than appealing to Sodom's "daughters" in Ezek 16:48-50 (see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 299-303).

¹⁸"Scripture's Plain Sense," 189.

¹⁹Seitz does not make this point to excuse homosexual behavior, as some do, but rather to say that one should no more bless homosexual behavior than one would bless adultery, greed, anger, or drunkenness (*ibid.*, 190). One should not deduce from this "leveling" of sin that "homosexual behavior is less offensive than anger or greed"

that Paul's listing of additional vices in 1:29-31 and the abrupt accusation of the one who judges in 2:1-11 suggest that same-sex intercourse was not for Paul a "specially reprehensible sin."²⁰

The evidence suggests otherwise. Paul gives special attention to same-sex intercourse precisely because a clearer and more egregious instance of a deliberate sin against the knowledge of God's will, published in nature, could hardly be had. The multiplication of negative descriptive terms for same-sex intercourse in 1:24-27 fits in with the utter repugnance that same-sex intercourse generated among Jews in antiquity (both in Israelite religion and early Judaism): "sexual uncleanness" or "dirty sexual behavior," "dishonoring" or "degrading" bodily conduct, and "indecent" or "that which is shameful."

Paul's rigorous denunciation of same-sex intercourse was not a mere pretense for trapping his imaginary interlocutor. When Paul goes on to broaden the indictment in 1:28-32 and especially 2:1-3:20, he no more intends to deflate the horrific assessment of same-sex intercourse in Judaism than he intends to do the same for idolatry. Rather, his point is that, as egregious and numerous as Gentile sins are—and they are, on average, far more egregious and numerous than those of Jews—Jewish sins cannot be overlooked because, while Jews sin less and do so less egregiously, they know more (2:17-24). There is a "sting operation" in Rom 2:1-3:20, but not one that undermines the standard Jewish assessment of same-sex intercourse.

In Paul's view, while any sin could render one culpable to divine wrath and in need of Jesus, all sins were not necessarily of equal magnitude, either in God's eyes or in the eyes of the church.²¹ It is instructive and striking that in 1 Corinthians, a letter devoted to stress-

but rather that God's grace "extends even to offenses held by him to demand the death penalty" (his emphasis). Moreover, "one could no more 'bless' homosexual unions than one could bless anger or adultery" (ibid.).

²⁰The quote is from Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 388. Hays goes on to say: "for Paul, self-righteous judgment of homosexuality is just as sinful as the homosexual behavior itself" (ibid., 389).

²¹The same holds true today. I know of few people who would seriously argue that the church (or God) should treat pocketing a company pen on the one hand and murder, incest, and racism on the other as comparable offenses.

ing the unity of the church and criticizing divisions, Paul at one point—and one point only—advocates the temporary removal of a member of the community: a case of sexual immorality comparable to same-sex intercourse, man-(step)mother incest (1 Cor 5).²² Who in the church today would want to argue that incest is not a “specially reprehensible sin”? Certainly Paul, in line with the Old Testament and the prevailing sentiment in early Judaism, regarded same-sex intercourse as at least as offensive as incest.²³

A Major Problem: Ignoring the Old Testament Witness

The major problem with Seitz’s article has to do not so much with what he says as with what he does not do within the context of the Balch volume. Two Old Testament scholars are represented in this volume. One is prohomosex (Phyllis Bird); the other is not (Seitz). While Bird develops an extensive argument regarding the Old Testament witness, Seitz largely ignores that witness or, perhaps better, assumes it. Seitz would have better served readers if he had provided a counterpoint to the kinds of arguments raised by Bird and others.

I know that such a criticism runs against the grain of Seitz’s opening skepticism about the value of further historical-critical exploration of specific texts. However, the unfortunate result of Seitz avoiding such issues is that he abandons the field of the Old Testament witness to Bird and other prohomosex interpreters. Readers are left with the impression that the claims of the latter cannot be answered. These claims include:

²²There is something distinctive about immoral acts of sexual intercourse that makes them more liable to community discipline. They are generally unambiguous (sexual intercourse, unlike greed, is a fairly well-defined, clear-cut overt act); limited to isolated acts by a minority of members (whereas greediness infects all people at some level); often affirmed as morally good by the participants and hence more prone to being serial unrepentant behavior (whereas few affirm greed in principle); prone to engage persons’ bodies holistically in corrupting acts (see 1 Cor 6:18: “every sin, whatever a person does, is outside the body”); and viewed as especially potent sources of temptation for a community, given the addictive quality of sexual urges.

²³See “Notes to Gagnon’s Essay,” n.17.

- The stories of creation in Gen 1-2, homosexual assault in Genesis (9:20-27; 19:4-11) and Judges (19:22-25), and the *qedeshim* (male cult prostitutes) in the Deuteronomistic History are irrelevant for assessing the Old Testament view of homosexual behavior.
- Ezekiel, in a substantial reference to Sodom (16:49-50), makes no mention of homosexual behavior.
- The Levitical prohibitions are so limited in their reference or motivation as to be of no help for contemporary discourse.

If the above claims were true, intelligent churchgoers would have good reason to disregard the Old Testament witness on same-sex intercourse. Therefore, answering such claims matters. That is why I devoted almost a fourth of my first book to elaborating on the Old Testament witness (115 pages), as well as nearly a fourth of my essay in the *Two Views* book (12 pages).²⁴ Seitz should have provided readers with similar help.

VII. Robert Jewett, “The Social Context and Implications of Homoerotic References in Romans 1:24-27”²⁵

The bulk of Robert Jewett’s article consists of a detailed, verse-by-verse exegesis of 1:24-27. The issue of same-sex intercourse is not broached in earnest until the second half of the article when Jewett discusses 1:26d (“for their females . . .”).²⁶ It is to this second half that my comments will be directed.²⁷

²⁴*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 43-157; *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*, 56-68.

²⁵Pp. 223-41. Jewett is professor emeritus at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and guest professor of New Testament at the University of Heidelberg, Germany.

²⁶Bottom of p. 230.

²⁷On the whole I found the exegesis of 1:24-26a to be insightful, informative, and well researched. My only qualification is that I am more inclined than Jewett (p. 226) to see 1:24 as primarily a direct reference to sexual sins and to same-sex intercourse in particular, so that the discussion of same-sex intercourse really begins in 1:24, not

Readers may assume that Jewett’s article presents a counterpoint to Fredrickson’s prohomosex treatment of Rom 1:24-27, given that the general pattern of the Balch volume is to juxtapose opposing scholars with similar fields of expertise. Such a presumption would not be entirely accurate. At many points Jewett’s essay comes across as ambivalent—accepting of, or at least open to, some forms of same-sex intercourse, though resisting attempts to impose such an outlook on Paul.

For a book that purports to be even-handed, it is a major deficiency to have the prohomosex perspective represented by three scholars with expertise in the New Testament and its Greco-Roman milieu (Schoedel, Fredrickson, Balch) while lacking any article by a New Testament scholar who espouses a vigorous pro-complementarity position against same-sex intercourse *per se*.²⁸ This is not Jewett’s fault; he has a right to register a thoughtful view that cuts both ways. Nevertheless, it does require readers to look elsewhere than the Balch volume if they desire to hear a strong defense of the “traditional” (i.e., scriptural) position by a NT scholar.

An Apology for Paul’s “Prejudicial Language”?

According to Jewett, Paul’s decision to highlight a form of

sexual perversity that created wide revulsion in the Jewish and early Christian communities of his time. . . . for the sake of an effective argument leads him to highly prejudicial language, particularly to the modern ear. But it should be clear from the outset that his aim is not to prove the evils of perverse sexual behavior; that is simply assumed from the outset, both by Paul and in his view by his audience.²⁹

1:26 (*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 233, 252). Also, on a point of minor importance, whereas Jewett leaves the *te* in 1:26 untranslated, I argue that it has the force of “even”: “for *even* their females . . . ,” underscoring the most shocking or unexpected form of same-sex intercourse first.

²⁸Also, unlike Schoedel and Fredrickson, Jewett gives no attention to 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10.

²⁹“Romans 1:24-27,” 230-31.

Although Jewett's intention may have been otherwise, readers may get the impression that Jewett is offering an embarrassed apology for Paul. Jewett sounds as if he is intimating that Paul's choice of same-sex intercourse and his "highly prejudicial language" were dictated not so much by Paul's own convictions as by the prejudices of his audience and the demands of Paul's overall argument in 1:18-32.

As it is, Paul's remarks in Rom 1:26-27 are no less the product of theological conviction than are Paul's remarks on idolatry in Rom 1:19-23, 25 or any of the vices in Rom 1:29-31.³⁰ Given the many intertextual echoes to Gen 1-3 in Rom 1:18-32 (some of which Jewett himself cites), Paul apparently viewed the offense of same-sex intercourse against the backdrop of the creation stories. His reaction to same-sex intercourse was thus not "prejudicial" but grounded in Scripture, in addition to nature; specifically, the exclusive endorsement of the one man/one woman model of marriage. The negative intensity of Paul's language is hardly surprising in view of the Levitical label of "abomination." The repugnance registered by Paul is precisely what we would expect of a person who takes Scripture and God's stamp of gender differentiation in nature seriously. Paul's disdain for same-sex intercourse also coincides with his reaction to other categories of *porneia* in 1 Cor 5; 6:9, 15-20; and 1 Thess 4:3-8.³¹

³⁰The extended discussion of idolatry and same-sex intercourse in 1:19-27 should be thought of as introducing the first two elements of an extended vice list.

³¹In *1 Thess 4:3-8*, Paul refers to fornication and adultery as *porneia* (4:3), a form of behavior typical of "the Gentiles/nations who do not know God" (4:5), a product of "passions of desire/lust" (4:5), "uncleanness" (dirty or filthy conduct, 4:7), acts that by their very nature oppose the Holy Spirit and reject God (4:8). Believers who participate in such acts merit cataclysmic destruction at the hands of the avenging God (4:6; cf. 1:10; 5:2-3, 9). In *1 Cor 5*, Paul characterizes a case of incest between two consenting adults as a kind of shocking *porneia* that receives widespread disapproval even from Gentiles (5:1), a behavior that should be mourned by the community and that merits temporary expulsion (5:2-5, 9-13), an activity that, if not repented of, leads to the destruction of the perpetrator (5:5) and exclusion from the kingdom of God (6:9). It is likened to the corrupting properties of old rotting leaven and to wickedness and evil (5:6-8). In *1 Cor 6:12-20* Paul regards sex with prostitutes as *porneia* (6:13, 18) which, like all cases of *porneia*, involves the horrific act of defiling the very body purchased by Christ's blood to be a sanctified "temple" of Christ's Spirit (6:15-20)—worse even than the sacrilege of throwing mud at the

To say, as Jewett does, that Paul merely assumes the perversity of same-sex intercourse is, I think, not entirely correct. True, on the level of rhetorical fiction he can count on his imaginary Jewish diatribe partner to nod in agreement. Yet Paul does make an effort to demonstrate in 1:24-27, consistent with 1:18-19, not just that same-sex intercourse is morally wrong but something more. He presents same-sex intercourse as the best example of clear and deliberate suppression of the truth about the human creation in the only venue where Gentiles can be held accountable (creation/nature). Consequently, there is some level of "proof" even if the evidence is presented to a friendly audience. Then, too, the predominantly Gentile audience may have needed a little reminder not to return to the "unclean" or "filthy" behavior that characterized their pre-Christian lives.³² Ultimately, Paul's goal in 1:18-3:20 was to widen the indictment beyond Gentile sinners to Jews as well, but not so as to downplay sinful acts or even treat all sins as equal. If

temple in Jerusalem. One is obliged to flee from such activity (6:18), the implication being that failure to do so brings upon the perpetrator God's terrifying eschatological wrath. In *1 Cor 6:9* Paul brings together *porneia* (here incest and sex with prostitutes, perhaps too fornication), adultery, and same-sex intercourse as instances of egregious sexual immorality.

³²So Rom 6:19: "for just as you presented your members as slaves to sexual uncleanness (*akatharsia*, the same term used of same-sex intercourse in 1:24) and to [other acts of] lawlessness for the purpose of [manifesting] lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for the purpose of [manifesting] holiness (or: sanctification)." Similarly, Rom 13:12-14: "Let us then lay aside the works of darkness. . . . As in the day let us walk in a decent manner (*euschēmonos*; cf. the reference to same-sex "indecent" [*aschēmosynē*] in Rom 1:27), . . . not in immoral acts of sexual intercourse (lit., "beds," *koitai*; cf. *arsenokoitai* in 1 Cor 6:9) and licentious acts (*aselgeiai*; cf. Gal 5:9 where *aselgeia* follows *porneia* and *akatharsia* as "works of the flesh"), . . . and make no provision to satisfy the desires (*epithymiai*) of the flesh" (cf. Rom 1:24: "God gave them over to the desires [*epithymiai*] of their hearts"). If Paul had no interest in proving the perversity of same-sex intercourse to any in his Roman audience, why twice urge his readers in the same letter not to return to this and other forms of sexual immorality? Given the predominantly Gentile composition of Paul's Roman audience (1:5-6, 13-15; 11:13; 15:15-18) and Paul's especially dim view of Gentile sexual morality (1:24-27; cf. 1 Thess 4:5; 1 Cor 5:1), a view shared by virtually all Jews, it is risky to assume that Paul's parenetic statements on sex were little more than *pro forma* exercises, particularly in the case of a practice that still met with qualified acceptance in many quarters of the Roman world.

for Paul the manifestation of God's wrath entailed giving people over to the control of preexisting immoral passions, with homoerotic desire as a prime instance, obviously the manifestation of God's saving righteousness could mean nothing less than deliverance from such body-degrading conduct (Rom 6:1-7:6; 8:1-17; cf. 1 Cor 6:9-11).

Misogyny and Confusing Nature with Cultural Norms?

Jewett rightly points out that Paul mentions female same-sex intercourse first because of its more shocking nature to Paul and his audience. Paul leads with his strongest suit. However, it will probably not be clear to readers whether Jewett follows Bernadette Brooten³³ in believing that both Paul's placement of lesbian intercourse first and his description of it as "unnatural" have to do with male disgust for "women usurping the dominant place of men."³⁴ Presumably, if one followed this assumption to its logical conclusion (as Brooten does), one would have to conclude that Paul's opposition to same-sex intercourse was based on misogynistic considerations and should therefore be relegated to the dustbin of history.

Jewett does not go quite that far; at least he makes no explicit statement to that effect. Indeed, he goes on to say: "There is a strikingly egalitarian note in Paul's treating same-sex intercourse among females as an issue in its own right, holding women to the same level of accountability as men."³⁵ Jewett does not resolve for the reader the tension between these two different ways of looking at the citation of lesbian intercourse, one chauvinistic, the other egalitarian.

In this connection Jewett faults Paul for failing to see

³³*Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

³⁴"Romans 1:24-27," 231-32, 235-36. "It is clear from various ancient references that "'natural" intercourse means penetration of a subordinate person by a dominant one,' a female by a male" (ibid., 232, citing Brooten, *Love Between Women*, 241).

³⁵Ibid., 233. Commenting on the similar phrasing in 1:26b and 1:27a, Jewett notes: "Except for the missing 'their' in 27a, this first clause is a characteristic example of the effort in Paul's later letters to equalize the roles and responsibilities of males and females" (ibid., 236). For my own explanation of the phrase "even their women," see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 300-303.

the weaknesses in the Greco-Roman concept of nature: its cultural subjectivity and its threat to genuine human freedom in that one allegedly must conform to whatever 'nature' as defined by that cultural group demands. Paul is actually raising a cultural norm to the level of a 'natural' and thus biological principle, which would probably have to be formulated differently today.³⁶

Jewett thus appears to be saying that Paul's opposition to homosexual intercourse can be traced, at least in part, to a confusion of "nature" with mere "cultural norms" and an unreasonable abridgment of human freedom. This is the kind of argument that most persons would expect from a prohomosex advocate.

At the same time, Jewett does acknowledge, rightly, that Paul is not opposing same-sex intercourse primarily because of its non-procreative potential.³⁷ Furthermore, he points out that the condemnation of lesbian relationships in 1:26, as well as the phrase "males committing shameful acts with males" in 1:27,³⁸ undermines Robin Scroggs' thesis that Paul was condemning only exploitative, pederastic forms of same-sex intercourse.³⁹ Indeed, Jewett goes so far as to say:

Making no distinctions between pederasty and relationships between adult, consenting males, or between active and passive partners as Roman culture was inclined to do, Paul is acting consistently with his Jewish cultural tradition by construing *the entire realm* of same-sex relations as a proof of divine wrath.⁴⁰

³⁶Ibid., 234.

³⁷Ibid., 233. Neither in Rom 1:24-27 nor in 1 Cor 7 is there any indication that sex is valid only in instances where there is procreative potential. However, Jewett might have pushed the issue further by asking whether Paul saw the procreative potential of heterosexual intercourse in general as a heuristic tool for surmising the essential discomplementarity of all same-sex intercourse.

³⁸Jewett sees an intertextual echo between this phrase and the Levitical prohibitions of homosexual intercourse, prohibitions which are not age-specific.

³⁹Ibid., 235-36. Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

⁴⁰"Romans 1:24-27," 237 (my emphasis).

This recognition that Paul condemns “the entire realm of same-sex relations” stands in some tension with the conclusion of Jewett’s article regarding the text’s import merely for exploitative bisexuality (see below).

Was Paul simply confusing nature with misogynistic cultural norms of male dominance? Probably most readers would construe Jewett’s comments to suggest that he thinks so. In fact, Jewett has indicated to me that he does not believe that Paul’s opposition to same-sex intercourse had anything to do with male dominance over females.⁴¹ But in the article he says both that ancient philosophical discourse viewed “natural” intercourse as the penetration of a subordinate by a superior and that Paul raised a cultural norm to the level of a “natural” principle. Jewett also states:

The Romans . . . forbade the passive sexual role for free males and enforced laws against pederasty when it involved the sons of citizens. In general, sexual freedom was granted to freeborn males in relation to all slaves, clients, and persons of lower standing, so that sexual relations were *clearly an expression of domination*.⁴²

In other words, the Romans saw participation in the receptive partner’s role in male same-sex intercourse to be unacceptable for social equals but acceptable for social subordinates. Gender differentiation, then, was not the primary issue but social stratification. As Jewett states, sexual relations in such a system are “clearly an expression of dominance.”

However, in the case of Israelite religion, early Judaism, and early Christianity, matters are hardly so clear. Precisely because Jews and Christians made no exceptions for same-sex intercourse among social unequals it is a dubious proposition to argue that their critique of same-sex intercourse was first and foremost about social hierarchy. Broadly speaking, for Greeks and Romans issues of dominance transcended issues of gender; for Jews and Christians issues of gender transcended

⁴¹Correspondence dated 2/6/2001.

⁴²“Romans 1:24-27,” 239 (emphasis added).

issues of dominance. Given this fundamental distinction, attempts to read Jewish and Christian attitudes toward same-sex intercourse in the light of Greco-Roman attitudes must be judged misleading at best.

Since Paul and other biblical authors in their opposition to homosexual intercourse generally were more uncompromising than their pagan contemporaries, those who think the motivation for such a stance was primarily the desire to preserve male dominance over females have to argue, in effect, that the biblical authors, Paul included, were more misogynistic than their pagan contemporaries. And this must be argued in spite of the fact that the view of women espoused by biblical authors, particularly the view of the Paul of the undisputed Pauline letters, was on the whole more enlightened than that of surrounding cultures.⁴³ Making male dominance the main concern for biblical authors results in a nonsensical conclusion: Biblical authors who were less misogynistic in their treatment of women than the prevailing culture of the Mediterranean basin were more vociferous in their opposition to same-sex intercourse because they were more determined to hold women down as social inferiors.

What of Jewett's statement that Paul in Rom 1:26-27 confuses "nature" and "natural" with cultural norms? Jewett does not do a review of other Pauline uses of the word "nature" (*physis*). As it turns out, in Paul's nine references to "nature" outside of Rom 1:26-27, "nature" always corresponds to the essential material, inherent, biological, or organic constitution of things as created and set in motion by God. Neither in Paul's thinking *nor in our own* do any of these uses pertain merely to personal preferences or prejudices, custom, a culturally conditioned sense of what is normal, or social convention.⁴⁴ And

⁴³While Paul probably believed in a husband's authority over his wife, he also undermined conventional, subordinate roles for women by, for example, his active recruitment of women co-workers (Rom 16); his embrace of women's prophetic roles, albeit within the context of advocating head coverings for women as a means to maintaining some gender differentiation (1 Cor 11:3-16); his advocacy of the mutuality of conjugal rights in 1 Cor 7:3-4; and his use of the baptismal formula "neither male and female" (Gal 3:28).

⁴⁴1 Cor 11:14-15; Gal 2:15; 4:8; Rom 2:14, 27; 11:21, 24 (cf. Eph 2:3). Even in the case of 1 Cor 11:14-15 *physis* may refer to common, biologically-induced hair loss

while Jewett is right to note the danger that exists in reading moral absolutes into morally indifferent features of nature (1 Cor 11:14-15 is arguably a case in point), it is surely unwise to discount every argument from nature in matters of moral discernment (e.g., in the case of bestiality). The sexual design of males and females suggests that God intends sexual intercourse to be a complementary union of sexual others.

Excursus on Pim Pronk's Critique of the Nature Argument

Ironically, most proponents of same-sex intercourse who charge "traditionalists" with committing a "naturalistic fallacy"—making prescriptive or proscriptive value judgments from descriptive biological observations—could be charged with the same. A classic case in point is using the essentialist claim that homosexuals are "born that way" (incidentally, a false claim) as a basis for arguing the morality of same-sex intercourse.

A more sophisticated attempt at arguing for the morality of homosexual behavior is the work of Dutch biologist and theologian Pim Pronk.⁴⁵ Pronk argues that it is wrong to infer directly "a moral judgment from biological characteristics." The reason: one loses sight of a necessary intermediate step to moral judgments: the "human reasons and motives informing" sexual behavior, the "intentions, purposes, and associated feelings" that convert an empirical "is" to a moral "ought." Yet Pronk admits that we cannot dispense with scientific information, including biological data, in making human decisions. For if no relation exists "between the content of moral judgment and what is actually the case. . . . we are stuck with the position that moral judgments are arbitrary labels a society fastens on behavior. Then moral judgments are stripped in advance of cognitive value" and human intentions become arbitrary.⁴⁶ So even Pronk, whose book is committed to attacking the "against nature" argument of traditionalists, has to admit that there is at least an indirect line between nature and morality. How then does Pronk justify same-sex intercourse? He does so on the basis that homosexuals want same-

for men (baldness) but not for women (*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 369-78). See further the critique of Balch on pp. 262-65 below.

⁴⁵Pim Pronk, *Against Nature? Types of Moral Argumentation Regarding Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 14-15, 64, 110, 210, 213-14, 232, 246.

sex intercourse for the same reasons that heterosexuals want heterosexual intercourse; namely, "for pleasure, relaxation, or security." As such, "homosexuality clearly carries with it the same potentialities for humanity . . . as heterosexuality."⁴⁷

Yet, *pace* Pronk, heterosexual intercourse and homosexual intercourse neither are justified by precisely the same moral reasons⁴⁸ nor share precisely the same potential for good.⁴⁹ The limitations of the argument are readily

⁴⁷Ibid., 252, 262-63.

⁴⁸Despite exceptions, the general truth holds: for heterosexual unions the birthing and raising of children, or at least the intent to do so, is a virtual given; for homosexual unions it is not. Even the undeniable desire for "pleasure, relaxation, and security" that heterosexuals and homosexuals share in common is not shared in precisely the same way. Men are not women with a few superficial differences in physical parts; women are not men who can give birth. The substitution of a person of the same sex for a person of the opposite sex in a sexual relationship is hardly immaterial to the way in which "pleasure, relaxation, and security" are experienced. It changes the entire equation. In homosexual relationships, the attraction is toward one who is fundamentally the same as oneself in sexual identity, despite some variation for individual differences within the same sex. As concerning the one component that distinguishes marriage from deep friendship (*viz.*, the genital sexual dimension), the essence of homosexual relationships is self-affirmation. As regards the sexual aspect of heterosexual marriages, a person reaches out to a distinctly different sexual being, in intended or tacit recognition of the beauty, excellence, or worth of the "sexual other." Although the intercourse itself is usually stimulated by powerful desires for self-gratification, it is—when conducted in the God-intended context of a lifelong monogamous union—a commitment to affirm the unfamiliar sexual identity of a different sex. The result is a true sexual merger or union, not just an extension of the sexual self. It is a union that binds the self-gratifying nature of sexuality to a sex different from one's own. It forces an understanding of one's sexual "neighbor" who is alien to oneself (which, in turn, forces a true understanding of the sexual self). It is reconciliation and community formation with the "sexual other." It is "re-creation": making one truly new being out of two. Ultimately, marriage between man and woman is the gospel lived out in the sphere of sexual intimacy.

⁴⁹As we have noted in our discussion of the article by Jones and Yarhouse, homosexual behavior is characterized by disproportionately high rates of health problems for its participants and thus for society as a whole. Same-sex unions also typically have a very poor track record in terms of monogamy (especially among male homosexuals) and longevity (especially among female homosexuals). For all the hard-won societal approval that same-sex unions have received in the last few decades, we still witness in the homosexual population the same high rates of substance abuse, depression, and suicide attempts. (On nonmonogamy and mental

apparent when one considers that adult incest and polygamy would pass muster using Pronk's vague interpretive criteria. Moreover, by relying heavily on the value of feelings (the experience of pleasure, relaxation, and security) Pronk himself commits a naturalistic fallacy of sorts. Such feelings are closely connected to the brain and to sensory elements in other parts of the body. Thus, Pronk's reliance on feelings is a reliance on a physical, biological, and naturalistic aspect of human existence. Choices are never entirely free but become progressively less so as patterns of behavior and arousal (especially sexual fantasy life) become increasingly "embedded" in the neural network of the brain. Pronk argues as if moral appeals to intentionality and pleasurable feelings do not commit the logical fallacy of moving from *what is* to *what ought to be*. And yet they clearly do. Indeed, in a larger sense, *all* arguments for or against homosexual expression boil down to naturalistic arguments of one sort or another. It does not seem fair for Pronk to single out the relatively

health issues see further "Notes to Gagnon's Essay," n. 167). The development of homosexual attractions may also lead to an increase in adult-adolescent and adult-child activity (note the recent scandals that have shaken the Catholic Church). Sexual identity confusion among the young is likely to increase, resulting not only in more homosexuality but also more transvestism and transgenderism. By requiring a greater tolerance level on the part of heterosexuals for homosexual promiscuity, homosexual behavior undermines stable heterosexual family structures for the rearing of children. Indeed, within 5-10 years of granting quasi-marriage status to homosexual unions, Scandinavian countries have experienced a doubling or tripling of out-of-wedlock births among heterosexual couples (Stanley Kurtz, "The End of Marriage in Scandinavia: The 'Conservative Case' for Same-Sex Marriage Collapses," *The Weekly Standard* 9, no. 20 [Feb. 2, 2004]; available online at: <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/003/660zypwj.asp>). Same-sex relationships do not appear to produce any societal good beyond the homosexual population that would counterbalance its negative effects on society as a whole. Heterosexual marriages at least contribute to the procreation and raising of the next generation, develop stable relationships and community between the sexes, and promote a healthy restraint on sexual appetite. Pronk has to ignore negative social-scientific data on the effects arising from same-sex intercourse in order to make his claim that homosexual relationships share the same "potential" for good as heterosexual ones. Perhaps the operative word is "potential" rather than "reality," but even so the potential is not the same.

objective argument based on anatomical, procreative, and interpersonal complementarity as a "naturalistic fallacy" while withholding such a label for highly subjective arguments based on intentionality and the sensation of pleasure. Pronk's charge, then, may amount to little more than a selective criticism of *explicitly held* naturalistic arguments.

All of this is to say that Jewett's tentative attempt at backing off from Paul's arguments from nature is probably a false step. The issue is not whether one side or the other in the homosexuality debate has a legitimate right to make moral arguments based on evidence from nature. Neither side can avoid such arguments altogether without drifting toward moral arbitrariness. The only real issue is which side has the better arguments from nature, arguments based on the least amount of plasticity, subjectivity, and self-rationalization. Arguments that appeal to some fundamental right to express one's sexual orientation, so long as the relationship in question is consensual, do not inspire much confidence in their alleged objectivity.⁵⁰

⁵⁰As an aside, there are a number of points where Jewett seems to presume as a matter of course that the notion of a biologically based sexual orientation was unknown to ancients. For example: "In view of the complex variations of sexual inclination discussed in ancient astrological and medical sources [in a footnote Jewett cites Schoedel's article, as well as Brooten], the popular application of the modern concept of individual sexual 'orientation' based on alleged biological differences is anachronistic. [Here Jewett is thinking of Boswell's argument that Paul is condemning only 'homosexual acts committed by apparently heterosexual persons.'] Such exegesis misreads Paul's argument as dealing with individual sins rather than the corporate distortion of the human race since the fall" ("Homoerotic References in Romans," 234; Jewett cites Richard Hays in a footnote). Although I think the last sentence is on target, the rest of the quotation is problematic. First, Schoedel's research shows the opposite of what Jewett deduces (as noted in my critique of Schoedel [*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 392-95], even Schoedel at some points reaches the wrong conclusion from the evidence he uncovers). The view that same-sex passions had at least some congenital basis had wide currency in Greco-Roman society; it was not the only view but it was sufficiently widespread. Sometimes the ancient "scientific" explanation for the origin of innate same-sex passion bears striking resemblance to modern explanations, often it does not. Regardless of the originating causes, all such explanations agreed on one fundamental point: same-sex passions could not be attributed solely to manufacture by the human will. That is the decisive point for comparison with modern scientific views of homosexuality. Second, Paul's own understanding of sin as innate and often beyond natural human control fits quite well with this understanding (so Rom 5:12-21; 7:7-23). Third, it is an unfair caricature of Boswell to accuse him of anachronism. Boswell was not arguing that Paul himself distinguished between natural homosexuals and unnatural

Condemning Only Exploitative Bisexual Behavior?

Jewett asks how the recipients of the letter may have heard Paul's remarks on same-sex intercourse. He speculates that since "slavery was so prominent a feature of the social background of most of Paul's audience in Rome," and since too male slaves were often required to "service" their masters, Paul's Roman audience would have regarded his remarks as "a welcome restriction of sexual relations." "[T]he moral condemnation of same-sex and extramarital relations of all kinds would confirm the damnation of their exploiters and thus raise the status of the exploited above that of mere victims."⁵¹ How, then, should we apply the message of Rom 1:24-27 to contemporary circumstances? Jewett concludes:

The difficulty in applying Paul's argument to current circumstances derives partly from the vast disparity in the social situation of modern readers as compared with Paul's original audience. Paul and his audience were resisting an aggressively bisexual society whereas the current debate takes place in a predominantly heterosexual society. The patterns of abuse and exploitation are therefore very different, with discrimination in the current setting largely directed against those who dissent from a heterosexual norm. A text that functioned as liberating in a bisexual environment thus appears discriminatory in a heterosexual context. But it is not adequate simply to dismiss Paul's stance. . . . With the abandonment of normativity in sexual identity and behavior, the door is currently open for increasingly exploitative bisexual behavior, which by its essen-

homosexuals (i.e., over-sexed heterosexuals), condemning only the latter. Rather, Boswell contended that it was Paul who *mistakenly* believed that all homosexual acts stemmed from heterosexuals bored with heterosexual sex. Boswell was wrong on this last point (Paul probably recognized the innateness of some homosexual passions for some individuals) but not for thinking, as Jewett and Hays suppose, that Paul had some notion of a biologically related sexual orientation.

⁵¹"Romans 1:24-27," 238-40.

tial nature will not restrict itself to a single partner. Although it will not be exercised in an environment in which two-thirds of the population consisted of slaves or former slaves, . . . it could well be that the protection of the weak can still be best achieved by something like the standard accepted so broadly in early Christianity.⁵²

On the basis of this final line, it seems that Jewett is arguing that the church should retain a stance against same-sex intercourse primarily as a means to averting the resurgence of "exploitative bisexual behavior." But there are ambiguities in this tentative comment. For what does "*something like* the standard accepted so broadly in early Christianity" mean? In what ways might the new standard differ from the old, if at all? Might the standard be grounded on different arguments or might it also be less absolute in its proscription of same-sex intercourse? Moreover, what precisely is Jewett thinking of when he refers to "increasingly exploitative bisexual behavior" in our own culture? Is he thinking only of multiple sexual partners? If so, how does he distinguish this from the high number of sex partners had by the overwhelming majority of male homosexuals (and, to be sure, by a minority of male heterosexuals)? It is also unclear how the church could argue opposition to all forms of same-sex intercourse if the only real concern were aggressive bisexuality.

Jewett's speculation about how the Roman Christian communities might have heard Rom 1:24-27 strikes me as a bit reductionistic. Perhaps male slaves and freedmen among the Roman believers would have received Paul's words in Rom 1:27 partly in the manner that Jewett suggests. Yet that would constitute only one segment of the Roman churches, even if a large segment. And it would apply only to the reading of 1:27, the proscription of male same-sex intercourse. It would have no material link to the reading of 1:26, the prohibition of female same-sex relations, where "aggressive bisexuality" did not factor significantly. Moreover, nothing in Rom 1:24-27 would have helped female slaves exploited by male masters. Consequently, if Paul

⁵²Ibid, 240.

had been primarily interested in speaking out against sexual abuse of slaves, he could have found better ways of doing so than by railing on same-sex intercourse. Nothing in Rom 1:24-27 speaks specifically to the circumstances of slave exploitation. In fact, Paul speaks not of a master coercing sex from a slave but rather of males being “inflamed with their yearning for *one another*, males with males committing indecency and in return receiving in themselves the payback. . . .” In other words, he refers to the *mutual* gratification of same-sex desires and God’s wrath upon *both* participants in a same-sex relationship. Clearly a coerced sexual relationship is not in the foreground.⁵³

Most problematic of all, Jewett’s analysis at the end of his article stands in tension with his rebuttal of Scroggs. In treating Rom 1:24-27 both Scroggs and Jewett focus on the issue of exploitation: Jewett on the same-sex sexual abuse of a slave by a master; Scroggs on pederasty in general, which he regards as inherently exploitative.⁵⁴ Both Scroggs and Jewett argue that the cultural context for Paul’s condemnation of same-sex intercourse was so different from the modern cultural context as to make application either very difficult (Jewett) or impossible (Scroggs).⁵⁵ Yet, as we have noted, Jewett argues elsewhere in his article that Scroggs is wrong to limit Paul’s critique to pederasty inasmuch as Paul’s critique is aimed at “the entire realm of same-sex relations.” If Paul makes the broadest possible argument against same-sex intercourse—and Jewett is surely right on this score—how can Jewett limit the application of Rom 1:24-27 only to aggressive bisexuality? If Paul’s remarks cannot be limited to same-sex sexual exploitation of slaves, what difference does it make to contemporary application that we no longer have a slave economy where male masters can exploit male slaves? Put in this way, the answer is apparent: it makes no difference.

⁵³To be sure, a sexually abused male slave could readily draw the valid inference that in a case of rape only the exploiter would be condemned.

⁵⁴For 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10, though, Scroggs limits the Pauline critique to “the adult use of male prostitutes,” not pederasty in general (*The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 121-22).

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 123-29.

As with the antihomosex OT texts whose normative force Paul accepted, Paul was concerned with several closely related matters in the act of same-sex intercourse:

- The denial of the complementary character of male-female differentiation still transparent in nature, through an attempted merger of two discomplementary sexual "sames."
- The inability of two persons of the same sex to re-merge, through union with one's sexual counterpart, the sexual whole split apart at creation.
- The sexual narcissism of being erotically attracted to one's own distinctive sexual features as a male or female; or the sexual self-delusion of thinking that one can bring sexual completion to oneself by merging with what one already is as a sexual being.
- The regularizing of one's own identity as a sexual complement or counterpart to a person of the same sex, which sometimes manifested itself in deliberate attempts to contort or transform one's own God-given sexual identity.

There is no intrinsic connection between these concerns and the concern for exploitation. Exploitation is, quite simply, beside the point—except, perhaps, insofar as all same-sex relationships are inherently exploitative. The cultural contexts, then and now, are reasonably similar because the aspects of same-sex intercourse to which Paul and other authors of Scripture objected have not changed over the intervening centuries.

Jewett has communicated to me that he believes that Paul would have opposed all consensual forms of same-sex intercourse and that he would have based such opposition on the creation account in Gen 1-2 and on his Judaic heritage generally. His comments at the end of his article were intended to explain why his audience could so easily accept his argument in 1:26-27, not to explain Paul's own reasons. He also acknowledges that he did not make these specific points clear in his article.⁵⁶

⁵⁶Communications dated 10/13/99 and 2/7/01.

In summary, Jewett's learned article can be helpful in sharpening the positions of both sides of the debate. Jewett makes his strongest arguments when he critiques the weaknesses in the revisionist reading of Paul by advocates of same-sex intercourse. Overall his article provides a more balanced and sensible interpretation of Rom 1:24-27 than Fredrickson's article. However, readers will probably be confused about Jewett's interpretation of Paul at a number of points and will wonder whether Jewett is arguing for or against rejection of all homosexual practice.

VIII. David E. Fredrickson, "Natural and Unnatural Use in Romans 1:24-27: Paul and the Philosphic Critique of Eros"⁵⁷

David Fredrickson has written one of the better studies of Rom 1:24-27 (and, to a lesser extent, 1 Cor 6:9) from a prohomosex perspective. His article is erudite, citing substantial primary and secondary literature on Greco-Roman perspectives. Nevertheless, his major contentions regarding Paul's view of homosexual practice—that Paul did not have in view a divinely mandated creation norm, that passion per se and not the sex or gender of the participants was the problem for Paul—do not follow, logically or materially, from the evidence adduced. Given the mountain of evidence disproving such claims, they can only be referred to as very bad arguments.

Not a Violation of a Male-Female Creation Norm?

Fredrickson's main point is stated clearly in the conclusion of his article:

Sexual activity between males is not portrayed as the violation of a male-female norm given with creation but as an example of pas-

⁵⁷Pp. 197-222. Fredrickson is associate professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

sion into which God has handed over persons who have dishonored him. The immediate problem is passion, not the gender of the persons having sex. The argument of Romans 1:18-27 . . . [is] that passion itself is dishonorable.⁵⁸

Earlier in the article he makes a similar point:

Romans 1:24-27 highlights the problem of passion and its consequences rather than the violation of a divinely instituted norm of male and female intercourse. . . . Unnatural use . . . has less to do with the gender of the persons having sex and more with the loss of self-control experienced by the user of another's body. . . . Romans 1:24-27 is not an attack on homosexuality as a violation of divine law but a description of . . . the philosophic rejection of passionate love.⁵⁹

I will start with Fredrickson's observation that Paul in Rom 1:24-27 does not treat same-sex intercourse as "the violation of a male-female norm given with creation." Fredrickson has reiterated this point, with a new and odd justification, at a recent prohomosex gathering of Lutherans:

Conservative interpreters see that word 'natural' and their minds are taken back to Genesis 1, where God made humans male and female. But the Greek word for natural that Paul is using doesn't actually occur in the Septuagint, which is what Paul would have been familiar with.⁶⁰

It is true that the adjective *physikos*, "natural," does not appear in the Septuagint and that the noun *physis*, "nature," appears only in the Old Testament Apocrypha. Yet this is not a good argument for rejecting any

⁵⁸Ibid., 222.

⁵⁹Ibid., 207-208.

⁶⁰Joel Hoekstra, "Conference urges gay unions, ordination changes," *The Lutheran* (June 2003): 43; also online at: <http://www.thelutheran.org/0306/page43.html>.

place for natural theology in the Hebrew Bible. In fact, James Barr has made a strong case for a limited but significant role for natural theology therein.⁶¹ Obviously the concept behind a word can be present even when the specific word does not appear. For example, although the Hebrew equivalents for “love,” “grace,” “mercy,” “righteousness,” and “sovereignty” do not appear explicitly in Gen 1-2, virtually all scholars would contend that the concepts are implicit in the creation stories. Similarly, both Philo and Josephus state that Lev 18:22 and 20:13 establish male-male intercourse as “contrary to nature,” even though the Greek word “nature” or “natural” does not appear in the Septuagint translation of these texts (Philo, *Spec. Laws* 3.37-39; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.199-200, 275). The fact that the words “natural” and “nature” do not appear in Gen 1 is no obstacle to the claim that Paul had Gen 1 in view in his critique of homoerotic practice in Rom 1:24-27. Moreover, the case for asserting a link to the Genesis creation stories does not hinge only on the appearance of the words “nature” and “unnatural” in Rom 1:26-27.

There is, in fact, an intertextual echo to Gen 1:26-27 in Rom 1:23-27. It is so obvious that denial of its existence can be attributed only to a determined ideological agenda. Romans 1:23 transparently echoes Gen 1:26 (LXX):

Let us make a *human* according to our *image* and . . . *likeness*; and let them rule over the . . . *birds* . . . and the *cattle* . . . and the *reptiles*. (Gen 1:26)

And they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the *likeness* of the *image* of a mortal *human* and of *birds* and of *four-footed animals* and of *reptiles*. (Rom 1:23)⁶²

There are six points of correspondence between these two verses:

⁶¹*Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

⁶²The limited threefold combination of birds/animals/reptiles in Rom 1:23 appears in Gen 1:30 (minus the reference to fish and the doubling up of cattle and wild animals in Gen 1:26).

Gen 1:26

Rom 1:23

A. God’s likeness and image in humans

(1)	human (<i>anthrōpos</i>)	likeness (<i>homoiōma</i>)	(3)
(2)	image (<i>eikōn</i>)	image (<i>eikōn</i>)	(2)
(3)	likeness (<i>homoiōsis</i>)	human (<i>anthrōpos</i>)	(1)

B. Dominion over the animal kingdom

(4)	birds (<i>peteina</i>)	birds (<i>peteina</i>)	(4)
(5)	cattle (<i>ktēnē</i>)	4-footed animals (<i>tetrapoda</i>)	(5)
(6)	reptiles (<i>herpeta</i>)	reptiles (<i>herpeta</i>)	(6)

With the exception of the inversion of “human” and “likeness” in Rom 1:23—a change necessitated by Paul’s argument—the order of the correspondences also matches up.⁶³

Now the very next section of Paul’s argument, Rom 1:24-27, marks a transition from the sin of idolatry to the resulting sins of a sexual and social sort. Romans 1:26-27 surely echoes the very next verse in Genesis (LXX):

And God made the human; according to the image of God he made him; *male (arsen)* and *female (thēlu)* he made them. (Gen 1:27)

Even their *females (thēleiai)* exchanged the natural use for that which is contrary to nature;²⁷ and likewise also the *males (arsenes)*, having left behind the natural use of the female (*thēleias*), were inflamed with their yearning for one another, males with males (*arsenes en arsenes*). . . . (Rom 1:26-27)

⁶³Looked at differently, one could argue that Paul does indeed put “human” first, for the “they” of “they exchanged” (*ēllaxan*) in Rom 1:23 refers back to the “humans” (*anthrōpoi*) mentioned in 1:18. For Paul, God’s creation of a *human* in his *image* and *likeness* has turned tragically into worship, by *humans*, of the *likeness* of an *image* of a *human*. The wording “the likeness of” is apparently derived from an additional echo to Ps 106:20 (discussed below in the critique of Balch, pp. 242-246).

Thus:

Gen 1:27

Rom 1:26-27

C. Male-female differentiation

(7)	male (<i>arsēn</i>)	females (<i>thēleiai</i>)	(8)
(8)	female (<i>thēlus</i>)	males (<i>arsenes</i>)	(7)

Paul could easily have used the terms “man” and “woman” (as in Gen 2:24). That he chose the terms “male” and “female” signals a continuation of the intertextual echo to Gen 1:27, “male and female he made them.” The inversion of sequence here is to be expected given Paul’s prefacing remark, “*even (te) their females,*” which stresses a surprising turn of events.⁶⁴ Taken together, we have not only eight points of correspondence between Gen 1:26-27 and Rom 1:23, 26-27 but also a threefold sequential agreement:

- A. God’s likeness and image in humans
- B. Dominion over the animal kingdom
- C. Male-female differentiation

It would be fair to say that if there is no intertextual echo here, then there is no such thing as an intertextual echo, as opposed to direct citation, in all of the New Testament.

Adding to the creation backdrop is the reference to “the creation of the world” in Rom 1:20. Even more significant is the mention of “the Creator” in Rom 1:25, in the midst of Paul’s discussion of same-sex intercourse in 1:24-27. How could Paul’s readers fail to note that same-sex intercourse stands in tension with the intentions of “the Creator”? Yet Fredrickson would have his own readers believe that “the violation of a male-female norm given with creation” is certainly not the backdrop to Rom 1:24-27. In this connection, it is surely not accidental that when Paul dealt with the offense of incest in 1 Cor 5 and cited a series

⁶⁴See *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 235-36, 299-303.

of sexual vices in 1 Cor 6:9-20 (including two involving male-male intercourse) he cited in context the other key creation text besides Gen 1:27, Gen 2:24 (1 Cor 6:16). Nor can it be pure coincidence that when Jesus dealt with sexual offenses he focused on Gen 1:27 ("male and female he made them") and 2:24 ("a man shall . . . become joined to his woman") as defining prescriptive norms for human sexual behavior. Why is it so hard to believe, then, that Paul would have had the creation standard in view when he critiqued same-sex intercourse in Rom 1:26-27?⁶⁵

The point of the intertextual echoes to Gen 1:26-27 is clear. Idolatry and same-sex intercourse together constitute a frontal assault on the work of the Creator in nature. Instead of recognizing their creation in God's image and dominion over animals, humans worshipped statues in the likeness of humans and even animals. Similarly, instead of acknowledging that God made them "male and female," some humans went so far as to deny the transparent complementarity of their sexuality by engaging in sex with the same sex. Those who had suppressed the truth about God visible in *creation* (*ktisis*, 1:20, 25) would go on to suppress the truth about themselves visible in *nature* (*physis*, 1:26; cf. *physikēn*, "natural," 1:26-27).

In Rom 1:18-27 the distinction between creation and nature collapses because Paul means here by *creation* the things made by the initial act of creating and still intact.⁶⁶ What is "contrary to nature" is simultaneously contrary to divinely created structures. As I noted above in comments on Seitz's article,⁶⁷ *T. Naph.* 3:3-4 also treats creation and nature as equivalent concepts in a context that yokes together the sin of idolatry with the sin of same-sex intercourse as comparable "exchanges" of nature's order. A similar point appears to be made in Wis

⁶⁵The refusal to acknowledge this obvious point becomes even more puzzling in light of Paul's appeal to the creation stories when discussing the secondary issue of head coverings and hair styles in 1 Cor 11:2-16 (appeal to creation in vv. 8-9, 12).

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 258-59 n. 18.

⁶⁷Pp. 183-84.

14:26, which probably alludes to same-sex intercourse with the phrase “change of birth” within a context (chs. 13-14) characterizing idolatry as a suppression of natural revelation.⁶⁸

Some deny that Rom 1:18-32 has any reference back to the Genesis creation accounts on the ground that this passage has in view a decline-of-civilization narrative, not the origin of sin in Adam’s fall.⁶⁹ The latter point is mostly correct. I make it myself in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*,⁷⁰ though I would add that Rom 1:18-32 is not *in the first instance* about Adam’s fall.⁷¹ But acknowledging the latter does not establish that Rom 1:18-32 lacks any allusions to the Genesis creation accounts. *Obviously an event can be both post-Fall and a tacit repudiation of pre-Fall decrees and structures.* The argument in Rom 1:18-32 does not treat directly the fall of Adam (for which see Rom 5:12-21). Adam did not worship idols or commit the sin of same-sex intercourse. Nevertheless, Rom 1:18-32 does not have to treat Adam’s fall directly in order to have in view a post-fall rebellion against creation structures. In Rom 1:18-27 Paul characterizes the sins of idolatry and same-sex intercourse as a rebellion against God’s will for humankind established at creation and set in motion in nature.

⁶⁸*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 247-48.

⁶⁹For example, Dale Martin, “Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32,” *BibInt* 3 (1995): 332-55; Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, 107; and Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 88-93.

⁷⁰Pp. 246, 285-86, 291.

⁷¹I say *not in the first instance* because there are a number of possible intertextual echoes to Adam’s sin in 1:18-32: references to “the lie” in Rom 1:25 (cf. Gen 3:5), shame in Rom 1:27 (cf. Gen 3:1, 8), knowledge in Rom 1:19, 21, 28, 32 (cf. the tree of the knowledge of good and evil), and the sentence of death in 1:32 (cf. Gen 2:17; 3:4-5, 20, 23; noted in *ibid.*, 291; cf. Jewett, “Romans 1:24-27,” 227). In a sense all sinful deeds subsequent to the fall recapitulate Adam’s sin. In this connection, it is not surprising that some commentators see at least secondary echoes to Adam’s fall in Paul’s discussion of the war between the “I” or mind and sin in Rom 7:7-23, even if the primary echoes are to the experience of Israel at Sinai (e.g., Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 202-11; S. Lyonnet, “L’histoire du salut selon le chapitre vii de l’épître aux Romains,” *Bib* 43 [1962]:117-51).

The case for Paul seeing same-sex intercourse as a "violation of a male-female norm given with creation" seems to be beyond denying. It is perhaps telling that when I debated Prof. Fredrickson on the subject of the Bible and homosexual practice recently and presented the case for intertextual echoes to Genesis 1 Fredrickson did not attempt a refutation.⁷²

Nowhere in his article does Fredrickson even consider the possibility of an intertextual echo to Gen 1:26-27. Yet the presence of such an echo in Rom 1:23-27 is devastating to Fredrickson's entire argument that for Paul "the immediate problem [was] passion, not the gender of the persons having sex." Clearly, "the gender of the persons having sex" makes all the difference, for God created humans for sexual pairing "male and female." In short, Romans 1:24-27 is not indeterminate with respect to the sex of the object of one's "use."

Fredrickson's Argument regarding "Use"

Fredrickson makes much of the term *chrēsis*, "use," in Rom 1:26-27: "Their females exchanged the natural *use* for that which is beyond nature. Likewise, the males left off the natural *use* of the female and were inflamed for one another in their appetite, males among males producing disgrace."⁷³ Fredrickson makes two points here.

First, *chrēsis* ought not to be translated "relation" or "intercourse"⁷⁴ because the latter "imports the modern notion that sex is (or should be) a matter of mutuality," whereas *chrēsis* "does not refer to a relation

⁷²The videotaped event was a daylong seminar sponsored by the sexuality task force of the Northeastern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA, held Jan. 31, 2004 at First Lutheran Church in Aitkin, Minn. Fredrickson and I each spoke for an hour; followed by a half hour each to respond to the other's presentation and then by an hour-long question-and-answer period with the audience. There was ample time for Fredrickson to rebut my intertextual argument if he had had the arguments to do so.

⁷³Fredrickson's translation (p. 197). I have added a "the" before the first occurrence of "natural use"; Fredrickson omits it but the Greek has the definite article both here and before the second occurrence of "natural use" (Fredrickson translates the "the" in the second occurrence).

⁷⁴LSJ puts Rom 1:26 under its definition (3): "intimacy, acquaintance." BDAG similarly translates the word in Rom 1:26-27 as "relations, function."

carried out in the medium of sexual pleasure but the activity of the desiring subject, usually male, performed on the desired object, female or male.”⁷⁵ Fredrickson’s point is that Paul, in employing the term “use,” shows no regard for the mutual enjoyment of sex between two persons. For Fredrickson this is one reason to discount Paul’s remarks in Rom 1:26-27.

However, Fredrickson’s point about Paul’s allegedly one-sided, male-only view of sexual pleasure falls flat, for three reasons. (1) Fredrickson himself admits that *chrēsis* can be employed in sexual contexts that speak of the enjoyment of both partners.⁷⁶ (2) The context for the use of the term in Rom 1:27 is clearly that of mutual desire: “the males, having left the natural use of the female, were inflamed in their desire *for one another, males with males. . .*” The plain inference is that there is a “use contrary to nature” (cf. 1:26) and that this “use” of a male by another male involves mutuality. (3) The fact that Paul can speak in Rom 1:26 of *females* exchanging “the natural use [of the male] for the [use] contrary to nature”⁷⁷ suggests that Paul did not view sexual pleasure as a one-way street: It is not just males who make “use” of females sexually but also females who make “use” of males sexually. This understanding of the mutuality of sexual pleasure in heterosexual relations corresponds to Paul’s remarks in 1 Cor 7:3: “the husband should pay back the (sexual) debt to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.” It is not just the husband who has a marital right to be pleased sexually; so too the wife. Fredrickson himself states with respect to Rom 1:26: “Rarer than the male’s use of the female are instances of the wife’s use of the husband, to which Paul most likely

⁷⁵“Natural and Unnatural Use,” 199.

⁷⁶Fredrickson states that he can find only one such use: in Chariton, *Chaereas and Callirhoe* 2.8.4. Yet he then adds: “For enjoyment (ἀπόλαυσις)—a term sometimes coordinated with χρῆσις—shared between male and female lovers and asserted not to be possible in pederasty, see Ps.-Lucian, *Affairs of the Heart* 27” (ibid., 199 n. 5).

⁷⁷On understanding *para physin*, “beyond nature,” in the sense of “contrary to nature” or “against nature,” see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 389-90.

alludes in Romans 1:26.⁷⁸ Unfortunately, he does not draw the logical conclusion from this acknowledgement; namely, that Paul did not mean to suggest by “use” that only one partner in the marriage relationship, the husband, was suppose to experience sexual gratification. In Paul’s application, the expression “the natural use” simply specifies that the gendered body is designed for sexual intercourse with the other sex.

Fredrickson’s second point regarding the term “use” is as follows: Since “neither the gender of the subject nor that of the object is material to the concept of use,”⁷⁹ “use” in Rom 1:26-27 indicates that the sex of the partner is incidental, or at least secondary. According to Fredrickson,

The metaphor of use in sexual matters does not in itself raise the issue of the gender of the persons involved. . . . Indifference to gender is seen most clearly when χρῆσις (or its cognates) refers in the same passage to the male’s use of males and females. . . . Natural use is characterized by an avoidance of luxury and the control of passion. . . . Paul is not condemning homosexual relations as such. . . . Unnatural use . . . has less to do with the gender of the persons having sex and more with the loss of self-control experienced by the user of another’s body. . . . Therefore, it is anachronistic and inap-

⁷⁸Ibid., 201. Fredrickson does not think that Rom 1:26 refers to female homoeroticism but rather to “inordinate desire within marriage” (ibid., n. 15). Even given such a meaning my point would still hold. If “use” stresses “the activity of the desiring subject,” then a reference to a wife’s “natural use” of her husband must entail the admission that a wife’s sexual desire for her husband is “natural.” Yet Fredrickson’s main justification for rejecting a reference to lesbianism in Rom 1:26 is weak: “I have been unable to discover any examples of ‘use’ in descriptions of female sexual activity with females” (ibid.). The references to lesbianism in antiquity are not so numerous that the absence of the term *chrēsis* should occasion any great surprise. Certainly ancient writers who alluded to lesbianism recognized that women could be “desiring subjects” in female-female intercourse. Consequently the absence of the term *chrēsis* in connection with female-female intercourse can have nothing to do with the inappropriateness of the term for such intercourse. For a defense of Rom 1:26 as referring to female-female intercourse see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 297-99; Brooten, *Love Between Women*, 248-52.

⁷⁹“Natural and Unnatural Use,” 200.

propriate to think that Paul condemns homosexuality as unnatural. . . . The immediate problem is passion, not the gender of the persons having sex. . . . Passion itself is dishonorable.⁸⁰

Fredrickson's argument fails on many counts.

(1) *Gender specification through context, not word.* Of course *chrēsis* and its cognates do not, in and of themselves, specify the gender of one's partner. However, that is not the same as asserting, as Fredrickson does, that the occurrence of *chrēsis* and its cognates makes the gender of one's partner a matter of indifference in every context that these words appear. Context is the determinant of meaning for any given word. This is such a basic point of all lexical analysis that it hardly seems worth laboring over; but labor over it we must. An example can serve to make the obvious more obvious. The fact that the English word *intercourse* need not mean "physical sexual contact between individuals that involves the genitalia," but can simply refer to any "connection or dealings between persons or groups," does not lead us to conclude that in every given context the sense of the word *intercourse* is indeterminate for sexual activity. Context is everything. Thus the phrase "intercourse between a man and a woman" invariably has sexual connotations. Furthermore, even though one can conjoin the phrase *have sexual intercourse with* to many different objects—a person of the opposite sex or of the same sex, an adult or child, a person who is unrelated or a close blood relation, a human or an animal, a single partner or multiple partners at the same time—the object of the sexual intercourse is not indeterminate or inconsequential in every given context that the phrase appears. Obviously in the sentence, "Having sexual intercourse with a child is against nature," it would be wrong to claim that the age of the child is immaterial to unnaturalness of the act. The context is decisive. Likewise, the fact that in ancient Greek texts one author can speak of a man's sexual "use" of a female, while another author can speak of a man's sexual "use" of a male or even of both females and males certainly does not mean that

⁸⁰Ibid., 201-202, 204-205, 207, 222.

every time the metaphor of use in sexual matters appears the gender of the object of desire is inconsequential.

(2) *Rom 1:24-27 in the context of early Judaism on gender.* It is clear that the gender or sex of one's sexual partner made all the difference to the Jews of Paul's day. For example, Philo could say: "Nearly the whole of Plato's *Symposium* is about erotic love, not simply about men mad after women or women after men—for these desires pay tribute to the laws of nature—but about men after males, differing from them only in age" (*Contemplative Life* 59). Here it is apparent that, for Philo, male erotic desire for women and female erotic desire for men are natural, even when excessive, while male erotic desire for other males is inherently unnatural.⁸¹ How is it possible to argue here, in this context, that the quintessential boundary marker between natural erotic love and unnatural erotic love is something other than the gender of one's sex partner? Although it is true that Philo could designate as disrespectful of nature an "immoderate" and "insatiable" sexual desire of men for their own wives—as when a man has intercourse with his wife during her menstrual flow or when he marries a woman known to be sterile—Philo still treated a man's erotic love for a woman as essentially a "natural pleasure" (*Special Laws* 3.9, 32-36). By contrast, a man's desire to have intercourse with another male was always, without exception, an "abominable lust," "a polluted and accursed passion," and "a pleasure that is contrary to nature" (*Special Laws* 2.50; 3.39). Similarly, Josephus notes that the law forbids any sexual intercourse that does not lead to procreation, even among heterosexual unions, but it particularly "abhors the union of males with males" (*Against Apion* 2.199). Sexual intercourse between males was characterized by "pleasures that were disgusting and contrary to nature" (2.275). Once again, the sex of the partner is the decisive factor in devaluing the behavior as grossly unnatural.

⁸¹Even William Schoedel, whose article in the Balch volume is prohomosex in perspective, acknowledges this: "Here a distinction is made that is worth noting: when the two sexes madly pursue each other for pleasure, their behavior is morally wrong yet within the bounds of 'the laws of nature' (59). That of course cannot be said for the love between males" ("Same-Sex Eros: Paul and the Greco-Roman Tradition," 50).

This is abundantly clear in Rom 1:26-27: “their *females* exchanged the natural (sexual) use (of the male) for that which is contrary to nature, and likewise also the *males*, having left behind the natural use of the *female*, were inflamed in their desire for one another, *males with males*. . . .” What constitutes “natural use”? Sex with a member of the other sex: females with males, males with females. What constitutes “use contrary to nature”? Sex with a member of the same sex: females with females, males with males. The issue is *exchanging* or *leaving behind* natural intercourse, defined as male-female intercourse, for unnatural intercourse, defined as female-female or male-male intercourse. The plain sense of Rom 1:24-27 requires one to reverse Fredrickson’s dictum: *The immediate problem is the gender of the persons having sex, not the passion per se.*

(3) *Excess passion: how does one know?* Fredrickson stresses that the primary problem is excess passion or even passion itself, not the gender of the partner. The problem here is: How would one know how to define a given passion as excessive apart from some prior understanding about what is wrong with the behavior in question? As I state in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*:

Claiming that ancient moralists opposed homosexual expression precisely for the reason that homoerotic passion was excessive heterosexual lust is, so to speak, putting the cart before the horse. Philo, for example, thought that gluttonous eating by people could stimulate passions “even for brute beasts” (*Spec. Laws* 3.43) but who would seriously argue that Philo opposed bestiality primarily for the reason that it amounted to excess passion? The description of excess passion was a way of demeaning a desire that on other grounds had already been evaluated as abominable; otherwise, how would the author know to characterize the passion as excess? In other words, the characterization of homosexual desire as excessive lust is incidental or supplementary to a prior revulsion toward such conduct. . . .

Same-sex intercourse (like all other forms of sexual immorality) can be defined as excess passion only *after* and *on the basis of* some prior understanding of why same-sex passion is unacceptable. Greek and Roman moralists who did not see anything

inherently wrong with one or more forms of same-sex intercourse would not have agreed with the blanket assessment of Paul and all other Second Temple Jewish authors that same-sex intercourse was inherently unnatural or excess passion. Excess passion, therefore, is not an independent, self-standing argument for why a given behavior is assessed as wrong. . . .

Whether Paul held all homoerotic desire to stem from oversexed heterosexuals can hardly be established with certainty from Rom 1:27 ("males . . . were inflamed in their yearning for one another"). The language makes clear that the element of "overheating" is present in Paul's thinking, but that does not tell us much about his view of the development of homoeroticism. Paul (like most in antiquity) probably viewed any infraction of God-ordained boundaries of any sort (including sexual) as an overheating of desire simply because transgression of God's will invariably entailed a victory of the passions of the flesh over the rational mind or Spirit (cf. 7:13-25). If one craved anything that God had forbidden or nature had shown to be unacceptable, and acted on that craving, then obviously one was mastered by one's passion, thereby proving that the intensity of the passion had been too great to be resisted. . . . Since it is likely that Paul did not oppose homoeroticism *because* it constituted excessive heterosexual passion but at most interpreted homoeroticism as excessive passion in view of his prior opposition to such behavior, the whole objection that we no longer perceive of homoeroticism as due to excessive passion is largely irrelevant to the hermeneutical debate.⁸²

In short, the sequence of thought for Paul was not: Same-sex intercourse is excess passion; therefore it is wrong (Fredrickson's view). It was: *Same-sex intercourse is wrong; therefore it is excess passion.* The concept of "*disoriented desire*" logically precedes the concept of "*inordinate desire*."⁸³ Fredrickson never really explains to

⁸²Pp. 386-89.

⁸³Fredrickson cites approvingly Dale Martin's contention that by *para physin* Paul meant "*inordinate desire*," not "*disoriented desire*" (ibid., 205; Dale Martin, "Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32," *BibInt* 3 [1995]: 332-55, quote from p. 342).

readers *why* Paul concluded that sex between females or sex between males was excess passion.⁸⁴

(4) *Honorable passion in Paul*. Fredrickson suggests at points that for Paul “passion itself is dishonorable.” This observation does not do justice to Paul’s remarks in Rom 1:24-27. It is impossible to argue reasonably that Paul could have said of other-sex erotic desire per se what he said of same-sex erotic desire per se. Paul did not view the sexual desire of a man for his wife or of a woman for her husband as “sexual uncleanness” (*akatharsia*), “dishonorable/degrading passions” (*pathē atimias*), “contrary to nature” (*para physin*), and “indecency” (*aschēmosynē*). The very fact that Paul could speak of “passions of dishonor” indicates that Paul did not regard passion per se as dishonorable or self-degrading. He did not view heterosexual desire per se as “impiety and unrighteousness” (1:18) or as “sin” (3:9). He did, however, place same-sex intercourse per se under this rubric.

Paul’s discussion of marriage in 1 Cor 7 does not treat sexual desire for one’s wife as sinful or dishonorable. It was the Corinthians, not Paul, who were arguing that they had become so “spiritual” (*pneumatikoi*) that they could do without sexual intercourse in marriage.⁸⁵

⁸⁴Fredrickson briefly mentions that in the Greco-Roman world “natural sex was understood in three distinct ways: sex for the sake of procreation (thus only male with female); sex which symbolizes and preserves male social superiority to the female (males penetrate/females are penetrated); and sex in which passion is absent or at least held to a minimum” (pp. 205-206). He does not develop the first two points—which, incidentally, cut against Fredrickson’s central thesis that the gender of the partners was a relatively insignificant feature of Paul’s critique in Rom 1:24-27. Instead, Fredrickson focuses on the third point which, he says, is the only one “coordinated in ancient texts with the concept of use” (ibid., 206). For a rebuttal of a requirement-to-procreate argument see (4) below and *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 270-73. For a rebuttal of the misogyny argument see my discussion of Jewett’s article above; my online “Notes to Gagnon’s Essay,” nn. 129-30; and my online “Response to Eric Thurman’s Review in *Review of Biblical Literature*,” 3-4 (section I.D.) (www.robagnon.net).

⁸⁵Bruce W. Winter contends, I think rightly, that 1 Cor 7:1 should be understood as the Corinthian position, in this sense: “It is good for a man not to have sexual intercourse with [his] wife” (*After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 225-32).

Paul's response to them was that they were not as invulnerable to sexual temptation as they thought. In fact, "because of sexual immoralities (*porneiai*)" and "because of [their] lack of self-control" (7:2, 5; similarly, 7:36-37) they ought not to abstain from sexual intercourse in marriage (7:2-5). Paul could hardly be treating passion itself as dishonorable when he was exhorting married believers not to abstain from sexual relations with each other. Indeed, he contends, they owe it to each other to fulfill the other's sexual needs (7:3). He states repeatedly that getting married, and thus satisfying one's sexual desires in marriage, is no sin (7:28, 36-38). Particularly significant is that Paul's discussion in 1 Cor 7 shows relatively little concern for procreation,⁸⁶ which, after all, was rendered somewhat superfluous by the expectation of a near end. Unlike many of his contemporaries (e.g., Philo, Josephus, Musonius Rufus), Paul does not state, or infer, that sexual desire for one's wife is only acceptable when there is intent to procreate. Sexual needs exist quite apart from procreation and it is right and good, even necessary, for Christians to satisfy their spouse's needs.

Many modern interpreters have criticized Paul for not having a higher view of the purposes of marriage in 1 Cor 7. There are at least two problems with such criticism.

(a) It ignores the fact that Paul's expressed preference for singleness was not grounded in the conviction that sexual passion per se is dirty. Rather, Paul's concern was over the extra obligations and anxieties that marriage normally imposed on persons, a circumstance that would be especially troublesome in a time of coming eschatological distress (7:25-35). Paul had suffered significantly for the faith. It was easier for him to risk his own life, knowing that he did not have obligations to a wife and children that might restrain him from bold or sacrificial acts for the sake of the gospel; and knowing too that when he put himself in harm's way he would not at the same time be endangering a wife and children. In short, Paul was motivated more by pragmatic missionary and service considerations, particularly in the light of a perceived nearness of the end, than by an anti-passion bias.

⁸⁶The only mention of children in 1 Cor 7 occurs in an oblique comment in 7:14b: God sanctifies even the unbelieving partner in a marriage, for, if it were otherwise, the children would be an unholy product of the union.

(b) Paul's promotion of sexual activity within marriage as a legitimate safety valve for pent-up sexual desires was probably conditioned, at least in part, by the arguments of the Corinthians. Since they stressed that their exalted spiritual status had enabled them to transcend tempting sexual urges, Paul countered by focusing on marriage as an institution given by God for the responsible release of such desires. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that this was all that Paul thought sex in marriage was good for. First Corinthians 7 probably does not record everything that Paul believed about marriage. There are no substantial grounds for assuming that he dispensed with the vibrant image of marital intimacy and companionship put forward by Gen 2:18-24; 29:9-30; Exod 21:5; Deut 24:5; Prov 5:15-23; Mal 2:13-16; and the Song of Solomon. Paul did give top priority to an unencumbered life, for evangelistic reasons. In that context all desires, including sexual desires, took a back seat. Nevertheless, Paul was not a strict ascetic: "I know what it is like to have both little and a lot; in any and all circumstances I have been initiated into the secret of being well-fed and hungry, having a lot and being in want" (Phil 4:12). It is not likely that he was unmarried, or promoted singleness to others, because he wanted to deny to himself and others all sexual pleasures.

Contrary to what Fredrickson thinks, 1 Thess 4:4-5 is not an exhortation to "passionless sex."⁸⁷ Rather, when Paul exhorted Gentile (male) believers to "know how to procure for himself his own vessel (= wife)⁸⁸ in holiness and honor, not in the passion of (sexual) desire as do the Gentiles who do not know God," he was giving advice on how to select a mate. Believers should look beyond a prospective mate's physical appeal to broader issues of character as well.⁸⁹ Although we

⁸⁷"Natural and Unnatural Use," 209 n. 60. Cf. idem, "Passionless Sex in 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5," *WW* 23/1 (2003): 23-30.

⁸⁸Or, less likely, the male sexual member (cf. 1 Sam 21:5). For "vessel" as wife, see the texts cited by O. Larry Yarbrough, *Not Like the Gentiles: Marriage Rules in the Letters of Paul* (SBLDS 80; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 70-73; Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 226-27.

⁸⁹Cf. Sir 36:26-29 ("One girl is preferable to another. A woman's beauty lights up a man's face. . . . If kindness and humility mark her speech, her husband is more fortunate than other men. He who acquires a wife gets his best possession, a helper fit

might want to modify the language of "his own vessel" and certainly frame things with greater mutuality in view, the overall principle of not making physical beauty the paramount consideration for mate selection remains good advice for our contemporary context.

All of this suggests that Fredrickson is in error when he argues that Paul's primary problem in Rom 1:24-27 was with passion, not with the gender of one's partner. Paul was not the passion prude that Fredrickson makes him out to be.

(5) *The Genesis echo in Rom 1:23-27*. The intertextual echo to Gen 1:27, noted above, establishes that Paul was eminently concerned with the sex or gender of the partner in his remarks in Rom 1:24-27. A female-female or male-male union does not correspond to the model for complementary sexual pairing established by God at creation.

(6) *The appeal to nature as an appeal to sex differentiation*. Another point confirming the gender-directedness of Paul's remarks is the parallel between the appeal in Rom 1:26-27 to the evidence of nature and the appeal in Rom 1:19-23 to the intact structures of creation that are still transparent to human sight and reason. This parallel is underscored by various features of the text, including: the creation/nature correspondence (cf. *T. Naph.* 3:3-4, where both idolatry and same-sex intercourse are viewed as exchanging the order of nature); the use of "exchange" for both actions of idolatry and same-sex intercourse, denoting the choice of innate desires over the general revelation residing in the world's material structures; the theme of absurd denial and deliberate suppression of the truth; and the flashback remark in Rom 1:25, which in the midst of discussing sexual immorality in 1:24-27 refers the reader back to the general point of 1:19-23. Also confirm-

for him and a pillar of support"); Tob 8:7 ("I am taking this kinswoman of mine, not because of lust, but with sincerity. Grant that she and I may find mercy and grow old together"; cf. 6:12: "the girl is sensible, brave, and very beautiful, and her father is a good man"). Translations from NRSV. Paul's philosophical contemporaries in the Greco-Roman world also "warned against marrying because of a woman's beauty and thus become a slave of pleasure" (Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 230).

ing the parallel between the human suppression of the truth about God and the human suppression of the truth about the sexual self are some Greco-Roman critiques of one or more forms of same-sex intercourse, which intimate a design argument based on the natural complementarity of male and female genitalia.⁹⁰ “Natural use,” then, refers to basic structures of maleness and femaleness—including, but not limited to, anatomical and procreative compatibility—that ought to make apparent to the world God’s creation design and intent. In short, the appeal to nature is an appeal to the significance of sexual differentiation. The gender of the participants mattered to Paul.

What is the “Error” and the “Punishment” in Rom 1:27?

Two final, but relatively minor, points on Fredrickson’s reading of Rom 1:27 round off my critique of Fredrickson’s interpretation of Rom 1:24-27. Romans 1:27b states that those engaging in male-male intercourse are “receiving back in themselves the punishment which was necessary from their error.”⁹¹ Fredrickson interprets the word “error” (*planē*) to mean “sex for pleasure.” “Their error . . . was to exchange normal use for erotic love.”⁹² Fredrickson cites some texts in Greco-Roman moral discourse where *planē* appears in erotic contexts. The one Jewish source that he cites is a bit tangential: *T. Reu.* 2:1, 8; 3:2-3; 4:6, which refers to “the spirit of sexual immorality (*porneia*)” as one of the “spirits of error,” a spirit that distorts the “spirit of procreation and intercourse” “through fondness of pleasure.” Fredrickson overlooks much closer parallels to the context for Rom 1:27: *Wis* 12:23-27 and *T. Naph.* 3:3-4, both of which refer to the “error” or “straying” of idolatry and share a number of other words and motifs in common with Rom 1:18-32.⁹³

⁹⁰See the critique of Balch on pp. 250-56 below.

⁹¹Fredrickson’s translation. My translation is: “in return receiving in themselves the payback that was necessitated by their straying (from the truth about God).”

⁹²*Ibid.*, 215.

⁹³For discussion of *Wis* 12:23-27 see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 260-61; concerning *T. Naph.* 3:3-4 see my critique of Seitz on pp. 183-84 above.

What was the “punishment” (*antimisthia*, payback, recompense) for their “error/straying”? According to Fredrickson,

punishment consists of being handed over to passion—itsself dishonorable to have. . . . Punishment was a central metaphor for the ill effects on the lover of his own passionate love. . . . Eros was a destructive passion, taking its toll on the finances, mental equilibrium, and the honor of the lover.⁹⁴

The problem here is that if the “error” is erotic love, as Fredrickson supposes, how can the “punishment” also be erotic love? In effect, Fredrickson reads Rom 1:27 as saying that males who have sex with males “receive back in themselves the erotic love that was necessary from their choice of erotic love.” This is jarring. Moreover, the larger argument in Rom 1:18-32 is that God “gave them over” to dishonorable passions (not passions per se) as a consequence of their having “exchanged” the true God for idols.⁹⁵ This context confirms that the “error” or “straying” has to do with *exchanging* God for idols, not an exchange of sex-for-procreation for sex-for-pleasure. The “punishment” or “payback” for this error/straying refers to God *giving them over* (that is, some of them) to the control of unnatural and dishonorable passions for members of the same sex, not to passion or erotic love per se. There may be a secondary allusion to some of the negative side effects of homoerotic desire but the chief punishment appears to be the self-degrading, gender-distorting character of homosexual behavior itself.⁹⁶

⁹⁴“Natural and Unnatural Use,” 217.

⁹⁵Note the threefold repetition of *paredōken autous ho theos* (“God gave them over”) in 1:24, 26, 28, which correlates with two of the three uses of (*met*)*ēllaxan* (“they exchanged”) in 1:22, 25 and a parallel expression in 1:28 (“they did not see fit to acknowledge God”). The third occurrence of *metēllaxan*, in 1:26, refers not to an exchange of God for idols but rather to a parallel exchange, on the horizontal level of human existence, of the natural use of the body for an unnatural use.

⁹⁶For further discussion see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 261-62.

Despite my critique of Fredrickson's interpretation of Rom 1:24-27, I am not arguing that a person cannot profit from reading Fredrickson's article. One will find therein a marvelous sifting through of ancient Greek texts for the significant Greek terms in Rom 1:24-27: *chrēsis*, *para physin* (contrary to nature), *epithymia* (desire), *pathos* (passion), *ekkaiō* (inflare), *orexis* (appetite), *planē* (error), and *aschēmosynē* (unseemly conduct).⁹⁷ However, Fredrickson's interpretation of this data and especially his application of it to Rom 1:24-27 often fall victim to gaps in logic. Perhaps part of the problem is that Fredrickson is unable to account for differences between (a) Greco-Roman thought on homosexual practice, which in terms of opposition was at best porous, inconsistent, and relatively weak, and (b) Jewish thought on homosexual practice, which was resolutely pervasive, absolute, and strong.

Fredrickson's Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 6:9

Fredrickson devotes three-and-a-half pages at the end of his article to interpreting the words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* in 1 Cor 6:9. He translates the former as "those who lack self-control" and the latter as "the arrogant who penetrate boys." As regards *malakoi* Fredrickson adopts a very broad meaning; as regards *arsenokoitai* he opts for a very narrow interpretation.

Malakoi. How does Fredrickson justify his broad rendering of *malakoi*, which literally means "soft men"? He acknowledges that *malakos* "frequently designated the sexually passive, penetrated male" but then argues (correctly) that "softness" can also refer more broadly to a lack of self-control. He contends that this broad sense is appropriate for 1 Cor 6:9 because the immediate context in 6:1-8 refers to the unjust (*adikoi*) "who run the law courts" and who do not reflect "the ideal of the temperate citizen who is able to pass out just judgments. Paul thus deconstructs the moral legitimacy of the elite who run the law courts."⁹⁸

⁹⁷The first two terms, and particularly the first, are treated on pp. 199-207. All the other terms are treated on pp. 207-18.

⁹⁸"Natural and Unnatural Use," 219-20.

The problem with Fredrickson’s analysis here is the same problem that arose in his interpretation of Rom 1:24-27: he is good at collating extrabiblical (chiefly non-Jewish) background material but not so good at paying attention to the context of the biblical text.

The first context problem is that Fredrickson treats 1 Cor 6:1-8, lawsuits before pagan authorities, as the main concern of the vice list in 6:9-11. It is far more likely that 6:9-11 links up with the case of the incestuous man in ch. 5, for three reasons.

- The vice list in 6:9-10 repeats the same list of offenders mentioned in 5:10 and 5:11 and merely adds four more offenders, three of which have to do with sex (*moichoi* [adulterers], *malakoi*, and *arsenokoitai*).
- In 6:9-10 offenders known as *pornoi* head up the vice list, just as in 5:10 and 5:11. In 6:9 the word appears before “idolaters, adulterers, *malakoi*, and *arsenokoitai*.” Why isn’t the word grouped with the three other types of sexually immoral persons? The answer has to do with the fact that the incestuous man is called a *pornos* in 5:8 and his actions *porneia* in 5:1. Paul places *pornoi* at the head of the list, before idolaters and other sex offenders, because it is still the main subject of the discussion.⁹⁹
- The material immediately following the vice list, namely 6:12-20, introduces a hypothetical example of *porneia* (sex with a prostitute) that illustrates Paul’s point that sex is not like food. This confirms that the case of *porneia* or sexual immorality

⁹⁹In following *pornoi* with adulterers, *malakoi*, and *arsenokoitai*, Paul does not mean to distinguish the latter three from the rubric *pornoi* but rather to further specify who would be included under that rubric. The immediate context in ch. 5 (incest, called *porneia* in 5:1; cf. *pornos* in 5:8) and 6:12-20 (sex with prostitutes, called *porneia* in 6:13, 18; cf. *porneuō* in 6:18 and *pornē* in 6:15-16) makes clear that *pornoi* would include at least participants in incest and men who have sex with prostitutes. The following three categories of sexual offenders simply fill out explicitly who else would be a *pornos*. This also explains why the vice lists in 5:10-11 employ *pornoi* as the sole term denoting sexual offenders; it is a general term that normally covers the sweep of sexual offenses. Similar to 1 Cor 6:9, 1 Tim 1:10 singles out immediately after *pornoi* “men who lie with males” (*arsenokoitai*)—not because *arsenokoitai* are distinct from *pornoi* but because *arsenokoitai* are a particularly egregious instance of *pornoi*.

dealt with in ch. 5 is still the issue at hand, not the matter of believer hauling believer before pagan law courts. Paul's exasperated question in 5:12 ("Is it not those inside the church that you are to judge?") diverts him momentarily to an instance where not only did the Corinthians shirk their responsibility to be arbiters of internal affairs but they also handed over such authority to the very pagans over whom they would one day stand in judgment.

If the opening section of the vice list in 6:9b has the issue of immoral sexual intercourse primarily in view, then it is not likely that Paul intended the term *malakoi* to include non-sexual offenses like the one in 6:1-8.

Confirming this supposition is the second context issue that Fredrickson fails to consider: the types of offenders that surround the mention of the *malakoi*. As noted above, *eidōlōlatrai* ("idolaters") probably appears second in the list, after *pornoi*, because Paul's immediate concern is the *pornos* in 1 Cor 5. Bracketing the former term, the sequence is: *pornoi*, *moichoi*, *malakoi*, and *arsenokoitai*. Two points are of significance here. First, *malakoi* is positioned amidst other participants in illicit sexual intercourse. This suggests that Paul understands *malakoi* as a reference to sexual offenders, not as a generic description for anyone lacking self-control. Second, *malakoi* appears immediately before the term *arsenokoitai*, which even Fredrickson admits refers to men who have sex with other *males* (albeit "males" in the sense of adolescent boys). Since the latter were known to have sex with persons designated as *malakoi*, it seems likely that these two terms are to be taken together. Lending support for this is the structuring of the vice list. Although in terms of syllables and sounds the four offenders after the *pornoi* constitute a chiasm in which *moichoi* and *malakoi* match up,¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰The first and the fourth terms are both five-syllable words ending in *-ai* and accented on the penult. The second and third terms are words ending in *-oi* and accented on the ultima.

A. *eidōlolatrai* B. *moichoi* B'. *malakoi* A'. *arsenokoitai*

in terms of content they, like the rest of the vices in the list, appear to be paired consecutively:¹⁰¹

A¹. *eidōlolatrai* B¹. *moichoi* A². *malakoi* B². *arsenokoitai*

Idolatry and adultery are often paired in the Old Testament. If *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* form a pair, then *malakoi* has to do not just with sexual offenders but more specifically with a particular group of sex offenders: those who have sex with the *arsenokoitai*.

I will deal with the third contextual concern that Fredrickson does not address, the broader context of 1 Cor 5-7, in my discussion of the term *arsenokoitai*. For now it is enough to note what Fredrickson himself admits. The word *malakoi* and its Latin equivalent *molles* (and their cognates) were often employed in antiquity in a restrictive sense; namely, to refer to adult males who were biologically and/or psychologically disposed to desire penetration by men and who actively feminized their appearance and manner as a means to attracting such partners.¹⁰² Given the context issues already cited, Paul probably intended *malakoi* in this restrictive sense.¹⁰³

Arsenokoitai. While Fredrickson gives a broad interpretation of *malakoi*, he gives a very narrow interpretation to *arsenokoitai*: “the arrogant who penetrate boys.” Fredrickson discounts assertions that the term was coined from the Levitical proscriptions of male-male intercourse, saying that this approach “is able to provide only speculation as evidence.”¹⁰⁴ Fredrickson believes that the word’s post-Pauline history

¹⁰¹For the rationale behind the rest of the pair structures in the list, see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 316.

¹⁰²For examples, see: “Notes to Gagnon’s Essay,” 97.

¹⁰³Even if *malakoi* were taken in the broadest sense to refer to any who lack self-control, particularly sexual self-control, it would still include most obviously men who serve as the passive partners in an act of male-male intercourse. But not even this concession need be made, given the context.

¹⁰⁴Is Fredrickson contending that his interpretation does not have a speculative component?

indicates a restricted reference to the *pederast as one who not only lacks self-control but also has “violent, hybristic” intent in disgracing the younger male through penetration.*¹⁰⁵ According to Fredrickson, the fact that the sex is male-to-male is not the issue for Paul; the issue is the intergenerational quality of the sex and the “violent, hybristic” intent of the active partner.¹⁰⁶ The inference conveyed to Fredrickson’s readers is: Paul would have had no problem with two adult men in a committed homoerotic union. What really bothered Paul was the coercive, arrogant aspect of having sex with an unwilling adolescent.

There is no historical basis for such an inference. In *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, I devote nearly 20 pages to discussing the term *arsenokoitai* in 1 Cor 6:9 and ancient literature generally, as well as an additional five pages to discussing the word’s occurrence in 1 Tim 1:10.¹⁰⁷ At the end of my discussion of 1 Cor 6:9 I conclude: “It is self-evident, then, that the combination of terms, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, are correctly understood in our contemporary context when they are applied to every conceivable type of same-sex intercourse.”¹⁰⁸ Here’s why:

(1) *A firm link to Lev 18:22 and 20:13.* Fredrickson cannot so easily dismiss a link to Lev 18:22 and 20:13 as “only speculation.” That the word *arsenokoitai*, which literally means “men lying [= having intercourse] with a male,” is formed from the absolute Levitical prohibitions (LXX), texts that prohibit men from “lying with a male,” should be beyond debate. The word and its cognates are generally confined to Jewish and Christian literature so their origination can be explained only on the assumption of influence from the Levitical prohibitions.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵“Natural and Unnatural Use,” 220-21 (my emphasis).

¹⁰⁶“The moral issue is not sexual orientation but the connection between passion and injustice” (ibid., 222).

¹⁰⁷Pp. 312-31, 332-36. Cf. also *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 83-88. Fredrickson does not discuss 1 Tim 1:10.

¹⁰⁸*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 330.

¹⁰⁹At least prior to the sixth century C.E. the term does not appear in non-Jewish, non-Christian sources. See the data in ibid., 315-23.

(2) *A firm link to an absolute ban.* It is historically irresponsible to ignore the implications that such a link has for establishing an absolute ban.

(a) There is nothing restrictive in the meaning of the word and nothing restrictive in the Levitical prohibitions that would suggest an option for accepting committed, adult homoerotic unions.¹¹⁰

(b) In the larger Hellenized milieu other, more restrictive terms were available to describe the active adult male who engaged in homoerotic behavior with boys, including the terms *paiderastai* ("lover of boys"), *paidomanēs* ("man mad for boys"), and *paidophthoros* ("corrupter of boys").¹¹¹ The distinctive choice of *arsenokoitai* apparently was intended to call to mind Scripture's strong, absolute stance against male-male intercourse, a stance in contradistinction to the porous and relatively weak opposition to male-male intercourse that existed in pagan society.

(c) There is no evidence in pre-exilic or exilic Israel,¹¹² Second Temple Judaism, or in rabbinic Judaism¹¹³ that any limitation was placed on the prohibition of male-male intercourse, such as a prohibition only of "violent, hybriatic" forms of man-boy love or of man-boy love per se. To the contrary: When, for example, Philo and Josephus spoke disparagingly about male-male intercourse, they explicitly referred to the prohibition of such behavior in the law of Moses and contrasted male-male intercourse with the only acceptable form of sexual intercourse, that between a man and a woman. Thus Josephus states: "The law recognizes only sexual intercourse that is according to

¹¹⁰For a discussion of the absoluteness of these prohibitions in their own historical context, see *ibid.*, 115, 128-46; *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 62-68 (with online notes).

¹¹¹Even if, for that matter, Jews had wanted to use a broader term than "pederast," they had other options available; for example, *androbotēs* ("man-coverer") and *arrenomanēs* ("man mad for a male"). While Jews and Christians did sometimes use such terms, there seems little reason to invent the term *arsenokoitēs* apart from a desire to hark back explicitly to the Levitical prohibitions.

¹¹²*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 56-110, 146-57; *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 56-62 (with online notes).

¹¹³For Second Temple and rabbinic literature, see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 159-83.

nature, that which is with a woman. . . . But it abhors the intercourse of males with males” (*Against Apion* 2.199). What type of male-male intercourse would have passed muster here? Obviously no type of male-male intercourse would be acceptable to such standards, for the point of contrast for the Levitical prohibitions and their subsequent Jewish interpreters was not exploitative versus non-exploitative male-male intercourse but male-male intercourse versus male-female intercourse. Similarly, rabbinic texts that speak of *miškab zākûr*, “lying with a male” (the Hebrew words for “lying” and “male” in Lev 18:22; 20:13) hark back to the Levitical prohibitions with a broader referent than coercive pederastic intercourse.¹¹⁴ For instance, in a discussion of how one knows that *miškab zākûr* is punished by stoning, *b. Sanh.* 54a cites Lev 20:13 and notes that the man who lies with a male (the active partner) “excludes a minor,” but the male with whom he lays (the passive partner) may be “an adult or minor.” Would the rabbis have permitted a committed form of *adult* male-male intercourse? Obviously not.

(3) *A firm link to Romans 1:24-27.* The meaning of *arsenokoitai* in Paul cannot be isolated from his fuller discussion of same-sex intercourse in Rom 1:24-27. We have already demonstrated that (a) Paul, both in echoing Gen 1:27 and in appealing to the transparent, revelatory quality of the material structures of nature, was indicting every form of same-sex intercourse. (b) The prohibition of female-female intercourse in Rom 1:26 also indicates that neither coercion nor intergenerational sex was Paul’s main problem with same-sex intercourse, for female homoerotic behavior in the ancient world was not noted for its coercive or intergenerational character. (c) The fact that Paul stressed in Rom 1:27 the mutuality of erotic affections, male-for-male, establishes that Paul’s disapproval of male homoerotic behavior was not aimed exclusively at a “violent, hybristic” subset of male-male intercourse. (d) That Paul had the Levitical prohibitions partly in view is evident from

¹¹⁴Ibid., 315-16.

intertextual echoes to Lev 18 and 20 in Rom 1:24-32.¹¹⁵ Thus the evidence from Rom 1:24-27 indicates that Paul maintained the broadest possible sense of the term *arsenokoitai*, derived as it was from the absolute prohibitions in Leviticus that Jews continued to view as absolute and reused by Paul himself, a person who likewise treated all forms of same-sex intercourse per se as an “unclean,” “dishonorable” or “degrading,” and “indecent” affront to nature.

(4) *The import of 1 Timothy 1:10*. The appearance of *arsenokoitai* in 1 Tim 1:10 conveys two important points.

(a) The fact that *arsenokoitai* appears here in the midst of a vice list that the author states is derived from the law of Moses (1:8-9) confirms that Paul would have recognized a link to the Levitical prohibitions.¹¹⁶ Of course, such a proof is hardly needed after all that has been said above; and, after all, Paul was not intellectually or theologically obtuse.

(b) At least the last half of the vice list in 1 Tim 1:8-10 (and possibly the whole of it) corresponds to the Decalogue. Why is that important? In early Judaism and Christianity the Ten Commandments often served as summary headings for the full range of laws in the Old Testament. The seventh commandment against adultery, which was aimed at guarding the institution of marriage, served as a summary of all biblical sex laws since all sex offenses in one way or another threaten the institution of marriage. There is good evidence that *pornoi* and *arsenokoitai* belong together under the seventh commandment, in which case

¹¹⁵Paul’s word for “nakedness, indecent exposure, indecency” (*aschēmosynē*) in Rom 1:27 is used 24 times in the Septuagint translation of Lev 18:6-19; 20:11, 17-21. Paul’s word for “uncleanness, impurity” (*akatharsia*) in Rom 1:24 appears in the Septuagint rendering of Lev 18:19; 20:21, 25. “Worthy of death” in Rom 1:32 may also have called to mind the capital sentence pronounced on man-male intercourse in Lev 20:13. Even Bernadette Brooten acknowledges that Rom 1:26-32 “directly recalls” Lev 18:22 and 20:13. However, she contends that this is a good reason for disavowing Paul’s views (*Love Between Women*, 281-94). For a rebuttal of the latter point, see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 122-28.

¹¹⁶Even as a deuteropauline text 1 Tim 1:10 still provides strong evidence of how Paul would have interpreted *arsenokoitai*—certainly much stronger evidence than can be supplied by non-Pauline texts that date a century or more after 1 Corinthians was written. For a defense of *nomos* in 1 Tim 1:8-9 as a reference to the law of Moses see *ibid.*, 334.

the obvious offense of the *arsenokoitai* is a violation of the male-female prerequisite for marriage.¹¹⁷

A similar point can be made about the occurrence of *arsenokoitai* in 1 Cor 6:9. For the vice lists in 5:10-11; 6:9-10 appear to have been constructed on the basis of the contexts in which the refrain “Drive out the wicked person from among yourselves” (quoted in 1 Cor 5:13) occurs in Deuteronomy (17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21; 24:7).¹¹⁸ The sex offenders listed in 1 Cor 6:9 would come under the discussion in Deut 22:13-21: the case of a woman whose virginity at the time of marriage cannot be established and is thus found to have “prostituted herself in her father’s house.”¹¹⁹ Obviously, the term *arsenokoitai* in such contexts did not have in view only men who had intercourse with the male partners of other males. If it were otherwise, then one would have to argue, logically but absurdly, that the case of the incestuous man in 1 Cor 5, which is likewise brought under the rubric of Deut 22:13-21, dealt only with man-(step)mother sex in an adulterous context. Clearly, such a conclusion is untenable, for the OT prohibition of man-(step)mother incest is absolute, making no exceptions for strong affective bonds (Deut 27:23; Lev 18:7-8). There is no distinction between particularly “hybristic, violent” forms of man-(step)mother incest and humble, loving forms of the same. It is similar with male-male intercourse: The contrast is not between exploitative and non-exploitative forms of homosexual practice but rather between homosexual practice and the male-female prerequisite for all sexual relationships.

(5) *The context of 1 Corinthians 5-7.* The preceding observation leads us to another point. The context of 1 Cor 5-7 further confirms that *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* collectively take in every form of male-male intercourse.

¹¹⁷For a defense of the placement of *arsenokoitai* under the seventh commandment, see *ibid.*, 334-36.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 329-30.

¹¹⁹The text may presume a case where the woman had intercourse with another man during the time of her engagement.

(a) *1 Corinthians 5* treats a comparable case of intercourse involving consenting adults who are too much alike or same (here, on a familial level), with echoes to Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity regarded incest of this sort and same-sex intercourse as similarly severe offenses. Paul treats incest and same-sex intercourse, along with adultery and sex with prostitutes, as acts warranting a temporary ban from the life of the community because they endanger a person's inheritance of the kingdom of God (1 Cor 5:4-5, 9-13; 6:9-10).¹²⁰ In short, Paul's stance toward incest provides the best analogue toward Paul's stance toward same-sex intercourse and, as such, it does not support Fredrickson's restrictive interpretation of *arsenokoitai*.¹²¹ For Paul, as for early Judaism and Christianity generally (and even us today), there were structural prerequisites for acceptable sexual unions that transcended appeals to loving dispositions. Gender and degree of blood unrelatedness were two such prerequisites.

(b) In *1 Cor 6:19-20*, immediately following the vice list, Paul treats a hypothetical case of intercourse with prostitutes to underscore the point that sex is not like food (6:12-20).¹²² Sex is never a matter of indifference. In this context what is the one Old Testament text that Paul cites as normative and prescriptive for matters of sexuality? "The two shall become one flesh" (1 Cor 6:16). In context, Paul cites Gen 2:24 to substantiate his point that "the man who joins himself to the prostitute is one body" with her (6:16a); that is, to show that sexual intercourse per se, not just intercourse in the context of a marital commitment, has a bonding effect on the participants. A Christian engaged in unholy sexual intercourse thus brings the indwelling Christ into the act. Given the intertextual echo to Gen 1:27 in Rom 1:26-27, it

¹²⁰The presumption of these texts is that the offender engages in serial, unrepentant conduct. It is not a matter of isolated acts in which the offender repents.

¹²¹For further discussion of the incest analogy see *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 48-50 (with online notes, esp. n. 17); "A Comprehensive and Critical Review Essay of *Homosexuality, Science, and the 'Plain Sense' of Scripture*, Part 1," *HBT* 22 (2000): 191-92.

¹²²Cf. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 294-96.

is inconceivable that Paul would not have recognized the import of the whole of Gen 2:24 (“a *man* . . . shall become joined to his *woman*”) for the proscription of adultery and male-male intercourse in 1 Cor 6:9.

(c) In *1 Cor 7* Paul discusses only male-female sexual unions because these alone are valid. Sex is to be confined to male-female marriage. Paul made no attempt to regulate positive forms of same-sex intercourse because, quite simply, there were none.

Thus Fredrickson’s attempt to restrict the meaning of *arsenokoitai* to a particularly exploitative subset of participants in male-male intercourse makes no sense of the context of 1 Cor 5-7, to say nothing of the context of the Old Testament, early Judaism, Rom 1:24-27, and 1 Tim 1:10.

(6) *The import of 1 Cor 11:2-16*. As if the context in chs. 5-7 were not enough, we can add one more element from 1 Corinthians. There is no chance that the very same Paul who was concerned about blurring the distinctions between the sexes even over such relatively minor matters as head coverings in 1 Cor 11:2-16 could have limited the meaning of the *malakoi-arsenokoitai* complex to pederasty. If inappropriate hairstyles or head coverings were a source of shame because they compromised the sexual differences of men and women, how much more would a man taking another man to bed be a shameful act, lying with another male “as though lying with a woman”? Paul did not make head coverings an issue vital for inclusion in God’s kingdom, but he did put same-sex intercourse on that level.

(7) *The implication of the meaning of malakoi*. If the “soft men” (*malakoi*) mentioned immediately before *arsenokoitai* are to be understood as I indicated above—as effeminate *adult* males who were thought to be biologically and/or psychologically predisposed to serve as passive partners in male-male intercourse—then *arsenokoitai* cannot be limited to the sense of “hybristic, violent pederasts” or “the arrogant who penetrate boys.” Indeed, even if one adopted Fredrickson’s own understanding of *malakoi*—as a broad term designating all those who lack self-control but certainly including “the sexually passive, penetrated male”—one would have to accept a wider meaning of *arsenokoitai* that embraces any man who penetrates another male,

whether the latter be "an adult or minor" (as *b. Sanh.* 54a puts it, cited above). This also leads us to our next point.

(8) *The problem with pederasty.* Fredrickson's attempt at confining the semantic field of *arsenokoitai* to abusive pederasty does not fit his own conception of what the ancients found offensive about pederasty: "Greek and Jewish tradition . . . regarded pederasty as an illegitimate form of erotic love . . . because of the younger male's disgrace in being penetrated."¹²³ If the problem with pederasty is that a male is disgraced by penetration, what difference does it make that the male is a boy or an adult? In fact, as William Schoedel intimates in the Balch volume, in the Greco-Roman world homosexual intercourse between an adult male and a male youth was regarded as a *less* exploitative form of same-sex eros than intercourse between two adult males. The key problem with homosexual intercourse—behaving toward the passive male partner as if the latter were female—was exacerbated when the intercourse was aimed at adult males who had outgrown the "softness" of immature adolescence. Schoedel's comment on Philo of Alexandria is apt:

Philo adds something new in this connection when he rejects the love of males with males even though they "only" differ in age ([*Contemplative Life*,] 59). The "only" is important here. For the difference in age made all the difference in the Greco-Roman view. Philo is subtly suggesting that the normal abhorrence for the love of adult males can with equal propriety be extended to pederasty.¹²⁴

So Fredrickson gets it backwards. He suggests that *arsenokoitai* should be limited to pederasty and not be extended to committed adult unions. But what he should have said is that if *arsenokoitai* primarily has in mind man-boy love then, *a fortiori*, it surely also takes in man-man love.

¹²³"Natural and Unnatural Use," 221.

¹²⁴"Same-Sex Eros," 50.

(9) *On commitment and orientation.* Finally, there is little basis for concluding that *arsenokoitai* does not take in committed homoerotic relationships between homosexually oriented persons. The term's emphasis on the act—similar to proscriptions of various incestuous unions—makes the term more encompassing of all male-male sexual activity, not less so. A loving disposition on the part of the participants is as irrelevant a consideration for homoerotic behavior as it is for an adult man-mother or brother-sister union. Moreover, ancient authors were able to conceive of caring, committed homosexual unions.¹²⁵ If Paul had wanted to make exceptions for such unions, he could have done so. Obviously he did not because the problematic dimension of same-sex intercourse, its “same-sexness,” the desire to merge with what one already is as a sexual being, is not resolved by commitment. Commitment addresses a different value for sexual unions: the quality of longevity. It does not speak to the value of sexual wholeness that comes from uniting with one's sexual counterpart. Knowledge of a “sexual orientation” also is irrelevant, both because the ancients could conceive of something akin to a sexual orientation while rejecting the behaviors that arise from them and because Paul conceived of sin itself as an innate impulse, passed on by an ancestor, running through the members of the human body, and never entirely within human control.¹²⁶

In conclusion, Fredrickson's claim that 1 Cor 6:9 does not indict all forms of male-male intercourse misrepresents the historical and literary contexts for this text. Fredrickson takes the fact that *arsenokoitai* is applied in some Christian texts after Paul to man-boy relationships and simply assumes that the term is *limited* to these forms of homoerotic

¹²⁵*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 350-60.

¹²⁶See further on the matter of orientation in the ancient world in general and in Paul's thinking in particular, *ibid.*, 384-95, 430-32; *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 101-102; and especially my article, “Does the Bible Regard Same-Sex Intercourse as Intrinsically Sinful?” in *Christian Sexuality: Normative and Pastoral Principles* (ed. R. Saltzman; Minneapolis: Kirk House, 2003), 140-52.

behavior.¹²⁷ We have seen from the nine points above that the evidence indicates overwhelmingly that Paul would have applied the term *arsenokoitai* to all male-male erotic relationships.

Conclusion

None of Fredrickson's three main arguments is even remotely sustainable; namely, that Paul did not view same-sex intercourse as a violation of a male-female norm ordained by God at creation; that Paul's problem was with passion, not the gender of the persons having sex; and that Paul was not focusing on male-male intercourse per se with the terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* in 1 Cor 6:9 but rather on issues of self-control and arrogance. Fredrickson shows an admirable awareness of ancient Greek literature but is less adept at noticing distinctive elements in the perspective of Paul and early Judaism and at discerning the argument and literary context for Pauline texts. In the end Fredrickson leaves the reader with the wrong impression that the perspective of ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity on same-sex intercourse differed not one bit from the perspectives that typified the ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman milieus.

IX. David L. Balch, "Response to Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*"¹²⁸

On Mar. 16, 2003 David Balch, editor of the book *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, delivered a high-pitched,

¹²⁷Cf. the texts cited in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 317-23. On occasion the link with the Levitical prohibitions is clear. In his *Demonstration of the Gospel* Eusebius at one point states, implicitly with Lev 18:22 and 20:13 in view: "Moses issued commands to adulterers and to the unbridled not to commit adultery, nor to lie with a male (*arsenokoitein*)" (1.6.67). For Eusebius the term apparently paralleled the expression "males mad for males" in the same work (1.4.6; 1.6.33). In the *Sacra Parallela* attributed to John of Damascus *arsenokoitia* is grouped together with *porneia* and *moicheia* (adultery) and linked explicitly to Lev 20:13.

¹²⁸Balch is professor of New Testament at Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas.

often vitriolic, review of my book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, to the Southwestern Regional Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature.¹²⁹ To my knowledge the paper remains unpublished, though the written text of his remarks was distributed to scholars attending the session. The paper is 14 pages in length, single-spaced with 12-point type. It provides a much clearer indication of Balch's views on the Bible and homosexuality, at least as regards Rom 1:24-27, than the chapter in his edited volume.¹³⁰ It is also particularly pertinent to my review of Balch's edited volume, inasmuch as Balch attempts to build on the arguments of Fredrickson regarding passions and "use" which

¹²⁹In contrast to Balch's viscerally negative response to my book, Prof. Charles Talbert of Baylor University offered a favorable evaluation at the session. I had been invited to the meeting but, as the invitation was late coming and without funding for travel, I could not attend. However, as the author of the book under discussion and as someone who had been invited to attend, it was appropriate for me to have a copy of Balch's paper. On Mar. 18, 2003 (two days after the session), I sent Balch an e-mail: "Dear David, I would be interested in a copy of your critique of my book. Please send by file attachment if possible. [Signed] Rob." I received no response. Nine days later I sent another e-mail: "Dear David, Checking to see whether you received my request. If so, please respond. [Signed] Rob." No response. After five more days I resent the message. Still no response. Ten days more passed and on Apr. 11, after nearly four weeks and three polite e-mail requests, I sent another e-mail: "Dear David, Please do me the courtesy of responding. It has been nearly a month since my initial request. [Signed] Rob." This time I also requested a "read receipt" with the message. The next day I received a machine-generated message from Balch's e-mail address simply noting that my message had been read on Apr. 12, 2003. Balch never got back to me. In the end a person who attended the session was kind enough to send me a copy of Balch's paper.

¹³⁰Despite the paper's title, Balch's critique is limited to my treatment of Rom 1:24-27 and that only a portion—less than 50 pages of roughly 460 pages of text in my book. Balch states at the beginning of his paper, "In 25 minutes I cannot review all of Gagnon's book, so I focus on his interpretation of the central Biblical text, Romans 1:24-27." This is reasonable. However, as we shall see, Balch does not appear to be aware of many arguments that I make regarding Rom 1:24-27 beyond the less-than-50 pages to which he refers. Indeed, there are indications that he did not even read the last 20 pages of that section of my book focused exclusively on Rom 1:24-27 (pp. 284-303), let alone the significant references to Rom 1:24-27 in the following hermeneutics chapter (pp. 341-486). At other points he makes arguments about matters beyond Rom 1:24-27 in apparent ignorance of my own lengthy rebuttals of the similar arguments made by persons before Balch (as in the Gentile inclusion analogy).

Balch regards as definitive.¹³¹ Moreover, he attempts to do so by rebutting the arguments in my book.

I have made every effort here to represent Balch's arguments accurately. I hope that Balch will publish his review on the web, if not in print, so that readers can make a direct comparison. However, even if Balch chooses not to do so, readers can still benefit from seeing the responses that can be given to the *types* of arguments raised by Balch in his critique of my book.

Apart from a short introduction and conclusion, Balch's paper is divided into three unequal parts:

- I. A critique of my reading of Romans 1 (pp. 1-8) that: (A) argues why "Rom 1 is not an interpretation of Gen 1" (pp. 2-3);¹³² (B) attacks what Balch thinks is my view of "natural theology" (pp. 3-4); (C) contends that Paul in Rom 1 is referring not to natural revelation but to the widespread dissemination of the special revelation found in the Pentateuch (pp. 4-6); (D) discusses Philo's views on the etiology of Sabbath in Gen 1 and on same-sex intercourse (pp. 6-7); and (E) criticizes Paul's views on "creation" and "nature" in 1 Cor 2:6-3:4 and 11:7-12 (pp. 7-8). He closes this section with a conclusion (p. 8).
- II. A relatively short rehash of "David Fredrickson's insights on $\chi\rho\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ in Rom 1:26, 27" (pp. 9-10).
- III. A discussion on "Hermeneutics" that includes: (A) A brief discussion of Augustine's remarks in *On Christian Doctrine* about seeking the "fuller sense" of Scripture (pp. 10-11); (B) An adoption of Luke Timothy Johnson's argument regarding the inclusion of Gentiles in Acts 15 as an analogue for the homosexuality debate (pp. 11-12); (C) An attempt to hold me and persons who share my views (i.e., the vast majority of Chris-

¹³¹Balch also cites Fredrickson's work as definitive in his brief article, "Romans 1:24-27, Science, and Homosexuality," *CurTM* 25 (1998): 433-40. "David Fredrickson is a professor at Luther Seminary, and the paper he presented is the most important one I know on Rom 1:24-27" (p. 436). Like Fredrickson, Balch is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA).

¹³²All references to page numbers are to the page numbers of the typescript copy that Balch distributed.

tendom worldwide) partly responsible for the murders of homosexual men and to paint us as not far removed from white supremacists who lynched blacks in American history (pp. 13-14).

I shall focus most of my remarks on section I of Balch's paper. Here I will presume and build on, but not repeat, my critique of David Fredrickson's argument that Paul in Rom 1:24-27 did not have in view a male-female norm given in creation. Concerning Balch's second section, on Fredrickson's "use" argument, there is nothing more that needs to be said beyond the comprehensive critique that I have given above. As for Balch's appeal to Johnson's Gentile-inclusion argument in section III, Balch shows no awareness of my extensive rebuttal of Johnson's view on pp. 460-69 of *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*. Since Balch does not bother responding to any of my points—it is not clear to me that he even read this section of my book—I simply refer readers, and Balch, to my discussion there.¹³³

Balch's Argument against Genesis Echoes

Balch starts his essay by insisting, "Rom 1 is not an interpretation of Gen 1." Oddly, Balch shows no sign of having read my discussion of the Gen 1 echoes in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, pp. 289-93. The result is confusion on his part. According to Balch,

¹³³Balch must have been aware of some of my arguments against the Gentile-inclusion analogy. I discuss the alleged analogy not only in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* but also in my "Part 1" review essay (pp. 234-38). Balch cites from pp. 235-36 of that essay in connection with a different matter, but does not refer to any of my arguments against the Gentile-inclusion analogy (p. 13 n. 50). Evidently, Balch did not have adequate counterarguments at his disposal.

Similarly, Dan Via was not able to counter my arguments against the Gentile-inclusion analogy. However, he did not have the luxury of ignoring my arguments inasmuch as they were in our co-authored book (*Homosexuality and the Bible*, 43-44). Instead of rebutting my arguments, Via attempted to sidestep the issue: "Whatever may be the merits of Professor Gagnon's critique of analogies . . . , his critique does not affect my position, for I make no use of those analogies" (*ibid.*, 97). Despite the disclaimer, my critique does indeed affect Via's position. If Via cannot appeal to any close analogues to support his attempt at departing from a core value in biblical sexual ethics, then he has little basis for advocating such a departure while maintaining the pretense of calling Scripture "the highest authority for Christians in theological and ethical matters" (*ibid.*, 2).

Gagnon is right: Romans 1 does not interpret Genesis 1. However, he then develops a view of natural revelation that is strange, claiming to view sex organs and to pronounce a natural revelation concerning their use.¹³⁴

Contrary to what Balch claims, I never say that Rom 1:18-32 “does not interpret Genesis 1.” I say, rather, that Rom 1:18-32 “does not describe the origin of sin” and “does not refer to the fall” in Gen 3.¹³⁵ This is not the equivalent of saying: Rom 1:18-32 does not allude to Gen 1. To be sure, I would not call the whole of Rom 1:18-32 an “interpretation” of Gen 1. Yet I would call Rom 1:18-32, and particularly 1:19-27, an argument regarding humanity’s deliberate suppression of the truth about the Creator and the Creator’s will for creation—a point that is deducible both from nature by those without Scripture and from Gen 1:26-27 by those who know Scripture.¹³⁶ Balch seems not to be aware of these nuances to my argument. I have already laid out the case for a clear intertextual echo to Gen 1:26-27 in Rom 1:23-27 (pp. 208-13 above).

Balch argues that Rom 1:23 cannot be reflecting on Gen 1 because it has Ps 105:20 (LXX)¹³⁷ in view:

kai ēllaxanto tēn doxan autōn en homoiōmati moschou esthontos chorton (“and they exchanged the glory of them[selves] for the likeness of a calf [or: young bull] eating grass”).¹³⁸

Romans 1:23 states:

kai ēllaxanto tēn doxan tou aphthartou theou en homoiōmati eikonos phthartou anthrōpou kai peteinōn kai tetrapodōn kai herpetōn

¹³⁴P. 14.

¹³⁵*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 246, 285.

¹³⁶The latter group includes Paul, his Roman Christian audience, and his imaginary Jewish dialogue partner.

¹³⁷MT and Eng. 106:20.

¹³⁸P. 2. Some Greek manuscripts read *autou*, “his [glory].”

(“and they exchanged the glory of the imperishable God for the likeness of an image of a perishable human and birds and four-footed creatures and reptiles”).

In *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* I acknowledge this to be a possible intertextual echo to the Golden Calf episode—something that Balch fails to note about my argument.¹³⁹ However, the echo to Ps 105:20 explains only the phrase “exchanged the glory [of God] for the likeness.” It does not explain five other points of correspondence—human, image, birds, animals, reptiles—that are covered by Gen 1:26 (in addition to “likeness”).¹⁴⁰

Balch appears to operate on the erroneous premise that a given New Testament verse can only have *one* intertextual echo. I do not know any expert in intertextuality who holds such a restricted view. A classic example of multiple references is Jesus’ brief words at the Last Supper (Mark 14:22-25 par.; 1 Cor 11:24-25). Here one can find simultaneous

¹³⁹*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 246 n. 9. Most commentators accept the echo as likely. An exception is Stowers who refers to the allusion as “alleged,” “supposed,” and “vague,” largely because Stowers rejects the notion that Paul is including Israel in the indictment in 1:18-32 (*A Rereading of Romans*, 92-93).

¹⁴⁰In p. 2 n. 8, Balch weakly tries to explain the birds-animals-reptiles sequence as referring not to Gen 1:26 (or 1:30) but to “unclean animals” (citing esp. Lev 11:13, 20-21, 23; also Gen 7:8; Lev 7:21; 27:27; Ezek 38:20; Wis 11:15; 4 Macc 1:34). Balch is wrong. There is nothing in Rom 1:23 that suggests a limitation to unclean creatures (cf. Wis 13:14; but Wis 15:18). One of the images that Paul says that idols are being fashioned into is that of a “human,” and humans are not inherently unclean creatures. Indeed, a bull calf (as in the golden calf) is not an *unclean* animal (cf. Wis 13:14; 15:18). Finally, the sequence and wording of birds-animals-reptiles is closer to Gen 1:26 than to any of the alternative verses that Balch cites. Ezekiel 38:20 is an exception but Balch’s citation of this verse does not discount an echo to Gen 1:26 in Rom 1:23, for five reasons: (1) Ezek 38:20 would be a relatively insignificant verse, compared to Gen 1:26, for Paul to have foremost in mind; (2) Ezek 38:20 does not cite the male-female differentiation mentioned by Paul in Rom 1:26-27 but Gen 1:27 does; (3) Ezek 38:20 does not convey the sense of irony and inversion that a connection between Gen 1:26 and Rom 1:23 would convey (humans who have been given dominion over the animal world now worship the very creatures that they were designed to govern); (4) Ezek 38:20 does not have in view only “unclean animals,” which Balch contends that Paul is thinking of in Rom 1:23; and (5) commentators acknowledge that Ezek 38:20 itself echoes the Priestly account in Gen 1:26, 30.

echoes to the Passover, the Sinai covenant ratification ceremony, the suffering servant text in Isa 53:12, the "new covenant" prophecy in Jer 31:31-34, and the messianic banquet motif in Isa 25:6-10. Similarly, Rom 1:24-27 echoes not only Gen 1:27 but also the Sodom narrative and the Levitical prohibitions.¹⁴¹ In fact, in my book I cite approvingly Knut Holter's mention of an additional echo to Deut 4:15-18 (LXX) in Rom 1:23-27. Deuteronomy 4:16-18 (LXX) reads: "Do not act unlawfully by making for yourselves a carved *likeness*, any kind of *image*, a *likeness of male or female*, a *likeness of any beast . . . bird . . . reptile . . .*" The connection to idolatry is mentioned here, not in Gen 1:26-30. Yet Holter rightly does not make allusions to Gen 1:26-27 and Deut 4:15-18 into an "either-or" proposition:

It seems clear to me that Gen 1,26-28 provides a reasonable backdrop for . . . Rom 1,23-27. Deut 4 is obviously the model for this negative echoing of Gen 1, but both the choice of terminology and the emphasizing of the sexual differentiation point back to Gen 1, rather than to Deut 4.¹⁴²

Balch's contention that Rom 1:23 cannot be alluding to both the creation story in Gen 1 and the Golden Calf episode mentioned in Ps 105:20 also fails to take into account the constant interchange between creation and covenant in ancient Israelite and early Jewish literature, to say nothing of Paul. Indeed, in Rom 1:18-23 idolatry is presented as a suppression of the truth about God "the *Creator*" (1:25, which summarizes 1:19-23), whose "invisible attributes since *the creation of the world* are clearly perceived, being mentally grasped by means of *the things made*" (1:20). Obviously, when Israel worshipped the golden calf at Sinai it participated in the same kind of renunciation of the Creator God and inversion of creation design that pagans routinely

¹⁴¹See pp. 182-86 and p. 233 n. 115, respectively, in this essay.

¹⁴²"A Note on the Old Testament Background of Rom 1,23-27," *BN* 69 (1993): 21-23. I cited this in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 290 n. 58. Balch appears to be unaware of my mention of it.

participate in: foolishly and shamefully choosing to worship images in the form of animals rather than exercising proper “dominion” over the animal kingdom (Gen 1:26-31). With respect to creation and covenant, there is no “either-or” here, but rather a “both-and.” Balch insists that the theme of creation is not in view in Rom 1:18-27 even though the theme is explicitly stamped on Paul’s argument.

*Excursus on Adam’s Transgression and Death
in the Wisdom of Solomon*

As part of his effort to show that Rom 1:18-32 “is not an interpretation of Gen 1,” Balch contends that the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon, a text that has obvious affinities with Romans, does not have a concept of a fall of Adam that introduces death into the world. According to Balch, “the Wisdom of Solomon does mention death [in 2:23-24], and also Adam [in 10:1], but the book does not connect the two.” In an adjoining note referring to p. 249 of *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* Balch claims that I “give a Pauline reading of the two texts in Wisdom.”¹⁴³ On p. 249 I state: “As with Rom 1:18-32, though the author [of the Wisdom of Solomon] seems to attribute all evil in the world to the development of idolatry . . . , elsewhere in the book he makes clear that corruption was introduced into creation at the fall of Adam (2:23-24; 10:1).”

Is Balch right that Wis 2:23-24, in conjunction with 10:1, does not suggest that corruption and death was introduced into creation at the fall of Adam? I do not believe so. Wisdom of Solomon 2:23-24 reads: “God created the human for immortality and made him the image of his own self (or: eternity),¹⁴⁴ but through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to the share of that one experience it (i.e., death; or: him, i.e., the devil).” Wisdom 10:1 says: “This one (i.e., Wisdom) closely protected (or: guarded, preserved [*diephylaxen*]) the first-formed father of the world, he alone having been created, and extricated (or: delivered [*exeilato*]) him from his own transgression” (cf. NRSV; Winston).

¹⁴³P. 3 and p. 3 n. 11.

¹⁴⁴The choice of readings, “his own self” or “eternity,” involves a text-critical problem.

What does one of the world's experts on the Wisdom of Solomon say? David Winston comments on Wis 2:24: "If the allusion of our verse is to Genesis 3, *as is most likely*, it is one of the earliest extant Jewish texts to equate the serpent with the devil."¹⁴⁵ Winston makes this evaluation in full awareness of the remarks of the late-second-century Christian apologist Theophilus of Antioch who connects Satan's envy and the introduction of death into the world with Cain's killing of Abel (*Autol.* 2.25).¹⁴⁶ James Barr draws a similar conclusion about a reference to Adam in Wis 2:23-24: "Wisdom's understanding of Genesis is in this regard the same one that is basic to Paul."¹⁴⁷

John R. Levison is perhaps the most prominent and skilled proponent among those who argue that Wis 2:24 refers to Cain's killing of Abel.¹⁴⁸ Stanley Stowers cites him approvingly.¹⁴⁹ Levison thinks that *diabolou*, translated above as "devil's" in the phrase "the devil's envy" should be rendered "enemy's" and refers to Cain. That strikes me as unlikely (even the reference from Theophilus above speaks of Satan's activity). He notes rightly that in 10:3-4 Cain is not only blamed for his brother's death but for the flood as well. Moreover, Levison contends, Cain's action in 10:3-4 parallels that of the sage's opponents in 1:16-3:11. Cain introduces spiritual death into the world. Yet even Levison admits some ambiguity when he states: "Whichever view is correct [i.e., whether the allusion is to Gen 3 or Gen 4], it is obvious that the author adapts the Genesis narratives."¹⁵⁰ Levison interprets 10:1 to

¹⁴⁵*The Wisdom of Solomon* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1979), 121 (emphasis added).

¹⁴⁶In a recent article Winston suggests that the author of Wisdom understands "the devil's envy" figuratively, that is, "as a figure for the irrational impulses that often drive human beings to vicious behavior and lead to spiritual death" ("Theodicy in the Wisdom of Solomon," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* [ed. A. Laato and J. C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2003], 525-45, quote from p. 527).

¹⁴⁷*Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*, 62.

¹⁴⁸*Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism: From Sirach to 2 Baruch* (JSPSup 1; Sheffield: JSOT, 1988), 51-52, 62, 155.

¹⁴⁹*A Rereading of Romans*, 86-87.

¹⁵⁰*Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism*, 52.

mean, in paraphrase, “wisdom preserved Adam with the result that he did not transgress.”¹⁵¹ However, 10:1 refers explicitly to “his own [Adam’s] transgression,” which is awkward phrasing if Adam did not transgress. It is better to read the text as saying that Wisdom “extricated” Adam from the full effects of “his own transgression” and in this sense “protected” or “preserved” Adam from experiencing the spiritual death subsequently experienced by “unrighteous” Cain.

Certainly Wis 2:23 directs the reader to Adam by referring to God’s creation of humans in his image. Genesis 2-3 itself supports the notion of death (i.e., mortality) entering the world through Adam’s transgression. Before succumbing to the temptation to eat from the tree of knowledge, Adam had access to the tree of life (2:9, 16-17). After succumbing he is banished from the garden of Eden, lest “he take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” (3:22-24). The serpent tempts Eve with the words “You will not die” if she eats of the tree of knowledge—that is, eating from the tree of knowledge would not lead to being cut off from the tree of life (3:4). Moreover, while Wis 10:1 does not specifically connect Adam with death, it does at least refer to Adam and his transgression. As *4 Ezra* 3:7 states, “you laid upon [Adam] one commandment of yours; but he transgressed it, and immediately you appointed death for him and for his descendants.”¹⁵² To be sure, *Fourth Ezra* was written at the end of the first century C.E., after the destruction of the temple. But Theophilus’s *Ad Autolyicum* is later still. In addition, Paul’s letter to the Romans is certainly not a post-70 text and yet Paul himself could state quite clearly that with Adam’s transgression “sin entered into the world and through sin death, and so death passed into all humans” (5:12; cf. 5:15-19).

In his compendium *Traditions of the Bible*, James Kugel cites Wis 2:24 in connection with Adam’s fall.¹⁵³ He also cites later traditions that connect the devil’s envy or jealousy with Adam in his pre-Fall state.¹⁵⁴ In *Life of Adam and Eve* (the Latin text) the devil tells Adam: “all my enmity and envy and

¹⁵¹Ibid., 60.

¹⁵²Cf. 7:116-18; 2 Bar. 17:3; 19:8; 23:4-5; *Apoc. Mos.* 14.

¹⁵³James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 121.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., 122-24.

sorrow concern you," because the devil had been expelled from heaven for not worshipping the image of God in Adam, before Adam's fall. "So with deceit I assailed your wife and made you to be expelled through her from the joys of your bliss" (12:1-16:3).¹⁵⁵ According to *3 Bar.* 4:8, "the devil became envious and tricked him (Adam) by means of the vine (the tree of knowledge)," for God did not allow Adam to touch the tree of knowledge that had been planted by the devil. The only reference to the devil's envy that links up with Cain is the Theophylus text: "When Satan saw that Adam and his wife not only were alive but had produced offspring, he was overcome by envy" (*Autol.* 2:29).

In conclusion, although absolute certainty cannot be had on the interpretation of "the devil's envy" in *Wis* 2:24, the weight of evidence appears to support a connection with Adam's "own transgression" in the garden of Eden.

Balch's Rejection of a Complementarity Argument

The second reason that Balch gives for denying an allusion to creation structures is this: He thinks that my explanation of Paul's appeal to nature in *Rom* 1:26-27 as an argument based on the transparent anatomical and procreative complementarity of men and women is ridiculous. Balch comments sarcastically:

Gagnon claims that (*as a prophet?*) his heterosexual eyes can look at a penis and vagina and *see divine revelation!* I know of no comparable claim among Israel's prophets or early Christian apostles that revelation occurs in this manner, through one person's eyes looking at sex organs. . . . *the penis has more possibilities than Gagnon imagines.* . . . [The Jewish idea of special revelation to Abraham and Moses being disseminated to the Gentile world] is a far cry from *Gagnon's claim to be a natural theologian* in the 21st century, who independently of special revelation, with his heterosexual *eyeballs* looks at a penis and vagina and perceives a

¹⁵⁵Cf. *Heb* 1:6; *2 En.* 31:3-6; *Apoc. Sedr.* 5:1; *Cav. Tr.* [E] 2:22-3:2; Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 2:22.

revelation from God. . . . There is a qualitative distinction between Philo's [natural] theology and Gagnon's individualized natural theology, looking with his heterosexual *eyeballs* at sexual organs and seeing divine revelation.¹⁵⁶

My response consists of two main parts. 1. Ancient writers did comment on the complementarity of the sex organs. 2. The complementarity argument that I employ certainly includes, *but is definitely not restricted to*, the anatomical dimension. At the outset, though, the contradiction should be duly noted that Balch has no problem with being able to "look upon" homosexual orientation and "see" divine revelation.

1. *Ancient writers on the complementarity of sex organs*. It is a bit bizarre that Balch would ridicule the notion of anatomical and procreative complementarity from an ancient perspective. For, in Balch's own edited volume, one of the writers whose work Balch extols makes this very point. William R. Schoedel states clearly:

I shall argue that those [ancient writers] who appeal to *nature* against same-sex eros find it convenient to concentrate on *the more or less obvious uses of the orifices of the body* to suggest the proper channel for the more diffused sexual impulses of the body.¹⁵⁷

To Schoedel's observation I can add another, one from Craig A. Williams in his book *Roman Homosexuality*. Even Williams admits that

some kind of argument from "design" seems to lurk in the background of Cicero's, Seneca's, and Musonius' claims: the penis is "designed" to penetrate the vagina, the vagina is "designed" to be penetrated by the penis.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶Pp. 3, 5, and 6 (emphases mine).

¹⁵⁷"Same-Sex Eros," 46 (emphases mine).

¹⁵⁸*Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 242. Williams goes on to say that "comments like theirs represented a minority opinion" (p. 243). Yet that this would be a "minority

Then, too, the second-century physician Soranus (or his later “translator” Caelius Aurelianus) referred to *molles*, “soft men” eager for penetration, as those who “subjugated to obscene uses parts not so intended” and disregarded “the places of our body which divine providence destined for definite functions” (*On Chronic Diseases* 4.9.131). What does Balch want to argue? That Greek and Roman moralists and physicians might have thought such things but certainly not Paul?

If Balch did attempt such an argument, it would be strange indeed. First, it would be surprising if Jews did not embrace a similar critique of male-male intercourse, inasmuch as the critique intimates the prohibition of *all* homoerotic unions. Generally the Greco-Roman moralists and physicians using such a critique accepted, or at least tolerated, homosexual practice on the part of active male agents. The critique stood in tension with their position of exceptions. But Jews did not have exceptions—at least no stated exception ever appears in ancient Jewish texts. As such, a critique based on the complementarity of male-female genitalia would be more at home in the mindset of early Judaism. Indeed, Gen 2:21-24 obviously views the copulative act that takes place in marriage as both a symbol of, and actualizing instrument for, the complementary reemerging of two sexual “others” into a sexual whole. Surely ancient Jews saw the anatomical and procreative compatibility of male-female genitalia as an integral part of this symbolism and instrumentality.

Second, in his essay in the Eerdmans book, Balch seems quite happy to appeal to complete continuity between pagan perspectives on homosexual practice and Jewish perspectives. He cites a misogynistic text on male and female “nature” in Aristotle and then insists that opposition to same-sex intercourse in Leviticus and Romans was predicated solely and exclusively on a similar misogynistic perspective.¹⁵⁹ So apparently

opinion” among Roman moralists is precisely what one would expect given the fact that few Romans, unlike Jews, believed that same-sex intercourse should be proscribed absolutely.

¹⁵⁹“Concluding Observations by the Editor,” 299 (citing Aristotle, *Hist. an.* 9.1.608a32-608.b18). Ironically, even the Aristotle text is based on assumptions about how males and females are made, that is, about their respective “natures.”

Balch does see a strong continuity—except perhaps when it does not serve his purposes to see it.¹⁶⁰

Third, Philo seems to be aware of pagan arguments from complementary anatomical and physiological design. He mocks the attempt of the men of Sodom to “mount” other males as though they were females, that is, as though these males had a complementary orifice designed for penile insertion and procreation (*Abr.* 135-36).¹⁶¹ There are certainly misogynistic dimensions to Philo’s argument here and elsewhere but I argue that Philo’s critique is not exhausted by the charge of misogyny. In fact, in the ancient world misogyny was often a stronger motive for promoting than for prohibiting male homoerotic behavior. Balch fails even to note my arguments, let alone respond to them.¹⁶² Balch certainly does not bother to make a positive case for claiming that the pervasive, strong, and absolute opposition to homoerotic practice that existed in ancient Israel and early Judaism depended *entirely* on a misogynistic core, without remainder. In addition, while Balch appears to acknowledge the role of procreation arguments in Philo’s critique of homoerotic unions,¹⁶³ it strangely escapes his notice that this is itself a creation argument, a “natural theology” predicated on the way God created men and women. The same is true of Philo’s repeatedly expressed concern for the erasure of the God-given masculine stamp by the feminized passive male partner. Despite the misogynistic overlay of some of Philo’s remarks, Philo was clearly thinking of how God at creation engraved an essential maleness on males, including distinctive male anatomy.

Fourth, the immediate literary context of Rom 1:24-27 supports my contention that in Rom 1:24-27 Paul was thinking, in part, of male-

¹⁶⁰For my part, I generally see greater discontinuity than Balch and Fredrickson would allow. But in the particular circumstance when Greek and Roman moralists and physicians spoke about the anatomical and physiological compatibility between men and women, they were certainly moving closer to the Jewish stance of stressing arguments applicable to *all* homoerotic unions.

¹⁶¹Cited in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 172.

¹⁶²*Ibid.*, 172-76, 181-82. This is in keeping with the overall impression that Balch has not read anything in my book prior to p. 235.

¹⁶³P. 7.

female anatomical complementarity.¹⁶⁴ Balch offers no explanation for why Paul highlights the sin of same-sex intercourse, on the horizontal dimension, as the first consequence of note to the vertical offense of idolatry. I do offer an explanation. Both idolatry and same-sex intercourse represent attempts at suppressing the truth about God in creation or nature, transparent to human minds and even visible to human sight. Both acts are spoken of as “exchanges” of clear natural revelation for gratification of distorted desires (1:23, 25 and 1:26 respectively). Both acts are depicted as absurd—foolish or self-dishonoring—denials of natural revelation. The parallel, and not merely consequential, relationship between idolatry and same-sex intercourse is confirmed, as we have seen, in *T. Naph.* 3:3-4. As Paul understood matters, those who had suppressed the truth about God visible in creation were more apt to suppress the truth about their sexual bodies visible in nature. If Paul is willing to talk about what “nature” teaches about hair length (1 Cor 11:14), what sense does it make to say, as Balch claims, that Paul saw no relationship at all between God’s will for male-female unions in Gen 1-2 and the obvious complementary character of male and female anatomy and physiology?

2. *My broad complementarity argument.* My second response to Balch’s sarcastic characterization is that my understanding of Paul’s view of complementarity is not limited to human anatomy (i.e., the parts fit). I make quite clear in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* that anatomical complementarity serves as an important heuristic springboard for grasping the broad complementarity of maleness and femaleness. For example, I state at the beginning of the concluding chapter:

Scripture rejects homosexual behavior because it is a violation of the gendered existence of male and female ordained by God at creation. Homosexual intercourse puts males in the category of females and females in the category of males, insofar as they relate to others as sexual beings. . . . God intended the very act of sexual intercourse to be an act of pluralism, embracing a sexual “other”

¹⁶⁴*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 264-68.

rather than a sexual “same.” . . . Same-sex intercourse represents a suppression of the visible evidence in nature regarding male-female anatomical and procreative complementarity. Complementarity extends also to a range of personality traits and predispositions that contribute to making heterosexual unions enormously more successful in terms of fidelity, endurance, and health than same-sex ones.¹⁶⁵

The complementarity of the sex organs is a very important dimension of the whole, as is evident from the health hazards and repulsive quality of men who eroticize the anal cavity for penetration and even oral activity. Anatomy is also a clue not easily falsified, unlike the malleable character of many human desires. Christians are not anti-body gnostic dualists. At the same time, the matter is about more than sex organs. It is about essential maleness and femaleness. In effect, Paul is saying in Rom 1:24-27: Start with the obvious fittedness of human anatomy. When done with that, consider procreative design as a clue. Then move on to a broad range of interpersonal differences that define maleness and femaleness. Although the intertextual echo in Rom 1:26-27 is primarily to Gen 1:27, Paul’s citation of Gen 2:24 in another context that deals with sexual immorality and that mentions male-male intercourse (cf. 1 Cor 6:9, 16) indicates that Paul also had in mind the image of the splitting and remerging of the two sexual halves in Gen 2:24.

When the anatomical complementarity of men and women is viewed as *emblematic* of the complementarity of essential maleness and essential femaleness generally, it becomes much more difficult to argue that attention to complementarity is too simple or superficial.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 487-88.

¹⁶⁶In effect, to trivialize the reality and importance of male-female differentiation—for example, to regard it as a mere social construct—is to trivialize pro-homosex advocacy for *same-sex* erotic unions. A case in point: One occasionally hears pro-homosex apologists derisively referring to an obsession with “plumbing” or “equipment”—differences in male-female anatomy—on the part of those opposed to homosexual practice. But the latter are no more concerned solely with “plumbing” and “equipment” than are exclusive homosexuals. Certainly anatomical male-female differences are an important part of homoerotic attraction. Homosexuals, certainly

It is this desire to *merge with what one already is* that Scripture, from Genesis 1-2 on, finds problematic. One sees a similar argument made by a Corinthian character, Charicles, in the Pseudo-Lucianic *Amores* or *Affairs of the Heart*:

And who then first looked with the eyes at the male as though at a female . . . ? One nature came together in one bed. But *seeing themselves in one another* they were ashamed neither of what they were doing nor of what they were having done to them but . . . exchanged great disgrace for a little pleasure.¹⁶⁷

Precisely because sex is not just about more intimacy but also about a complementary erotic merger, the sex or gender of one's partner makes all the difference. There is a world of difference between being attracted to complementary otherness and non-complementary sameness. A same-sex erotic merger is structurally discordant because the sexual counterpart or complement to one's own sex is missing.

So when Balch talks about "the penis [having] more possibilities than Gagnon imagines" he misses the point.¹⁶⁸ The obvious compatibil-

male homosexuals, are erotically aroused by the body parts that they share in common with persons of the same sex. Yet they are also attracted to an array of other features that define their own sex. Male homosexuals are erotically aroused by essential maleness, female homosexuals by essential femaleness—in short, by what they already are as sexual beings. If it were otherwise, a gender-nonconforming partner of the opposite sex could adequately satisfy their "homoerotic" desires. Persons who claim exclusive sexual attraction for persons of the same sex are tacitly acknowledging the reality of essential maleness and essential femaleness in males and females respectively. They acknowledge the significance of sexual differentiation but, unlike persons who are heterosexually inclined, they do not want someone who is a sexual "other." They want someone who is a sexual same, which by definition is sexual narcissism; or, if not sexual narcissism, at least sexual self-deception. This is a form of arrested sexual development.

¹⁶⁷See my translation of *Am.* 19-21 in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 165-66 n. 10.

¹⁶⁸Balch adds: "Many Christian married couples would surely deny Gagnon's claim that the mouth is unnatural in sex" (p. 3). Here Balch misrepresents what I say. I do not say that the use of the mouth is unnatural in sex—though oral-anal contact, which is a common enough activity in male homoerotic relationships, probably is an unnatural use of the mouth (*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 475, n. 215). What I

ity of male and female genitals is both part of and emblematic of the broad complementarity of essential maleness and essential femaleness that is so well illustrated by both the copulative act and the story of the splitting off of woman from a sexually binary, primal human in Gen 2:21-24. Scripture teaches that woman is man's sexual "other half" and counterpart, not another man. This remains true irrespective of whatever other sexual connections one might imagine.

Is Rom 1:18-32 about Special, Non-Natural Revelation?

In what is arguably his most tortured argument of all, Balch contends that Paul in Rom 1:18-32 deduces a universally accessible knowledge of God and God's will from a notion of "special revelation given to Abraham and Moses" being disseminated to pagans. Balch's proposal represents a profound instance of not listening to the scriptural text. I am not suggesting that a belief about disseminated special revelation to pagans did not exist in some Jewish and Christian circles. Certainly it did. I am disputing, however, that such a belief makes any sense of Paul's argument in Rom 1:18-32 or, for that matter, any nature arguments used in Greco-Roman moral discourse or early Judaism.

On what basis does Paul contend in Romans 1:18-20 that those who worship statues in the images of humans and, worse, animals are "without excuse"? For pagans without Scripture, the grandeur and order of creation itself—not access to the diffused special revelation to Abraham and Moses—testifies to a God who is above and beyond creation:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against every impiety and unrighteousness of humans who suppress the truth about God in their unrighteousness, because the knowable aspect of God is visible/evident to them, for God has made it visible/evident to them. *For from the creation of*

say is that neither the anus nor the mouth is a "complementary orifice for the male member" (pp. 254-55). The hand is also used in sex, and quite rightly, but that does not make it a complementary organ to the genitals.

the world on, his invisible qualities are clearly seen, being mentally apprehended by means of the things made—both his eternal power and divinity—so that they are without excuse.

A limited appeal to natural revelation here is unmistakable. Paul does not say that God made the knowledge of himself evident by means of spreading knowledge of the stories about Abraham or the law of Moses. Rather he says that God's "invisible qualities," "his eternal power and divinity," are "mentally apprehended by means of the things made." Moreover, this knowledge about God has been accessible not just since the time of Abraham and Moses but also "since the creation of the world." Only a prior commitment not to acknowledge a scriptural witness to natural revelation could cause one to miss it.

The closest parallel to Rom 1:18-20 supports this conclusion:

All people who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable *from the good things that are seen* to know the one who exists, nor did they recognize the artisan while paying heed to his works; but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars . . . were the gods that rule the world. . . . *Let them perceive from them how much more powerful is the one who formed them. For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.* Yet . . . perhaps they go astray while seeking God and . . . trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful. Yet again, *not even they are to be excused; for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things?* (Wis 13:1-9; NRSV)

Similar to Paul's argument the writer condemns those who worship the elements of the world as without excuse. They are not condemned because they refused to accept a diluted form of the special revelation given to Abraham and Moses. Rather, they are condemned because they did not exercise an innate capacity to "investigate the world." They should have been able to "recognize the artisan" and "Creator"

“from the greatness and beauty of created things” perceptible to sight (similarly, *T. Naph.* 3:3-4). Is this a “far cry,” in Balch’s words, from the notion of being able to perceive God’s will for human sexuality on the basis of visual observation of the human creation, that is, on the basis of natural revelation? Obviously not.¹⁶⁹

By the same token, can Balch name a single Jewish or pagan text that, when referring to same-sex intercourse as “contrary to nature,” means a form of diffused special revelation emanating from Abraham or the law of Moses? I encourage Balch to comb through the comprehensive presentation of texts in ch. 2 of *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, “Same-Sex Intercourse as ‘Contrary to Nature’ in Early Judaism,”¹⁷⁰ and find me just one such text. He cannot. “Nature” is not code for matters imparted by “special revelation.” It refers rather to the way things are made, just as Paul puts it: realities “mentally apprehended by means of the things made.” There are, to be sure, instances in ancient literature where writers confuse convention with nature or make invalid moral applications from correct observation about nature. Paul’s reference to what nature teaches about hair in 1 Cor 11:14 may be an instance of the latter;¹⁷¹ but, then too, his appeal to nature in that text is an ancillary subordinate argument and over a matter that Paul does not regard as life-or-death. Certainly, ancient Jewish writers who appeal to nature never intend readers to think of a diffusion of special revelation. The point should be too obvious for words.

On Appeals to Creation as regards Sabbath and Hair

It is revealing that, though Balch categorically denies that Paul has Gen 1 in mind in Rom 1:24-27, he nevertheless feels a need to engage

¹⁶⁹Cf. Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*, 65, 69: “Wisdom and Paul alike build their arguments against idolatry on the basis of creation. . . . But if Wisdom contains natural theology, it becomes much more likely that Romans also contains it. . . . and Paul’s view that homosexual relations are contrary to φύσις (cf. Wisd. 14:26) would seem to suggest a clear implication of a ‘natural’ *order* in creation which it is wrong to override.”

¹⁷⁰*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 159-83.

¹⁷¹See the discussion below; and in *ibid.*, 373-77.

in damage control as regards appeals to the creation texts. He attempts to make two points. Neither of them is convincing.

1. *Food laws and Sabbath*. It is worth quoting Balch's first point at length to underscore his misrepresentation of my work, his failure to read most of my book, and his problematic hermeneutic.

Gagnon makes the mistake of calling food and holy days "minor matters" (242). He downplays the importance of kosher food (Lev 11-15), although it was . . . the central concern of Pharisaic Judaism . . . and may well have been at the center of disputes among Roman Christians. The Sabbath . . . was also not "minor." Gagnon is willing to use a term from Stoic philosophy, *adiaphoron* (243, 244), to dismiss one of the ten commandments legitimated by the Genesis creation story! Since our discussion of homosexual practice involves detailed Levitical laws (Lev 18:22; 20:13), how does Gagnon presume to dismiss a key commandment from the decalogue mythologized by Genesis as well as five chapters of Leviticus concerning food as "minor, indifferent matters," while elevating two Levitical verses to "unbending" (243) law?¹⁷²

The simple answer to Balch's question is: Jesus and Paul have instructed the church not to treat sexual matters like matters of diet and calendar. Neither Jesus nor Paul—nor, for that matter, any NT author—put matters of diet and calendar on the same level of significance as an other-sex structural prerequisite for sexual unions. Presumably, Christians should take their cue from Jesus, the Lord of all and Head of the church, and from Paul, the chief apostle to the Gentiles and the most profound interpreter of the gospel in the early church, and from the consensus witness of New Testament Scripture, which is the church's ultimate authority for faith and practice. There is no great mystery here.

Balch distorts what I say about diet and calendar. He contends that I operate with the erroneous notion that diet and calendar were unimpor-

¹⁷²P. 1.

tant concerns in early Judaism. Unfortunately for Balch, I never say such a thing. Whenever I teach courses on Romans or 1 Corinthians or Pauline Theology I always make quite clear the great importance of diet and calendar matters in Second Temple Judaism(s)—particularly in the period of and following the Maccabean revolt against the forced hellenization of Antiochus Epiphanes. Specific dietary practices (particularly the prohibition against pork) and Sabbath observance were obviously among the defining features of Judaism in Paul’s day. What I say is that *Paul* treated matters of diet and calendar as matters of indifference.

Paul here has in view primarily those requirements [of the law] *that in the first century were regarded as distinctively Jewish* such as circumcision, *special dietary laws, and special holy days (the sabbath, Jewish festivals)*. . . . *Paul hoped* that his proclamation of the gospel to the Roman Christians would so fill them “with all joy and peace in the course of their believing” (15:13) *that they would be able to overlook differences on minor matters [of diet and calendar] and stop judging one another.*¹⁷³

How could I be any clearer? Circumcision, special dietary practices, and special holy days such as Sabbath functioned as primary markers of Jewish identity in the first century. However, *Paul* wanted the Roman believers to regard such things as matters over which Christians could agree to disagree. The “strong” should not look down on the weak for their scruples—even though Paul agreed with the strong that “nothing is unclean in itself” (Rom 14:14) and that “all things are clean” (14:20) and, presumably, also that “every day” is to be judged alike (14:5). And the weak are not to judge the strong on such matters. “For the kingdom of God is not (about) food and drink but righteousness. . . .” (14:17).

At the same time, it is clear from Rom 1:24-27; 6:19; and 13:12-14, to say nothing of 1 Cor 5-6, that various immoral sexual behaviors, including same-sex intercourse, were not matters of indifference for

¹⁷³*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 240-42 (emphasis added).

Paul. Paul repeatedly warned his converts that to engage in sexually immoral behavior, which for him obviously included same-sex intercourse, was to risk disinheritance from the kingdom of God.¹⁷⁴ Paul categorically rejected the equation of freedom from dietary restraints with freedom in sexual behavior (1 Cor 6:12-14).¹⁷⁵ In taking this approach Paul was following in the trajectory of Jesus, who on the one hand loosened Sabbath expectations and gave a lower priority to food laws (Mark 2:23-3:6; 7:1-23) and on the other hand intensified an already narrowly circumscribed sexual ethic given to him in the Hebrew Bible and declared that a person's eschatological fate depended on maintaining a sexually pure life (Matt 5:27-32; Mark 10:2-12). Apparently Jesus and Paul felt that there were deeper moral issues at stake in denying structural prerequisites to sexual unions than in modifying Sabbath and food laws. Would that Balch agreed.

I also discuss in my book why the Levitical prohibitions against male-male intercourse should not be set aside like Levitical food laws. Had Balch read greater portions of my book he would have had the answer to his question of why the church for the past two millennia, not just "Gagnon," has "presumed" to retain the one and to set aside the other.¹⁷⁶ I might ask a similar question of Balch: How does Balch, together with the church generally, presume to dismiss or modify Sabbath law, as well as five chapters of Leviticus concerning food, while elevating a few explicit statements in the Old Testament against incest, including those involving committed adults? His answer to this question should help him in figuring out the answer to the question that he addresses to me.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 242-44. In addition to the texts cited above, see: 1 Thess 4:2-8; Gal 5:19-21; 2 Cor 12:21; cf. Col 3:5-10; Eph 4:17-19; 5:3-6; 1 Tim 1:9-11.

¹⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 294-97.

¹⁷⁶For example, *ibid.*, 112-28, 155-57, 432-41, 448-51. See now also: *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 62-68, 100-101 (with online notes); and my online "Rejoinder" to Dan Via, pp. 22-28 (at <http://www.robgagnon.net/2Views/homoViaRejoinder.pdf>).

¹⁷⁷Balch's reference to only "two Levitical verses" that address male-male intercourse both miscounts the number of OT texts that speak to the issue and makes the hermeneutical error of equating infrequency of explicit mention with insignificance. Bestiality is mentioned less in the Bible than same-sex intercourse. Incest is

2. *Hair and head coverings.* Balch's second point is not as inane as the first. He observes that in 1 Cor 11:2-16 Paul appeals both to the Genesis creation stories (vv. 7-9) and to nature (vv. 14-15) when arguing that women (or wives) should wear a head covering and be subordinate to men (or their husbands). So, Balch concludes, Paul (and the Corinthians) could make invalid appeals to Genesis and nature. This in turn raises the question of why we should accept the validity of a Genesis-nature argument for Rom 1:24-27 but not for 1 Cor 11:7-15.¹⁷⁸

Once more Balch appears to be unaware of the fact that I address this question elsewhere in my book than on pp. 235-84, to which he seems to have limited his reading. I wrote:

In any case, it would not be surprising, given some of the arguments he employs in 1 Cor 11:1-16, if gender hierarchy were one of Paul's concerns in his discussion of homosexuality in Rom 1:26-27. Nevertheless, there are good reasons for thinking that for Paul in Rom 1:26-27 the blurring of gender stratification, if a factor at all, was secondary to the blurring of gender itself.

First, not even in 1 Cor 11:3-16 is total male dominance the overriding consideration. Paul is careful to qualify his argument for male headship with the point that neither male nor female exists without the other and that men are born from women (11:11-12). Paul is not trying to take away the right of women to prophesy but only to have them prophesy with sensitivity to gender distinctions. Elsewhere in his letter Paul undermines conventional, subordinate roles for women [cf. 1 Cor 7:3-4; cf. Rom 16; Gal 3:28]...

dealt with in Scripture only about as often as same-sex intercourse. Does Balch want to argue that sex acts with animals or with close blood relations were of minor concern to the authors of Scripture?

¹⁷⁸Pp. 8, 14. Balch does not actually concede that Paul may be alluding to Gen 1 in Rom 1:24-27 or may be making a natural theology argument there based in part on male-female anatomical complementarity. However, there is a certain "even if Paul were doing so" subtext to Balch's point.

Second, given the previous point and the significantly more severe responses that Paul takes toward homoeroticism in Rom 1:26-27 and 1 Cor 6:9, it seems unlikely that Paul's main concern with homosexual practice is that it threatens male dominance. . . . Something even more basic than gender stratification is at stake: nothing less than gender differentiation itself. The case is similar to that of incest, which Paul treats in 1 Corinthians 5 and for which he recommends expulsion from the community. . . .

Third, if one wants to argue that Paul's primary reason for rejecting homosexual behavior was his concern that male superiority over females not be undermined, then one has to explain why it is that Paul's position toward homosexual behavior (and the position of all biblical writers, and no doubt of Jesus himself) was more uncompromising than that of the prevailing Greco-Roman culture. . . . The fact that biblical authors made no such concessions [viz., to active male agents with males who were social inferiors] suggests that their concern was broader than status differentiation. Brooten, Nissinen, and others have to argue, in effect, that Paul and Jesus were simply more misogynistic than their Greek and Roman contemporaries. . . .

Fourth, on lexical grounds there is little basis for claiming that Paul's references to "nature" refer to contingent cultural norms. Outside of Rom 1:26 Paul uses *physis* in six texts. . . . In all of these instances, "nature" corresponds to the essential material, inherent, biological, or organic constitution of things as created and set in motion by God. . . . Even [in 1 Cor 11:14-15] there appears to be an element in Paul's reasoning that we would ascribe to nature in the proper sense—and Paul himself clearly distinguishes this argument from the next one based on church "custom" in 11:16. . . . Hence, the fact that women have greater success in retaining head hair than do men is, in Paul's view, nature's way of teaching us that long hair is appropriate for women and inappropriate for men. . . .

Even if we grant that this is what Paul is thinking, however, it does not make the overall argument credible. Few Christians today follow Paul in arguing that Christian women should wear hats when attending church. Paul himself seems to have recognized that his point was hardly self-evident. He adds this argument from nature only after making several other pleas, including the cryptic “because of the angels.” He also immediately adds another appeal to ecclesiastical “custom” since he suspects the Corinthians will not find his logic convincing (contrast the argument from nature in Rom 1:26-27 which is the *only* argument Paul needs inasmuch as the complementarity of male and female sex organs is obvious and convincing). My only point here is that, for Paul, *physis* means “nature” in the strict sense, although the inferences Paul draws from nature have to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.¹⁷⁹

In short, there are clues in 1 Cor 11:2-16 itself for not taking as seriously the use of creation-and-nature arguments for head coverings as for same-sex intercourse. Paul does not threaten to put anyone out of the church over the issue of head coverings. He does not declare anyone to be at risk of not inheriting the kingdom of God. He does not lift up female liberation from head coverings as a prime instance, comparable to idolatry, of a direct assault on the creation of “male and female” as complementary sexual beings. To be sure, Paul reads Gen 2:21-24 as conveying male headship over women (1 Cor 11:7-10). Nevertheless, even in 1 Cor 11:2-16 Paul’s greatest concern is not male domination over women, as is evident from his remarks in 11:11-12: “Nevertheless, . . . man is not without woman in the Lord, for . . . the man is through the woman, and all things are from God.” Rather, Paul’s greatest concern is gender differentiation, not gender stratification. He does not want men to become feminized and women to become masculinized—or both “androgynized”—when women join men in praying and prophesying in the church. Indeed, there may be overtones of concern here that the blurring of gender differences not lead to, or give

¹⁷⁹*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 367-78.

an appearance of openness to, homosexual unions.¹⁸⁰ As with the Judaism of his day, Paul obviously believed that same-sex intercourse struck at the heart, and not just the periphery, of a divinely established, nature-imbedded norm for human sexual behavior.

Bearing False Witness: Balch's Effort at Demonization

At the end of his critique,¹⁸¹ Balch finally throws off any remaining vestige of scholarly civility and Christian charity by charging me with inciting violence against homosexual persons. Balch associates my work with the deaths of three homosexual men that occurred in 1998-99 (*The Bible and Homosexual Practice* was published in 2001). I suppose that I should not be too surprised. Lacking any viable or substantive critique of my book, Balch ultimately has to rely on demagoguery. Balch even goes so far as to associate me with

the horror of whites lynching 4,752 blacks between 1882 and 1968, blacks who were dehumanized by ordinary Christians as "beasts, dogs, snakes, animals, and brutes."

Gagnon comes dangerously close to such prejudice by associating homosexuality with incest, polygamy, pedophilia, prostitution, and bestiality. Gagnon writes that same-sex intercourse is an "abominable and detested practice," which should call forth "social repugnance." In his book he uses similar terminology: depraved sexuality, disgusted, intense revulsion, visceral response. . . . In the context of American history and use of the Bible, this is scary language that tends to dehumanize others and to incite violence, the kind of violence perpetrated against Matthew Shepard, Billy Jack Gaither, and Barry Winchell.

¹⁸⁰Cf. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 132-33 ("The adult male inhabitants of Roman Corinth did not wear their hair long, for to do so indicated their denial of their masculinity—they were parading as homosexuals"); Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Sex and Logic in 1 Cor 11:2-16," *CBQ* 42 (1980): 482-500; idem, "1 Cor 11:2-16 Once Again," *CBQ* 50 (1988): 265-74.

¹⁸¹Pp. 13-14.

My response to Balch's base accusation is fourfold. (Space considerations require me to put the full response on my website at www.robagnon.net and offer here a condensed version.)

1. Balch apparently decided that it would not fit the dehumanizing strategy of his review to note the many exhortations in my book to treat those with homoerotic desire with sympathy and compassion.¹⁸² Apparently he *wants* readers to draw an erroneous conclusion about my book. It does not serve his purposes to represent my work accurately and fairly, for his intent is to set up a "straw man."

2. The statements that Balch pulls out of context from my work refer to what *the biblical writers* thought. What does Balch want to argue? That the biblical writers, as also ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity generally, were *not* repulsed by homosexual practice? That they would have responded favorably, or at least neutrally, to a committed homosexual union? Such notions are historically preposterous. And it is precisely this fact that poses such a problem for Balch. Scripture itself clearly expresses revulsion for the act of same-sex intercourse.

Balch rails against me for talking about same-sex intercourse in the same breath as incest, polygamy, pedophilia, prostitution, and bestiality. Yet this is precisely what the authors of Scripture do. Leviticus 20 puts male-male intercourse alongside the first tier of sexual offenses involving adultery, sex with one's stepmother and daughter-in-law (and, by inference, sex with one's mother or daughter), and sex with an animal. Paul in 1 Cor 6:9 speaks of *pornoi* (which, in context, includes men who commit incest [1 Cor 5] and men who have sex with prostitutes [1 Cor 6:15-18]) and of adulterers. When he highlights "sexual uncleanness" in Rom 1:24-27 as an instance of human suppression of the truth about God evident in creation and nature, Paul chooses same-sex intercourse as the prime example. Jewish writers of the period treat same-sex intercourse as a form of sexual immorality exceeded only by bestiality and as more or less comparable to the worst form of incest,

¹⁸²Cf., for example, the lengthy comments in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 31-32, 227-28, 484-85, 489-93.

sex with one's mother.¹⁸³ Paul and, undoubtedly, Jesus viewed same-sex intercourse as a frontal assault on the two key creation texts regarding human sexuality, Gen 1:27 and 2:21-24; namely, on the concept there that two sexes are needed to reconstitute a one-flesh sexual whole, a "male and female," a "man" and "his woman." Balch does not point out the scriptural basis for associating same-sex intercourse with other sexual offenses because, of course, it is most inconvenient for him to do so.

Naturally, making comparisons between same-sex intercourse and other instances of sexual immorality does not infer an equation in all respects. It may merely reveal a particular fallacy in the reasoning of those who argue for same-sex intercourse. For example:

- *Bestiality*, though a worse offense than same-sex intercourse, is an effective analogue for communicating that some sexual acts are unnatural or that infrequency of mention does not necessarily correlate with insignificance.
- An analogical use of *pedophilia* can be helpful in showing that some sexual orientations are bad; that being sexually oriented in a given way does not necessarily mean "God made me that way" or that the associated behavior is morally good or neutral. Moreover, it demonstrates that the inability to cure completely a given set of innate impulses does not render therapeutic treatment a farce. Change is a multifaceted phenomenon and refers in the first instance to ability to *manage* unwanted impulses. Finally, the analogy of pedophilia reveals the error of arguing that sexual behaviors must be accepted if harm cannot be proven in all circumstances. Many adults who experienced sex as a child are asymptomatic for measurable harm.
- *Sex with prostitutes* is employed analogically by Paul in 1 Cor 6:15-20 to underscore the fact that, unlike food, sexual intercourse is never a matter of indifference. It always engages the

¹⁸³Cf. "Notes to Gagnon's Essay," n. 17. Views in early Judaism varied as to whether same-sex intercourse was worse, equivalent to, or less offensive than sex with one's mother.

body holistically, even in a commercial sexual relationship. Consequently the corrupting effect of sexual immorality can be total. Sex matters.

- *The best analogies to same-sex intercourse, however, are polygamy and incest.* Polygamy and incest can be conducted as adult, consensual, and committed unions. In addition, incest has a monogamous potential, while polygamy may arise from a “polysexual” orientation.
- Balch is offended by the *polygamy* analogy but does not tell us why. Promoting same-sex intercourse while pretending to be shocked by polygamy strikes me as a bit disingenuous given the facts that: (1) Scripture regards the other-sex dimension as more significant than a monogamy requirement; (2) fidelity and commitment can be manifested in “threesomes” or other polygamous unions; (3) male homosexual relationships show themselves to be, on the whole, deeply resistant to monogamy; and (4) the limitation of two persons in a sexual union at any one time is itself predicated on the idea, rejected by Balch, that two sexes are necessary and sufficient for establishing a sexual whole. Heterosexual polyamory is a lesser wrong than homoeroticism. The reason is obvious. Heterosexual polygamists have a greater likelihood of maintaining longer-term unions and fewer lifetime sex partners on average than homosexuals do. They have a better track record. Moreover, they achieve these results without violating the requirement for complementary sexual others.
- I also fail to see why Balch regards *incest* of an adult and committed sort to be so horrible, given his embrace of homoerotic unions. Concern for “intergenerational” spillover and for birth abnormalities (the latter a non-issue in this age of contraceptives) do not address what is really wrong about incest. What is so wrong about a man having sex with his mother in a consensual, committed relationship—assuming the father’s death or divorce? Unless Balch subscribes to the idea that too much structural sameness is a bad thing, he has no grounds for rejecting incest per se. Leviticus 18:6 proscribes sexual intercourse with “the flesh of one’s flesh”; that is, intercourse with another

who is too much of a *familial* "like" or "same." The concept is similar for same-sex intercourse, only the infraction manifests itself more deeply: intercourse with another who is a *sexual* "like" or "same." Boundaries based on sex (gender) are far more secure than boundaries that divide incestuous from non-incestuous relationships; the latter require greater elaboration to handle ambiguous cases. This is why Lev 18 devotes thirteen verses to discussing the boundaries of incest (vv. 6-18) but only one verse to defining male-male intercourse (v. 22). Moreover, an other-sex prerequisite is more obviously ensconced in creation (Gen 2:21-24) than is a prohibition of incest. Thus, a good case can be made that consensual incest between adults is, on the whole, not as bad as same-sex intercourse. Of course, Balch will continue to insist that it is horrendous to use adult, consensual incest as an analogue to same-sex intercourse. But he cannot say why it is so.

3. Persons such as Balch are not going to be satisfied until they coerce from others, legally and ecclesiastically, full acceptance and even appreciation of homosexual behavior. In effect, Balch is arguing that, contrary to what the biblical authors believed, there should be no taboo or stigma to homoerotic practice. Of course, if this happened, then there would be no basis for disapproving of homosexual behavior, at any level. Opposition to homosexual practice would be sheer prejudice, needing to be stamped out with the same rigor that society exercises in stamping out racism. The argument is entirely circular:

- a. No one can say anything critical of homosexual practice per se because, to do that, would incite others to violence against homosexually inclined persons.
- b. But if there is no criticism of homosexual practice per se, then such behavior cannot be morally wrong.
- c. Since homosexual practice per se cannot be morally wrong, there is no basis for being opposed to the behavior per se.
- d. Therefore anyone who remains critical of homosexual practice per se must be the moral equivalent of a racist and justly subject to all the negative sanctions that church and society can muster.

It does not take long to see, once laid out in this way, that such an argument is both logically and morally vacuous. Balch is not opposed to intolerance and hate. He simply projects his own onto others by demonizing those who do not share his own self-perceived enlightened viewpoint. He wants those who speak up against ecclesiastical and societal endorsement of homosexual behavior to be treated as the moral equivalent of racists. I suppose that we can thank people like Balch for giving us a clear warning of what we face in days to come if, out of tiredness or a desire to get along, we give up efforts to resist a coerced acceptance of homosexual practice. Marginalization and even persecution of those who speak out against homosexual practice are on the rise and will continue to get worse as greater concessions are made to an intolerant prohomosex agenda.¹⁸⁴ When people like Balch compare strong but compassionate opposition to homosexual practice with the lynching of African Americans in this country's past, the writing is clearly on the wall. The situation for the church will be dire if it allows itself to be bullied and intimidated by such hate rhetoric.

4. Finally, if Balch is going to be consistent in maintaining that even well-reasoned and compassionate arguments against homosexual practice incite persons to violence against homosexuals, then Balch will have to campaign against any negative views about incest, polyamory, bestiality, prostitution, and pedophilia, or at least work toward substantially toning down societal opposition. If it were otherwise—that is, if Balch wants society to continue to take a dim view of these behaviors—then it follows, by Balch's own reasoning, that Balch is inciting others to violence against polygamists and participants in adult incest, among others. For, according to Balch, to hold a vigorous societal revulsion for such behaviors is to incite violence. The consequence of violence necessarily follows from the attitude of revulsion. It is apparently not good enough to talk vigorously about loving those who violate sexual norms in the context of vigorously rejecting their behavior.

An additional irony here is that Balch demonizes and dehumanizes me and, by inference, those who share my views. So, apparently, in

¹⁸⁴Cf. Alan Sears and Craig Osten, *The Homosexual Agenda: Exposing the Principle Threat to Religious Freedom Today* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003).

comparing me with those who lynched blacks or murdered homosexuals, Balch is quite happy to incite others to violence.

It is interesting that Balch chose to ignore the incitement to hatred posed by his rhetoric. Critics of homosexual behavior, especially those who have participated in political efforts to roll back a coercive homosexual agenda or who have testified to transformation out of a homosexual lifestyle, have become the targets of death threats, drive-by shooting into their homes, arson, and other forms of harassment. The situation is only going to get worse. On Nov. 19, 2002, Mary Stachowicz, a 51-year-old wife, mother of four, and devout Catholic, was murdered by a 19-year-old homosexual man when she asked him, "Why do you [have sex with] boys instead of girls?" In a fit of rage, Nicholas Gutierrez punched, kicked, stabbed, and strangled Mrs. Stachowicz; then stuffed her body into a crawl space under the floor of his apartment, where it remained for two days until he confessed to police. Not surprisingly, the news outlets gave this story very little attention. If Balch thinks that I share guilt for the murders of homosexual persons when, in fact, my book stresses over and over again the importance of reaching out in love to homosexual persons, then Balch himself shares guilt for contributing to the rising violence and intimidation of those who maintain a public, compassionate opposition to homosexual practice—indeed, the more so since there is nothing compassionate about his response to me.

Taboos toward various sexual behaviors can be very helpful in deterring people from engaging in intensely pleasurable acts that dishonor the image of God into which humans are created.¹⁸⁵ Even today a number of sexual offenses continue to carry a strong social stigma—including incest, pedophilia, bestiality, adultery, prostitution, and polyamory. Few bemoan this state of affairs. Few believe that maintaining such stigmas incites people to violence. The mission and message of Jesus speak precisely against the correlation of revulsion and violence promulgated by Balch. Jesus both intensified God's

¹⁸⁵Cf. *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 66-67, 100 (with online notes); *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 126-28.

ethical demands in the areas of sexual and economic ethics and reached out aggressively in love to those most violating these demands.¹⁸⁶

Balch is desperate, as is the homosexual lobby generally, to whip up mass hysteria over the tragic but isolated deaths of an extremely small fraction of the total number of homosexual persons. The ultimate aim of such a strategy is to coerce the rest of society to affirm homosexual practice. What Balch conveniently ignores is that the amount of injury done to homosexual persons pales in comparison to the amount of damage that homosexual persons do to themselves, through “pickup murders” associated with public or anonymous sex, domestic violence rates that exceed the number of hate crimes committed annually, high rates of drug abuse, risks of injury arising from thrill-seeking sado-masochistic practices, the spread of HIV and AIDS through dangerous sexual behavior, suicidality rates that have remained constant over time despite increasing tolerance of homosexuality and even in strongly homosex-affirming areas, and continued high rates of nonmonogamy and short-term sexual relations. If we are to trust Scripture, endorsing homosexual behavior also has serious ramifications for life beyond this perishable existence. The more loving response is to resist cultural incentives for homosexual practice while coming alongside those who are struggling with same-sex attraction.

Balch’s Truncated Gospel

The root problem with Balch’s work is that he truncates the gospel to mean freedom from moral demands.¹⁸⁷ When Paul asks in Rom 6:15 the rhetorical question, “Should we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?” he answers by insisting that genuine adherence to the lordship of Jesus Christ leads us *out of* a life under the control of the sinful impulse (6:15-23; 7:5-6; 8:1-17; cf. 6:1-14).

Same-sex intercourse in Rom 1:24-27 is cited as the prime example of “sexual uncleanness” (*akatharsia*)—the very word used in Rom 6:19

¹⁸⁶Cf. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 210-27; *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 70-71 (with online notes).

¹⁸⁷On the relationship between gospel and ethics, cf. *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 50-56; *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 277-84.

to denote the behavior that Christians must now leave behind (note that the term appears nowhere else in Romans). The mention of shameful practices that lead to death in Rom 6:19-21 also clearly echoes the themes of Rom 1:24-27, 32. Obviously, then, the point of the Christian life is to discontinue the shameful practices of 1:19-31, including females having intercourse with females and males having intercourse with males. If *the wrath of God* manifested in this age involves, in part, God permitting people to engage in such self-dishonoring, shameful behavior, with death resulting, then *the saving righteousness of God* must mean not merely forgiveness of sins but empowerment, through the Spirit, to be delivered from the primary control of such shameful impulses.

Paul does indeed set up a sting operation in Romans 2 against moral persons—in context, primarily unbelieving Jews—who condemn those who engage in the sinful activities of Rom 1:18-32 while committing sins of their own. But Paul does so not to trivialize the moral life but rather to underscore the universal human need for putting one's trust in Jesus' atoning death and empowering presence. God's wrath is *still* coming on those who live under sin's primary rule.

Accordingly, "sin shall not be lord over you, for you are not under the law but under grace" (6:14). To be "under the law" is to be dominated by sinful passions that "bear fruit for death" (7:5). To be "under grace" is to be Spirit-controlled and thus bearing fruit for life (7:6). It is life *lived* in "the law of the Spirit of life"—that is, life lived under the primary regulating power of the indwelling Spirit—that effects liberation from "the law of sin and death" (8:1-2).

For Paul, the transformed life, while not meriting salvation, is the indispensable middle term between Christ's justifying death and the gift of eternal life. Self-professed Christians who continue to live life under sin's primary sway will perish. Thus the conclusion to the question, "Should we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?"—that is, should we sin because there are, allegedly, no apocalyptic repercussions for sinning—is as follows:

So, then, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, that is, to live in conformity with the flesh. For if you live in conformity to the flesh, you are going to die. But if, by the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are being *led* by the Spirit of God—these are the children of God. (Romans 8:12-14)

In short, the fact that all persons have sinned is no license to continue in sin. The point of our “baptism into Christ’s death” is that we should now, “as if alive from the dead,” put our bodily members at God’s, not sin’s, disposal (Rom 6:3-14). The difference between our lives before faith and our lives in faith is *not* that we now get to live sinful lives without fear of apocalyptic repercussions, but rather that we are now empowered by the indwelling Spirit of Christ to live lives that do not lead to death.

*Concluding Word on
Homosexuality, Science, and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture*

The Balch volume, like nearly all edited books, is uneven. Its strength is that it offers readers some of the best article-length treatments of the Bible and homosexuality from a prohomosex perspective: the Old Testament article by Bird and the New Testament articles by Schoedel and Fredrickson. Of much lesser significance are the prohomosex articles by Toulouse, Gudorf, Duff, and especially Balch. This is not to say that Bird, Schoedel, and Fredrickson make an irrefutable case for discounting the scriptural witness against homosexual practice. On the contrary, their work actually makes a strong case for the weakness of prohomosex perspectives on Scripture. For in showing the significant problems in some of the best work done by scholars favoring homosexual unions, as I have attempted to do here, one shows the significant—indeed, in my judgment insurmountable—problems with that perspective. Schoedel’s article is the best in the book. Yet it is a curious mix. While Schoedel speaks in favor of endorsing committed homosexual unions, the content of the article, read properly, actually

aids the pro-complementarity position at many points. The book's best contribution from a pro-complementarity or "pro-comp" perspective is the article by Jones and Yarhouse on the socio-scientific data, though one can get an updated and expanded form in their monograph *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate* (Intervarsity, 2000). The pro-comp articles from the biblical and theological side—those by Seitz, a somewhat ambivalent Jewett, and Greene-McCreight—all have some value but are not as strong as they might be in defending their position.