

# A Queer Apostle's Peculiar Epistle for an Inclusive Church:

A Review (2007/2014) of Robert Jewett (2007) and other recent scholarship on Romans 1:16-2:16

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

**1:18-32 Elaboration of the Rhetorical Trap: *Bad news for idolatrous oppressors***

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

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

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

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

1-4 **oppression**, [+ *porneia*, sexual immorality, Textus Receptus, KJV, RV],  
wickedness, **covetousness**, malice,

5-9 *full of* envy,

of murder,

of strife,

of guile,

of malignity,

10 gossipers,

11 [30] slanderers,

12 haters of God,

13 bullies/insolents,

14 arrogant,

15 boasters/braggarts,

16 inventors of evil projects,

17 disobeyers of parents,

18 [31] *undiscerning*, 19 *unfaithful*, 20 *unaffectionate*, 21 *unmerciful*;

**32** Who, knowing God's just ordinance that those who practice such things deserve to die, not only do them, but even approve/applaud others who practice them

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

1 Wherefore, O man, you are inexcusable, everyone of you who judges; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, since you who judge practice the same things. 2 Now we know that God's judgment is according to truth against those who do such things. 3 So do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape God's judgment? 4 Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and longsuffering? 5 But by your stubbornness and your impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's just judgment will be revealed.

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

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

**Introductory Orientation** (Hanks 1997:137-49; 2000:80-96; 2006:582-605). Although he recognizes its serious limitations, Robert Jewett commends Paul's efforts in Romans 1:26-27 for providing "a theological approach to the issue of homoeroticism" that was "unique in the ancient world" (2006:180). Regarding the **scope** of the context, Jewett refers to the debates for ending the pericope at 1:22, 1:25 or 1:32 (149) but ignores the studies of Stanley Stowers (1994) and Diana Swancutt (2004) who demonstrate the importance of including 2:1-16, where the rhetorical trap so subtly laid in 1:18-32 is decisively sprung (Hanks 2006:597; see below). Jewett emphasizes that 1:18-32 constitutes "a **rhetorical** tour de force" (148) employing the traditional features of Greco-Roman and Jewish rhetoric in which Paul was well versed. But *whom* does the Apostle address and *what* does he want them to believe and/or do?

Amongst his opponents and fellow Jews (mainly married and whom he was soon to face again in Jerusalem, with almost fatal consequences) Paul's law-free Gentile mission would have created suspicion about his manhood and that of his mainly unmarried co-workers (Leif E. Vaage, 2009; cf the evidence from 1-2 Corinthians presented by Jennifer Larson 2004:85-97; also Jennifer Glancy 2004:99-135). Hence, in Romans 1:24-27 Paul first echoes five elements from the traditional patriarchal Jewish propaganda line against Greco-Roman homoeroticism (Wisdom of Solomon 14:24-27): (1) *changing* from worshipping the one true God, idolatrous humanity was given over to sexual acts that were (2) *unclean*, (3) *passionate/covetous/lustful*, (4) *shameful/dishonorable* and (5) *against nature*. Had Paul perhaps assimilated these five elements from his youth in what today we would call interiorized homophobia? (see Appendix 3 on Paul as repressed homosexual).

Paul's approach would have reassured potential allies in the Roman house churches that not all gossip arriving from Jerusalem was true (see "gossipers" Rom 1:29). However, once he had echoed the party line, he ventilates his long repressed anger and springs a trap on hypocritical judgmental readers, showing that those who condemned common pagan idolatry and unclean sexual behavior were even more guilty than those (mainly Gentiles) who applauded it (1:32; 2:1-29). Then in succeeding chapters, Paul expounds his inclusive Gospel, with a view to his Spanish mission and subtly **deconstructs four elements** in his trap-baiting rhetoric (1:18-32).

(1) behavior traditionally categorized as "**unclean**" (Rom 1:24) has now been cleansed (14:14, 20); (2) behavior "**against nature**" (1:26-27) was precisely what God engaged in when engrafting believing Gentiles into the Olive tree of Israel (Rom 11:24); by referring to Gentiles as *uncircumcised* "by nature" Paul recognized that circumcision itself a human cultural imposition, and thus an act "against nature"; 2:27; see also

the Gentiles not having the Law by birth, 2:14); (3) society condemns “shameful/dishonorable” behavior (1:24, 26-27), but the queer Jesus’ shameful crucifixion naked was God’s decisive instrument of liberating justice (3:21-26; cf “boasting,” 5:2-3, 11); (4) even “ex/change” (1:23, 25, 26-27), far from always constituting negative apostasy, may constitute the essence of sanctification as we “present our bodies as a living sacrifice” and are “transformed” into Christ’s likeness (12:1-2), with love replacing lust (5:5; 13:8-14).

**Note: The Four Deconstructions.** In addition to the setting (1:18-32) and first springings (2:1-16) of his rhetorical trap, Paul’s *explicit* double deconstruction of his rhetoric in 1:18-32 regarding sexual practices that are “unclean” (1:24 → 14:14, 20) and “against nature” (1:26-27 → 11:21, 24) should be taken as intentional and fundamental for the interpretation of 1:24-27. Otherwise it would be difficult to explain the choice of the divinely imposed “uncleanness” instead of human chosen “sinfulness” in 1:24 and Paul’s only uses of the philosophical phrase “against/beyond nature” in 1:26 and 11:24. This explicit double deconstruction should alert us to the intentionality of a third implicit deconstruction, wherein the Apostle’s *pride* in his liberating gospel centered on a *crucified*-resurrected Messiah both anticipates and deconstructs his *3-fold* references about sexual practices that are “dishonorable/shameful” (1:24, 26-27“→ see the 3-fold boasting, 5:2-3, 11 + 3:21-26).

The fourth deconstruction, implicit like the third, is more complex, since Paul’s double negative judgment on the “exchange” of the one true God for idols (1:23, 25) obviously remains normative throughout the epistle (11:33-36; 16:25-27). What shall we say, then about the female (heterosexual) “exchange” of procreative for nonprocreative (anal) sex (1:26) and males “leaving” their female sexual partners to practice (nonprocreative) anal sex with other males (1:27; see Lev 18:22; 20:13)? Does Paul really aim to confirm the reader of 1:26-27 in a universal negative condemnation of all non-procreational and/or homoerotic sexual practices? Although the repetition of the “ex/change...leaving” vocabulary at first sight might encourage a reader to leap to such a conclusion, Paul’s later emphasis on Christ as the “end” of the Law (10:4), on “transformation/radical change” as the essence of *sanctification* (12:1-2), and his specific elaboration of transformed norms for sexual practice (love replacing lust; avoiding harm to the neighbor; 5:5; 13:8-14,) makes such a leap highly questionable. Paul’s later development of such trajectories in the letter suggest that the reader’s leap to judgmental conclusions simply hastens his tumble into Paul’s carefully laid rhetorical trap (2:1-16).

**Excursus: The hermeneutics of deconstruction (from Russell Pregeant [2008], *Knowing Truth, Doing Good: Engaging New Testament Ethics* [Minneapolis: Fortress]).** Pregeant reminds us that the basic contention of the “deconstruction” school with respect to literary interpretation is that “any text has a tendency to ‘deconstruct’ itself. That is to say, it necessarily contains elements that render it open to various readings. Any attempt to find a neutral standpoint for an interpreter to take is therefore futile, because all perspectives necessarily involve prior conceptions or ideological commitments. Of course, one interpreter can make important points and document them from the text itself, but someone else can always make different points in a convincing way, based on different preconceptions and different elements in the text” (2008:10).

“The deconstructionists’ concern is not merely to note the impossibility of objective readings but to call attention to the possibilities that the open-endedness of a text presents. What bothers postmodernists in general is that certain readings have become dominant over time and have effectively silenced the voices of those who might offer alternative interpretations. And the most important point is that the standardized reading reflects the power structure of our social worlds and therefore serve the interests of a ruling class and/or a dominant gender, ethnic group, or race. Thus, one of the purposes of a ‘deconstructionist’ reading is to subvert (‘deconstruct’) ways of understanding texts that have become so ingrained in the mind-set of both the professional guild and the general public that they appear self-evident. The further intention is to open the way for other readings from perspectives that those in power traditionally exclude” (2008:10).

Pregeant cites with approval Willi Marxsen, who argues that “the more concrete the imperative is, the more situational it is and the less suitable it is for presenting and understanding the character of the Pauline ethic [universal behaviour norms]. Hence the imperatives in the letters are useless for resolving concrete ethical problems” (2008:31). Classic examples would be the various isolated Pauline imperatives that widows should remarry (1 Tim 5:14) or not remarry (1 Cor 7:8), that women should have their heads covered when praying or prophesying in the church (1 Cor 11:2-16), but keep silence in the church (1 Cor 14:34-35), that women should

not teach or have authority over men (1 Tim 2:11-15) nor indulge in “unnatural/nonprocreative” sexual relations (Rom 1:26, probably refers to practicing anal sex with males, thus avoiding procreation).

Pregeant also agrees with Brian K. Blount’s African American perspective that “because of their unique social and political circumstance, African American slaves were uniquely outfitted to interact with that part of the meaning picture that other communities, because of their space implications (limitations), could not.... It could well be that one community has seen something that has eluded another” (2008:43, citing Blount 2002:20). Pregeant then comments: “Although meaning arises in the interaction between text and readers, the text itself defines and limits the parameters of meaning. The meaning potential, in other words, is not infinite. The reader’s ‘space’ provides an angle of vision from which aspects of that meaning potential can come to light, but it does not simply *impose* a meaning that has no textual warrant” (2008:43). Pregeant, however, fails to apply this principle to sexual minority readers when treating the “clobber” texts traditionally used to condemn them and ignores the extensive literature available from gay/lesbian/queer perspectives.

In his treatment of a “Perspective on the Nature of Language” (2008:53-56) Pregeant builds on insights from Whitehead’s language theory, emphasizing both [1] “the imprecision of language and [2] its systematic thrust towards understanding.... The central insight of this understanding of language is that it has a dual nature. [1] On the one hand, all linguistic formulations are necessarily fragmentary and open-ended. They are inherently imprecise, making necessary an act of interpretation in which the recipient of a signification construes it in a particular way and places it in a particular context for a particular reason. [2] On the other hand, all such formulations necessarily contain a systematic thrust, a drive toward a comprehensive understanding” (53-54).

Undoubtedly Paul was aware of [1] the imprecise character of the key terms he employs in his rhetoric in Romans 1:18-27, where the ambiguity of the language continues to perplex commentators and provide a field day for lengthy explanations of diverse interpretations: desires/passions/lusts, uncleanness (cultic and/or moral?), natural/ customary, *against* nature/custom, dishonourable/shameful/unseemliness. As we shall see below, precisely Paul’s skilful use of ambiguity and imprecision makes his construction of the rhetorical trap so astute and yet also opens the door for his own later deconstructions of the usually pejorative terms in 1:24-26 which later he redeems for positive use: *God* does what is “against nature” (11:24) and all *things* are declared clean (14:14, 20), emphasizing “the central notion of the *goodness* of God’s creation (Gen 1:3)” (Pregeant 2008:85; my italics), which stands in tension with priestly notions of *impurity*.

Regarding the second characteristic of language [2], Pregeant (2008:56) then explains: “If for Whitehead language is imprecise and fragmentary, it nevertheless contains a *drive toward systematic, comprehensive understanding within the total world of experience*. Thus ‘every proposition refers to a universe exhibiting some general systematic metaphysical character’” ([Whitehead] 1978, 11). In Romans this drive is well illustrated when Paul begins to expound positively his norms for Christian praxis (Rom 12:1–15:13) in terms of a love that refrains from harming the neighbor (13:8-10). In his concluding chapter Pregeant further clarifies this point: “In the ancient world the original provenance of both religious observance and ethics was the small, autonomous kinship network or clan.... In this context, the values embraced by the group served the basic needs of survival and prosperity, and ethics enhanced internal cohesion and solidarity.... ethics in the Israelite tradition is not a matter of divine command in the simplistic sense. The point of moral action is not obedience to an arbitrary set of rules but action for the common good” (322-23). Moreover, if the alternative community of the Jesus movement espouses “an ethic of love, then, it was also an ethic of liberation, because it offered a radical form of inclusiveness” (2008:118)

One of Pregeant’s six guidelines for interpreting a text is “reading the text as a whole in order to determine the basic patterns of meaning potential it contains” (2008:64)—precisely what he fails to do when treating Romans 1:26-27 and homosexuality (2008:261, 339-45, 363, 371, note 5). Thus he must rely solely on his hermeneutics, rather than potential exegetical insights: “My own conclusion, then, is that contemporary experience is leading the church, through a process of Spirit-guided discernment—which make use of broad scriptural principles such as God’s inclusiveness, love for all creatures, and promise of abundant life—to transcend the traditional position on homosexual practice” (2008:344). The case for such a conclusion could have been immeasurably strengthened had he not overlooked key alternative exegetical insights.

**Four “ex/changes” condemned and the recommended “transformation.”** As Jewett emphasizes, Paul’s triple references to the human acts of “ex/change” in 1:23, 25 and 26 (plus “leaving” in 27), followed by the triple affirmation that “God gave them up” (1:24, 26, 28) is fundamental to the structure of 1:19-32. In fact, Paul refers twice to an ancient “ex/change” as a human decision: **(1-2)** the true God for idols (1:23, 25); then again twice to changes resulting from divine abandonment to sexual uncleanness: **(3)** “their females” exchange natural procreative sex for non-procreative heterosexual anal intercourse (26); **(4)** and the males “*leaving*” the natural use of women to practice anal intercourse with other males (27). Jewett and Gagnon conclude that Paul implies that any such male “leaving” of female partners is to be condemned absolutely as a sin comparable to idolatry (a conclusion promoted by the NIV translation “abandoned”; cf NRSV more literal, almost casual: “leaving”). Against Jewett and Gagnon’s *equating* the changes in sexual practices with *sin* we should note

1. the **literary genre** of Rom 1:18-32 is a highly rhetorical “**Decline of Civilization**” narrative (with its tendency to the hyperbole of prophetic denunciation), not a sober positive exposition of behaviour norms for the new communities (such as Paul later gives us in Romans 13:8-14).
2. Paul’s **purpose** in the four-fold repetition of vocabulary for change/leaving in the rhetoric of 1:23-27 is not to establish ethical absolutes, but rather **to entrap** the reader who boasts of his moral superiority and condemns others (2:1). Thus the reader who leaps to the conclusion that 1:26-27 implies a universal absolute condemnation of all homoerotic activity only lands the more quickly in the rhetorical trap Paul astutely prepared for arrogant hypocritical judges who condemn others (2:1-16).
3. the change from monotheistic worship to idolatry (23, 25) was a *human* decision, whereas the change to unclean sexual desires/lusts resulted from **God’s abandonment** of idolaters (God “gave them over,” 1:24, 26, 28), so unclean sexual desires/lusts were not the *cause* of God’s wrath (1:18), but its *consequence*.
4. Paul refers first to females (1:26), there specifying only a change from natural/procreative sex to **unnatural/non-procreative** sex, but does *not* indicate any exchange of male partners for female.
5. Paul emphasizes (**three times**) the shameful unclean **desire/lust** in 24, 26-27, but only in 1:26-27 does he specify the females’ recourse to “unnatural” (non-procreative) sex and only once (in 1:27) does he specify homoeroticism: the males leaving of female for male sex partners.
6. Even in **1:27**, the verse where Paul describes the idolatrous males in antiquity (generally? all?) as “leaving” the “natural” (procreative) use of females he again emphasizes **strong desire** (“burned with desire/lust”) before referring to the “males with males” element.
7. In Paul’s rhetorical trap, the “change” vocabulary (1:23, 25, 26-27) is thus another element that undergoes **deconstruction** later in the letter, where Paul declares that “transformation” (radical change) is the essence of individual sanctification (12:1-2) and the ultimate goal of God’s cosmic purpose (8:18-25).

From Paul’s **negative rhetoric about “change,”** we might conclude that he would insist on “Jesus Christ...*the same*, yesterday, today and forever” (Heb 13:8). However, the Apostle’s negative rhetoric on “*changes*” appears to be the fourth element in Romans 1 in which he later radically deconstructs an element that at first appears to be irredeemably negative. When he begins to provide positive instruction for authentic Christian praxis, radical *change* is of the essence: “be ye *transformed* [radically changed!] by the *renewing* of the mind” (12:2; cf the “reprobate mind” in 1:28). So Paul actually is the great Theologian of Change, who sought the continual transformation of the Christian mind and praxis (Romans 12:1-2) and hoped for a total renovation of the cosmos (Romans 8:18-25; 2 Corinthians 5:17)!

The changes denounced in Romans 1:23-27, however, were changes that dishonor God (1:23, 25) and harm the neighbour (13:8-10). Paul later indicates the *desired* transformation and renewal, affecting both mind and body, in terms of the corporate life of the tenement and house churches (12:3-16), their relations with oppressors and government authorities (12:14-13:7), and including sexual relations that reflect love, not lust (13:8-14). In the latter case, Paul does not require establishment of universal heterosexuality, but commands avoiding adultery (13:9), and other “excesses” (*aselgeia*) and assorted lusts (“beds” *koitais*...“covetings” *epithumias*) that harm the neighbour (13:13-14). Far from an “anything goes” postmodern relativism, Paul’s norms for Christian sexual behaviour are quite demanding: “make *no provision* for the flesh to fulfil its covetous lusts” (13:14). However, unlike traditional heterosexist Christian ethics, Paul’s norms are just and do not require more of persons with a homosexual orientation than they do of heterosexuals (for additional positive Pauline and Biblical perspectives on ex/change and transformation see Jewett 2007:160 and notes 114,

116; Frederick Büchsel, “*alláso*,” TDNT 1, 1964: 251; EDNT I, 62; BDAG 2000:45-46; Mk 9:2-13; 2 Cor 3:18; 5:17; Phlp 3:21; 1 Cor 15:51-52). In light of the later affirmation of *positive* change, we can see that Paul’s four *negative* references to change (in Rom 1:23, 25, 26-27) involved exchanging the true God for idols (1:23, 25) and changing natural (procreative) sexual relations for anal sex (non-procreative), expressions of strong desire/lust (1:26-27)—often destructive behaviors that would damage Christian communities (13:8-13).

Although the negative rhetoric of 1:26-27 might give the impression that Paul would approve only “natural” (procreational) sex, elsewhere Paul is singularly uninterested in procreation (1 Cor 7; 1 Thes 4:3-8; see similarly Jesus’ praxis and his teaching regarding eunuchs (Mat 19:12). Paul’s two references to “natural” (procreational) sex only remind us that in 1:18-32 he would lure into his trap patriarchal readers obsessed with procreating heirs (see below on 2:1-16). Before attributing to the Apostle any ethical absolute insisting on procreative (“natural”) sex, we should recall (1) that Jewish rabbis did not condemn anal sex between marriage partners; (2) modern evangelicals commonly refrain from condemning sex during menstruation, despite the prohibitions in Lev 18:19 and 20:18; (3) for decades evangelicals and even most Catholics have approved and practiced methods of family planning and birth control “against nature.”

Hence, efforts to interpret Romans 1:24-27 in the context of the entire letter and use it to provide norms for church praxis today require that we recognize the following factors, giving full weight to

- the *literary genre* of a Decline of Civilization narrative describing all humanity in antiquity;
- the *rhetorical trap* constituted by the relation of 1:18-32 (trap set) to 2:1-16 (trap sprung);
- the *deconstruction of four elements* in the negative rhetoric of 1:24-27 as the scroll of the letter unrolls;
- from all the negative rhetoric used to lay the trap in 1:24-27 the *only prohibition that remains normative* throughout the letter is that against *excessive desire* (coveting/lust that results in harm to neighbor; 1:24, 26-27), since any such coveting is to be replaced by sacrificial love (5:5-8) and linked to the norm of *love for neighbor* (13:8-14).

These two transcendent norms that remain standing when Paul concludes the letter (avoid any coveting, which leads to harm, love the neighbor; Rom 13:8-13) were perfectly appropriate for the large number of slaves in the Roman house churches. Although slaves could not refuse to provide the sexual services commonly demanded of them, they could fulfill the norm of love for neighbor that avoids harm, injustice, oppression and violence. This perception thus unmasks any notion of a Paul constructing an “ethical absolute” against “homosexuality” as oblivious to the socio-economic-historical context and hopelessly anachronistic. Paul’s construction of norms for sexual conduct condemn the covetous, oppressive sexual demands of slave owners, but insist on love for neighbor as the *unique* norm that fulfils the divine intent in Moses’ 613 laws. This teaching is coherent with the Apostle’s proclamation of a Gospel that is good news to poor slaves, who could not obey the cleanliness code of Leviticus. In recent centuries we have seen fundamentalist churches move from incessant citations of Paul to enslave women and *defend* racial slavery, to *forgetting* that Paul often addressed churches consisting mainly of slaves—and now with their incessant and lucrative citations of Paul to promote homophobia and attack “homosexuals.” Modern paraphrases that substitute “servants” for the more literal “slaves” and then add the neologism “homosexuals” to Paul’s theological vocabulary (RSV 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10) greatly facilitate the disappearance of slaves from our hermeneutical grid and promote violence against sexual minorities.

Of course, when Paul refers to this prehistoric (mythological/legendary?) “fall” of human ancestors into idolatry and consequent sexual uncleanness, he says nothing about modern youths who recognize their homosexual orientation from adolescence onward without ever having had any sexual relations with women (cf. 1:27). If an “exchange” in and of itself were sinful, then an informed and coherent Paul should encourage such youths to be faithful to their same-sex partner! Therefore, as Paul later insists, to evaluate different changes requires *discernment*: a woman who *changes* husbands while the first one is still alive is “adulterous,” but if she remarries after the death of the first husband, she is not adulterous (7:1-6). Thus when Paul denounces “changes” (Rom 1:23-27) this provides no basis for condemning a Christian homosexual male who, never having had sexual relations with a woman, forms a permanent and exclusive relationship with another man to live faithfully in love. In such cases the exchange that harms would be that proposed by the pseudo-scientific ministers of the “Ex-Gay” movement, who—in an era devastated by AIDS—seek to destroy such

stable relationships in order to impose heterosexual “marriages”—cruel pseudo-scientific experiments that commonly end in divorce, depression, addictions and suicides. Paul, however, says nothing about any sexual acts “against nature” (non-procreative) in contexts of relationships of committed love. Perhaps such relations were unknown to Paul, but we cannot twist his words to condemn something that he either refrained from mentioning or didn’t even know existed.

**Scope, persons described: 2:17-3:20 explicitly addresses Jews, but to whom does Paul refer in 1:18-2:16?**

Humanity in general?

Only or mainly Gentiles?

Only or mainly Jews?

Rom 1:18-2:16 does not criticize Gentiles alone, since 1:16-18 insists that God’s just anger threatens *all* impiety/idolatry and oppression and that God’s liberating justice and salvation is revealed in the Gospel to everyone who has faith (Jewett 152; Cranfield 106). Hence Paul in Rom 1:23 alludes to the Golden Calf episode (Ex 32) and Jer 2:11 in Israel’s history, as well as to the Genesis creation (and fall?) narratives. See the address to “all” who are in the Roman tenement and house churches (1:7) and the thanks for “all” of them (1:8). Therefore we should not assume that Paul thought that unclean sexual desires (1:24) including non-procreative anal sex (1:26-27) never occurred among Jews. The “men” and the “them” refer to persons who in the ancient past invented and practiced idolatry, not to “Gentiles” (distinguished from Israel only after Abraham’s call in Gen 12). The present tenses (1:18-20) indicate the on-going effects of a process that may have begun soon after creation (1:20).

**Schreiner** (1998:81) argues that 1:19-32 probably targets **gentiles**:

The critique reflects the typical Jewish view of Gentile idolatry (Wisdom. 11-15);

The overt form of idolatry depicted in 19-23 was virtually nonexistent among Jews of Paul’s day but typical of the Gentiles;

Homosexual relations were common in the Greco-Roman world: “Homosexual Jews doubtless existed, but they probably attempted to keep it a secret in order to avoid social ostracism” (81).

Most Jews would not openly applaud the vices referred to in 29-32.

**Moo** (1996:96-98) takes 1:18-19 as an introduction indicting **all humanity** (see 3:23); 1:20-32 as referring mainly to Gentiles; 2:1-16 especially to Jews; and 2:17-3:8 specifically to Jews (see his chart 2002:58). Wright (2002:429) suggests that 2:1-17 targets a pagan moralist; Swancutt specifies Stoic judges (2003:215-33; 2004, details below); Jennings argues that bad emperors like Nero may be in view (2009:138-52).

In the preceding section (1:8-15) Paul has made clear that he intended to visit the (divided) Roman domestic churches and preach there his inclusive Gospel (of reconciliation, 5:6-8; and welcome, 15:1-13); but despite the hint of his debt to “remaining nations” (1:13) and “barbarians” (1:14), the Apostle does not reveal until later his intention to use the Roman churches as a launching pad for his proposed mission to Spain (15:14-33). How, then, would these Roman tenement and house churches (consisting of a majority of slaves and gentiles but with a minority of returned Jews) hear the indictment of 1:18-3:20? Until 2:17 (“you who call yourself a Jew”), Paul appears purposefully coy about the identity of the persons he describes: “men/persons” 18; “them...to them” (19), etc. Paul’s rhetorical skill is such that, as 1:18-32 was read in the Roman house and tenement churches, listeners (both gentiles and Jews) would be kept on the edge of their benches and obliged to ask continually, “Does that mean me?” If they began to feel superior, assured themselves that it did not and condemned the idolatrous oppressors of Rom 1:18-32, they tumbled neatly into Paul’s rhetorical trap (2:1-16).

In **1:16** Jewett does not translate *sotería* as “integral liberation” nor *dikaioσύνη* in **1:17** as referring to God’s “liberating justice” revealed in the Gospel, and hence fails to make clear that in **1:18** Paul refers not just to “wrongdoing” in some general or moralistic (sexual) sense, but to **“oppression (*adikía*)**, twice), thus missing the allusion to Hebrew Bible emphasis on oppression as provoking God’s wrath (Ex 22:21-24; Hanks 1972:16). This oversight then prejudices Jewett’s interpretation of the later treatment of sexual uncleanness (1:24-27), which refers not to homoerotic relations universally, but to expressions of sexual desire, exploitation, abuse and violence. Later Jewett includes “injustice” as one definition of *adikía* (152) and the

crucifixion of Jesus as a prime example (151, “violence”?), but such data are not permitted to illuminate his translation of 1:18. Tom Wright makes the point clearer: “The word rendered ‘wickedness’ in the NRSV and the NIV is *adikía*, not just general evil but injustice, the crucial symptom of the world’s out-of-jointness. This human injustice contrasts sharply with God’s [liberating] justice (v. 17)” (2002:432).

As Jewett and others emphasize, Paul’s triple employment of references to the human acts of “**ex/change**” in **1:23, 25 and 26**, followed by the triple affirmation that “**God handed them over**” (**1:24, 26, 28**) is fundamental to the structure and argument in 1:19-32 (see also the males “**leaving**” the natural use of females and “receiving back” the punishment for their error (**1:27**). Where commentators differ widely, however, is in their efforts to identify the transcendent event Paul refers to in 1:21-23 wherein humanity as a whole (apparently heretofore monotheistic and monogamous, “practicing *heterosexuals*?”) experiences a “**fall**” into **idolatry** and are given over to sexual uncleanness, including male-male anal sex (1:27). Conservative evangelical commentators commonly ignore the problem or refer vaguely to some “mythico-historical” event unknown to us (Richard Hays 1986:200, cited by Brooten 1996:244; “mythico-historical categories,” Hays 1996:385). Stanley Stowers provides abundant examples of this genre, a “**decline of civilization narrative**” (1994:85-100).

Commentators show no consensus regarding the implications of the **threefold duplication of *parédoken*** (“**God gave them up/delivered them**”) in **1:24, 26 and 28**. Jewett understands the verb as “a forceful refrain of deliverance to human distortion, first on the mental and religious level in the worship of the creature rather than the Creator (vv. 24-25), then on the sexual level in the form of perverted relationships (vv. 26-27), and finally on the public level in the form of criminal and sociopathic behaviour (vv. 28-32)” (2007:165). This analysis appears to exclude sexuality from 1:24, which he then later includes (“perverse sexual relations...sexual irregularities...slaves used for prostitution...promiscuity”, 169, notes 41, 43). At the other extreme, Gagnon argues that “The three ‘giving overs’ (1:24, 26, 28) do not represent temporal sequences but rather are speaking of the same fundamental act,” (2001:252). Some see the three-fold abandonment as the expression of God’s wrath in the present referred to in 1:18 (Brooten 1996:221), but if Paul is presenting a Decline of Civilization narrative, he describes something in the remote past, although the pattern may be repeated—whenever humans opt for idolatry they are abandoned to their lusts (Wright 2002, cited above).

Commentators have put forward **three candidates** to explain Paul’s account of the **origins of idolatry** in Rom 1:21-23, 25 and the resultant sexual uncleanness (1:24, 26-27):

- **Adam’s “fall,”** (Gen 3), specifically treated later in Romans (5:12-21), but simply as Adam’s act of disobedience, with nothing said about inventing idolatry nor of homoeroticism (Morna Hooker 1959-60, 1966-67; Schreiner 1998: 81, 93; Jewett 177; cf Moo’s argument that every person repeats Adam’s fall, 1996:98).
- Israel’s idolatrous worship of **the Golden Calf** (Sinai, Ex 32; Ps 106:20), but this did not involve Gentiles, nor was it followed by homoerotic acts. Jewett finds the linguistic links closest to Ps 106:20 but agrees with Hooker that the description of idol images in 1:23 extends the allusion to Adam’s fall (2007:160-161).
- Peter Esler has proposed that Paul seeks to explain the origins of idolatry and resulting sexual uncleanness from the story of **Sodom and Gomorrah** and the attempted rape of the two visiting angels (Esler 2003, not cited by Jewett). However, the narrative in Gen 19 gives no indication that the cities had first invented idolatry. Moreover, when Paul later refers explicitly to “Sodom and Gomorrah” (Rom 9:29) he simply cites Isaiah 1:9, which uses the cities as examples of devastating divine judgment on Israel, with no reminder of the attempted sexual abuse prominent in Genesis 19, much less idolatry (Hanks 2006:598-601).

Jewett’s effort to interpret Paul’s references to **idolatry (Rom 1:18-23, 25)** as echoing basically the Fall of Adam, however, is undermined by the specific mention of four types of images in 1:23 (of man, birds, quadrupeds and reptiles), which he recognizes as an allusion to the golden calf episode as recalled in Ps 106:20 (2007:160). Regarding 1:25 Jewett emphasizes the use of the article “*the* lie” to refer to the human exchange of the truth of God for **idolatry**, “which involves the fundamental thrust of humans to replace God with themselves....to define evil and good for themselves” (170, citing Gen 3:5), with an oblique reference to veneration of the emperor in Roman religion.

## Dale Martin astutely critiques the heterosexist ideologies affecting such interpretations:

Paul's...logic assumes a mythological structure unknown to most modern persons, Christians included. Most of us do not believe that all of humanity was once upon a time neatly monotheistic, only later, at a particular historical point, to turn to polytheism and idolatry; nor are we likely to believe that homosexuality did not exist until a sudden invention of polytheism....In sum, modern people, even Christians, do not believe the mythological structure that provides the logic for Paul's statements about homosexuality in Romans 1. Heterosexist scholars alter Paul's reference to a myth which most modern Christians do not even know, much less believe (that is, a myth about the beginnings of idolatry) and pretend that Paul refers to a myth that many modern Christians do believe, at least on some level (the myth about the Fall). Heterosexism can retain Paul's condemnation of same-sex coupling only by eliding the supporting logic of that condemnation (1995:338-39 = 2006:55).

Another interpretation, however, is perhaps even more likely than the three cited above. Scholars have long called attention to the close parallels between Paul's rhetoric in Romans 1:18-32 and the **Wisdom of Solomon** 11-15 (Gagnon 2001:247-51; Brooten 1996:294-98; cf Stowers 1994:85). Basically in Romans 1 Paul simply spins out in detail what his readers would assumed to have taken place, according to the Wisdom of Solomon, and which they would have known from the LXX: "For the intention to make idols is the beginning of sexual immorality (*porneias*), and their invention is the corruption of life" (Wis. 14:12; similarly T. Naph. 3:3-4). However, although Wisdom specifically targeted Gentile idolatry, Paul subverts the Jewish propaganda by insisting that God's just wrath targets *all* impiety/idolatry and oppression (whether Gentile or Jewish). Wisdom's broad reference to *porneia* supports the understanding of Rom 1:24 as referring to sexual immorality generally, and not simply anticipating 1:26-27 (*pace* Gagnon). The reference in Wisdom 14:24-26 to idolatry as the source of "every evil" may have inspired Paul's vice list in Rom 1:28-32. Some scholars even detect in Wisdom the notion that idolatry produces "sexual perversion" (Wisdom 14:26 NRSV; David Winston, *Wisdom*, Anchor Bible 43 1979:280; Bernadette Brooten 1996:296 and note 112; Gagnon 2001:241, note 10). However, Countryman points out that the Greek term is best translated "alteration of generation," or "alteration of procreation," and would thus designate "the whole range of nonprocreative sexual activities rather than specifying same-gender sexual acts." (2007:62). The reference to enemies who are idol worshippers and "oppress Israel" (Wis 15:14) may also form part of the background to the two references to oppression in Rom 1:18 and the reference to God's liberating justice revealed in the Gospel (1:17).

Most conservative evangelical scholars agree with Jewett when he says "the popular application of the modern concept of individual sexual orientation based on biological differences is **anachronistic**. Such exegesis misreads Paul's argument as dealing with individual sins rather than the corporate distortion of the human race...." (2007:177; similarly Schreiner; Wright; cf Moo above). Paul appears to assume that some expression of male homoeroticism became common to the human race as a direct result of the option for idolatry, since the grammatical antecedent of the entire passage is *anthropon* (men, humans, males, 1:18) who suppress the truth about God revealed in creation and decide to fabricate and worship idols (1:19-23). Brooten adds that the reference to "*their* females" in 1:26 "points to the group nature of the transgression" (1996:240) and also would appear to limit the "men" in 1:18 to males; cf simply "the males" in 1:27. For the springing of his rhetorical trap on the hypocrite in chapter 2 Paul shifts to a diatribe style and addresses a singular "O *anthropos*" (2:1, 3; "O man/woman" Jewett 192); then, for his treatment of Torah and circumcision in 2:17-29, even more specifically the Apostle addresses "you" (singular) "who call yourself a Jew".

Commentators also have struggled to explain the relationship Paul indicates between the invention of idolatry (1:19-23, 25) and the unclean sexual practices (of 1:24, 26-27), including the male-male anal sex of 1:27; "therefore, God gave them up...", 1:24; see Ps 81:12, with reference to Israel). Douglas Moo rejects the view that Rom 1:19-31 describes either Adam's original fall (Gen 3) or "a kind of mythical 'Urfall' of the Gentiles" (1996:98). He concludes: "Paul...insists that those who turned were also those who knew better, and who are consequently deserving of God's wrath....This foolish and culpable rejection of the knowledge of God is repeated in every generation, by every individual. *Every person* is 'without excuse' because every person—whether a first-century pagan or a twentieth-century materialist—has been given a knowledge of God and has spurned that knowledge in favour of idolatry, in all its varied manifestations" (98)

Tom Wright, however, somewhat differently, explains: “Homosexual behaviour is a distortion of the creator’s design...such practices are evidence not of the intention of any specific individual to indulge in such practice for its own sake, but of the tendency within an entire society for humanness to fracture when gods other than the true one are being worshipped....He is not saying, as in an individualist culture he is inevitably read as saying, that individuals who are aware of same-sex erotic tendencies or who engage in the practices that result have themselves been worshipping idols. He is not proposing a case by case analysis. Rather his argument is that the existence of homosexual practice in a culture is a sign that that culture as a whole has been worshipping idols and that its God-given male-and female order is being fractured as a result” (2002:434-435).

Similarly, Robert Gagnon recognizes that Paul “is speaking in terms of collective entities, not individuals, and in terms of widespread effect, not origin” (2001:286). He elaborates: “Homosexual practice entails the conscious suppression of the visible and self-evident truth that the Creator shaped male and female as *complementary* counterparts of sexual pairing and not ‘males with male’ (Rom 1:27) or females with females (1:26) [note: Gagnon adds the term “complementary,” which is not in 1:26; see below]. It is a rebellion against the Creator on the horizontal level, as idolatry is on the vertical level” [www.robgnon.net](http://www.robgnon.net), review of Myers and Scanzoni, p. 69). We should ask whether such literalist/fundamentalist readings of Paul also require us to believe that the repeatedly observed homosexual behaviour in 450 animal species similarly is to be attributed to their idolatry or that of their ancestors! (Bagemihl 1999). In the nineteenth century many physicians and scientists still made similar pronouncements about the “perversion” of left handedness, which they deemed a conscious rebellion against the obvious intent of the Creator, a perversion to be corrected by various forms of torture they devised and lucratively sold to “cure” (torture) left handed children.

**1:24, “Therefore God gave them [men, humans, 1:18] up to the *epithumiais* (desires / excessive, covetous?) of their hearts to *akatharsian* (impurity, uncleanness).”** As Jewett observes, Paul moves beyond the vague passives of 1:22-23 and portrays God as “directly involved in the process of moral retribution” (167): Jewett points out that Paul’s use of the plural form of *epithumia* and the link with the “heart” make clear that “Paul does not share the Stoic assessment that desire is in and of itself a root cause of the human predicament” (168 and note 27 on Frederickson 2000; as in Buddhism). Instead Paul may reflect LXX usage where *epithumia* is the “coveting” of the male neighbor’s possessions (including wife) prohibited in the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment (Ex 20:17; cf Dt 5:21). This kind of excessive desire that harms the neighbour and destroys community may be Paul’s concern in 1:24-27, as later in the epistle (Rom 7:7-8; 13:8-10, 13; 12:3-21; Fredrickson 2000:207-15; Martin 2006:55-60; Hanks 2000:26; 2006:585-86).

As Jewett’s emphasizes, in Paul’s perplexing “decline of civilization narrative” human males (generally? universally?), having abandoned their (egotistical) “use” of females, were all “inflamed with sexual desire/lust” for one another (universal male promiscuity?)—hardly a description of the kind of loving committed gay relationship characterized by sacrificial care that many Christians today have experienced and witnessed. Of the wording “inflamed with desire/lust” Jewett says it implies “an irrational bondage to an egoistic, empty and unsatisfying expression of animalistic sexuality” (178-179); Robert Gagnon even thinks Paul here describes accurately all modern gays and their sexual relationships (2001:469-86). However, as Arnold Hultgren points out: “A new reality has come on the scene for the church, in which persons of the same gender claim to be Christians (not idolaters), know themselves to be homosexual (not heterosexual deviants), pledge themselves to lives of fidelity (rejecting promiscuity), and want their relationship public (not hidden away)” (2011:619).

**Gagnon also insists:** “The sequence of thought for Paul was not: Same-sex intercourse is excess passion; therefore it is wrong. It was: same-sex intercourse is wrong; therefore it is excess passion. The concept of ‘disoriented desire’ logically precedes the concept of ‘inordinate desire’” ([www.robgnon.net](http://www.robgnon.net), review of Myers and Scanzoni, p. 71). Even so we might at least grant that the Apostle seasoned his “decline of civilization narrative” with a dash of hyperbole (cf Jesus’ “woes” on his contemporary Pharisees, Mat 23). However, Gagnon here has failed to note that strong or *inordinate desire* is emphasized first and in each verse on sexuality (1:24, 26-27), while what he labels as “disoriented desire” only becomes explicit in 1:27, and even there the emphasis is first on the excessive? burning desire/lust:

24 *epithmiais* (covetous? desires; “desires” Jewett 163; Gagnon 231-32; Countryman 2007:110; “excessive sexual desire” Frederickson 2000:208-09)

26 *pathe* (“passions” Jewett 163; Gagnon 231, 235; Countryman 2007:111; “passion...excessive sexual desire” Frederickson 208-09)

27 *exekaúthesan en te oreksei* (“inflamed with their lust for one another,” Jewett 163; “inflamed with their yearning for one another,” Gagnon 231, 237-38; “inflammation...appetite” Frederickson 208); “burned with their desire for one another,” Countryman 2007:111.

As Swancutt says, “Verses 24-27 literally scream the language of ...passion-in-excess” (2003:210) but if Countryman is correct, Paul may be *purposely* baiting his rhetorical trap with *ambiguous* vocabulary (“uncleanness...strong desire/lust”) which the judgmental reader/listener would assume implies sin, not just cultic uncleanness.

Moreover, as William Countryman first emphasized, in 1:24 Paul categorizes all the sexual practices of 1:24, 26-27, not as “sin” (a category that does not occur until later—2:12 and 3:9), but as *akatharsía* (“uncleanness, impurity”); 1988:117; 2003:110-116; Daniel Helminiak 2000:93-94; 2003:161-163. Countryman then pointed out how Paul deconstructed his rhetoric regarding **sexual uncleanness** (1:24) later in the letter (1998:114; 2003:196; similarly Daniel Helminiak 1994/2000:80-84). As Jewett indicates, in the LXX *akatharsía* was used to designate that which is ritually impure (“matter out of place” as Mary Douglas defined it) and to be kept separate from the holy (Temple worship, for instance), but that in Hellenistic Judaism and the NT it came to be used also in a moral sense as sin that excludes humans from fellowship with God, and that Paul uses the ambiguous term in *both* a moral and cultic sense (168, citing Rom 6:19; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; 1 Thess 2:3; 4:7). Jewett, however, makes no reference to the debate on “uncleanness/sin” between Countryman and Schmidt and fails to note the significance of the deconstruction in Rom 14:14, 20 for the exegesis of 1:24-27 (Thomas Schmidt 1995:64-85; Robert Gagnon 2001:233, 273-77; Brooten 1996:232-38, note 57).

Subsequently Countryman has maintained and strengthened his original basic position: “The language [in 1:24] is certainly pejorative; and yet it stops short of actually saying that this aspect of Gentile culture is intrinsically sinful or deserving of God’s wrath. Paul’s argument is rather that God has ‘handed over’ the Gentiles to their disgusting culture as punishment for another sin, idolatry” (2003:174). However, even if Countryman and Helminiak err by distinguishing “uncleanness” and related desire-vocabulary in 1:24, 26-27 from sinfulness, and if Schmidt, Gagnon and Jewett are correct in arguing for implied sinfulness (coveting, lust, etc., not just strong desire), then *what Paul categorized as sinful is same-sex lust, abuse, oppression and violence, not same-sex love between two consenting adults*. Schmidt’s detailed linguistic arguments to prove that “uncleanness” in Romans 1:24 implies sinfulness overlook the use of such language for strong passionate desire in the erotic poetry of → Song of Songs (mainly expressed in images and actions, but see 2:3 and 5:16 in the LXX). And of course, since Paul is laying a rhetorical trap for judgmental listeners, his employment of ambiguous terms (uncleanness, desire/lust, unnatural) that often imply sinfulness fits perfectly into his game plan.

In addition, Countryman argues that, since Paul uses a perfect participle in Rom 1:29 (represented by “having [already/previously!] been filled with...” in the translation above), the Greek syntax implies a three-stage process that in effect *reverses* the order of the last two paragraphs of the text, 1-2-3 becoming 1-3-2:

1. Certain human ancestors abandoned their creator and turned to idols (1:18-23, 25);
3. Their descendants now commit all manner of injustice and oppression (vice list, 1:28-31);
2. God abandoned/punished the idolatrous ancestors with “a culture that was disgustingly *unclean* from a Jewish perspective (1:24-27)” (2003:174-75; also Helminiak 2000:96; cf. Moo 1996:118 note 144).

Jewett notes that virtually all the evils of 1:28-32 also involve the body, but like most (Dunn 1988:62; Moo 1996:111-12; Schreiner 1998:93-94; Wright 2002:403), he understands that the “uncleanness” and “dishonouring of their bodies among themselves” (1:24) refers mainly to sin that is “sexual...perverse sexual relations...sexual irregularities...sexual promiscuity...slaves used for prostitution” (169 and notes 41, 43, citing Wisdom 14:12, 24-27). Gagnon, however, argues that Rom 1:24 simply anticipates 1:26-27 and refers

only to same-sex intercourse (2001:252, note 14). Such *eisegesis* (reading into the text his prejudices) serves his polemics well, but obviously distorts the data. As Bernadette Brooten points out, Paul's vice list in 2:28-32 is *unique* in its omission of any reference to sexual sins (1996:260-61; cf Jewett's textual note 164 i). If these are not covered generically in 1:24, then the only sexual sins Paul targets are the anal sex practices of 1:26-27. Wisdom of Solomon similarly saw idolatry producing *porneia* generally and only later proceeded to specify "alteration of generation": "For the intention to make idols is the beginning of sexual immorality, and their invention is the corruption of life" (Wis. 14:12; cf. Sib. Or. 3:8-44; T. Jos 4:5-6). The notable absence of any reference to sexual sins in the vice list of 1:28-32 further supports the interpretation of 1:24 as referring to sexual uncleanness *generally*—a deficiency that the Textus Receptus, followed by the KJV and the Spanish RV, hastened to "correct" by adding the term *porneia* ("fornication") to the vice list in 1:29.

Moreover, Countryman's reordering of the chronology in 1:18-32, as implied by the Greek syntax in 1:29, results in a two-fold emphasis on the *sin* of oppression/injustice (*adikia*, 1:18, 29; see 2:8) preceding the reference to the *uncleanness* of the sexual acts in 1:24-27). Such prioritizing of the sin of oppression also occurs in the vice list in 1 Cor 6:9-10, where the references to "softies" (lacking self-control) and "bed-males" (arrogant penetrators of boys) occur as illustrations of the abuse of power (*adikia*) that heads the list of condemned behaviors (Hanks 2000:108). In Biblical literature when idolatry is condemned (as in Rom 1:18-23, 25) this commonly refers to the religions of cruelly oppressive *empires*, so writers like Paul naturally link the idolatrous worship that rationalizes the oppressive behavior with sexual abuse (Hanks 1983/82; 1992). These factors suggest that in so far as the Gentile "unclean" sexual behavior involved acts that were also sinful, the reference would not be to loving consensual sexual acts between adults, but to abuses of power, as in rape (Sodom), the sexual exploitation of unwilling slaves and in paedophilia. But whether we emphasize the dominant condemnation of idolatry and oppression (1:18-23, 25, 29) and/or accept Countryman's case for the "bracketing" of sexual practices as "unclean" but *not necessarily sinful* (1:24, 26-27), the Greek syntax in 1:29 and the rhetorical trap (2:1-16) render impossible any effort to extricate from Rom 1:24, 26-27 "ethical absolutes" condemning all homoerotic sex. As Countryman reminds us, "Same-gender sexual acts are treated here [in Rom 1:27] not as sinful but as consequences of a prior sin" (2003:177).

Countryman thus shows how the earlier general instruction on believers' praxis prepares the ground for the later deconstruction of uncleanness: What love commands suffices to satisfy the Law, even if it does not fulfill its letter [13:8-10]. The latter interpretation allows for the fact that Paul is about to *bracket the Torah's purity requirements*" (2003:201). Concerning 14:14 ("**nothing is unclean in itself**") he then observes: "It would not be a mistake to call this *the central affirmation of Romans*. I do not say that it is the central affirmation of Paul's faith; chapters 7-8 may give us a closer view of that. But it is the principle that Paul sees as necessary to any resolution of the conflict over food purity in the church at Rome" (2003:205). Countryman then concludes:

The Letter to Romans has a large and coherent structure....The larger part of it...is constructed in the form of *two extended, parallel entrapments*. In these, Paul hopes to neutralize potential opposition by showing those who assume an easy superiority to people of the opposite ethnicity that they have no real claim....The two 'entrapments' (1:18-32; chaps 9—11) came to be read as theological set pieces on the evils of homosexuality and Judaism, respectively, instead of playing their rhetorical function of entrapment for two distinct groups of Christians who prided themselves on their ethnicity and looked down on those who differed" (2003:211-12; see Boswell 1980 on anti-Semitism and homophobia)...."It is deeply distressing that Romans 1 and 9 have come to be read as affirmations of Christian cultural prejudices, whether against same-gender sexual partners or against Jews. **Passages that began as entrapments for the proud have now become bulwarks of our pride**....It is obscene that what began as an exercise in exposing the self-confidence of the proud has so long been an excuse for Christian arrogance and violence against gay-lesbian people and Jews." (2003:217).

Rom 1:18-32 + 2:1-16 thus constitutes the first entrapment wherein Paul sets up those *Jews* and others like them who felt themselves superior to the common "unclean" Gentile culture. The trap is set in 1:18-32 in the rhetorical denunciation of the idolatry, injustice and unclean sexual practices, and then sprung in 2:1-16 (actually extending to 8:39). Rom 9:1-29 + 9:30—11:36 constitutes the second entrapment, wherein Paul sets

up those *Gentiles* and others like them who felt themselves superior to traditional Jews. The trap is set in 9:1-29 (with the concluding reference to Sodom in 9:29 playing a role similar to 1:24-27 in the first entrapment). The trap is then sprung in 9:30—11:36 with the teaching that the branches broken off eventually are to be restored. The springing of the trap is then extended to 15:13 with the teaching that all things have become clean (14:14, 20). In addition to deconstructing Paul's rhetoric against "uncleanness" in Gentile sexual behavior (Rom 1:24), his bracketing of Pentateuchal purity requirements (in 14:14, 20) may be perceived as specifically deconstructing the prohibitions of male-male anal sex (Lev 18:22; 20:13, echoed in Rom 1:24-32; Hanks 2000:91; cf Ron Long 2004: viii, 90-94; Bernadette Brooten 1996:283-83). In effect, Paul's laying of his rhetorical trap in 1:18-32 leads readers to assume he is simply echoing Leviticus, while the springing of the trap (2:1-16) and declaring of all things clean (14:14, 20) make clear his conclusion that Jewish purity legislation was not literally binding on the Roman churches.

Jewett recognizes that **Rom 1:26** simply describes **females** who had changed the "natural *use*" of a sex partner for a use "beyond/against nature" (*para phusin*), and that Paul does *not* specify that this unnatural use involves another female (176 note 127). Jewett also recognizes that the reference to "*their* females" (1:26) implies patriarchal possession and male chauvinism (Brooten, Jewett; even Gagnon 2001:302). However, though recognizing that 1:26 does not refer explicitly to lesbians nor to homoeroticism, Jewett insists that a reference to lesbianism is clearly implied (176, note 127, following Brooten 1996:248-53, note 99 and her arguments against James Miller's 1995 *Novum Testamentum* article). In thus following Brooten, Jewett ignores Miller's powerful patristic evidence (Clement of Alexandria; Augustine, etc.) that for more than three centuries after Paul wrote, Romans 1:26 was understood to refer to women resorting to unnatural (nonprocreative) anal sex with males, *never* to female homoeroticism (see **Appendix 1 below**; Schreiner 1997:94 note 5 mistakenly refers to Miller's heterosexual reading as "creative" although it was the *exclusive* patristic interpretation until ca 400 AD!). Moreover, since pederasty was not associated with lesbians, Jewett proceeds to reject Robin Scroggs' hypothesis that the homoeroticism in Paul's diatribe targets only pederasty (177).

Miller's interpretation of 1:26 as referring to unnatural non-procreative heterosexual acts has been defended by David Fredrickson 2000:201; Hanks 2000:90-91; 2006:591-93; Helminiak 2000:86-90; Bryan 2000:86-87; Swancutt 2003:196, 209-10, note 36; Kuefler 2001:384, note 55; Ellens 2006:132; see also Jennings 2009:143-147; Martin Stowasser, NTS 43 (1997:517), earlier Peter Tomson 1990:106). Jewett cites only Tomson 1990, Miller's 1995 article and Fredrickson, and seems unaware of other scholarly literature and exegetical arguments against his position. Although he includes textual citations to exemplify innumerable minor points about the meaning of Greek words, Jewett fails to cite any of the patristic references that contradict his interpretation of 1:26 as referring to female homoeroticism.

Rather than commending Paul's reference to women in 1:26 as an effort "to equalize the roles and responsibilities of males and females" (2007:178 and note 146; 2000:231), Jewett would have done better to grapple more seriously with the problem that all other Biblical references in both Testaments refer explicitly only to males (Lev 18:22; 20:13; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10; similarly the Koran), although heterosexist majority propaganda (including Gagnon) continually conceals this fact with prejudiced translations and repeated references to Biblical texts as condemning "homosexuality." Instead of imagining that Paul cleverly pens a new law and thus invents the new sin of lesbianism in Rom 1:26, best follow the Apostle's own advice not to "go beyond what is written" (1 Cor 4:6) and recognize that in Greco-roman culture "unnatural" was not simply a synonym for "lesbian." It is especially ironic that so many who conclude that "Paul believed that the law had been abrogated in Christ" (Gagnon 2001:241 in an excellent note on the subject), then imagine that in Rom 1:26 the Apostle invents a new law to add to Moses' 613! (see Rom 10:4; 7:2, 6; cf Jewett 2007:619). Few who advocate justice and equality for women would insist that said "equality" should extend to lesbians the death penalty for abusive male-male anal sex (Lev 20:13; Rom 1:32)!

Bernadette Brooten points out that the reference to **"their females"** indicates "the group nature of the transgression" (1996:240) and recognizes the patriarchal implications of the phrase (which is not repeated with reference to the males in 1:27): "It is a logical term in male dominated societies, in which women belong to men and are seen in relation to them. This qualifying of women underscores their subordinate status within this culture" (241). Robert Gagnon agrees that the reference in 1:26 to "females of them / their females"

implies “that wives belonged to their husbands in a way that husbands did not belong to their wives” (2001:236) and chides prejudiced translators who omit the possessive pronoun (see Spanish NVI) or mistranslate the phrase “among them”). Although denying any attribution of “misogyny,” Gagnon acknowledges that “it is impossible to discount an element of chauvinism in Paul’s remarks” (2001:302).

Jewett agrees with Brooten and Gagnon and chides the commentaries for not explaining the phrase, which he recognizes may contain “an element of chauvinism or procreational preoccupation” (2007:177 and note 135; Moo, Schreiner and Wright ignore the phrase). The reference to “*their* females,” implying female inferiority and status as male sexual property, makes most sense, however, if the women were involved in “unnatural” (non-procreative) intercourse with the males, but *would it not be strange if they had in fact escaped all patriarchal control and oppression to enjoy sex with one another?* In addition, interpreters who assume that Rom 1:26 must refer to lesbians have struggled to explain why the reference to females should precede the reference to males in 1:27 (Brooten 1996:240 note 73; Gagnon “Excursus” 2001:299-303). Jewett concludes that the order is determined by the rhetoric that seeks to give the most shocking example first (2007:178). However, if we recognize that 1:26 refers only to “unnatural” acts, but not a change of male partners for female, while 1:27 specifies the *additional* factor of males “leaving the natural use” of females to engage in anal sex with one another, “males in males,” the rhetoric obviously is climactic, ending with a reference to the male-male anal sex abuse explicitly condemned in Lev 20:13 with the death penalty. Matthew Kuefler concludes, moreover, that the females referred to in 1:26 are engaged in cultic prostitution (a possibility Jewett does not consider) and critiques Brooten for affirming “incorrectly that the Roman-period sources on homoeroticism do not focus on cult prostitution” (2001:383 note 55; Hanks 2006:594).

Jewett commends Fredrickson, who says scholars have been “remarkably incurious” about the meaning of **chresis (“use”, Rom 1:26-27)**, which implies “the instrumentality of the object of sexual desire” (178, citing Fredrickson 2000:199; see BDAG 2000:1089; Brooten 1996:245; Jennings 2009:132). The common translation of *chresis* as “relations” instead of “use” implies a mutuality in sex, which *chresis* implicitly negates (199). BDAG recognizes that the primary meanings are “use” and “usefulness” but then with no basis gives “relations...esp. of sexual intercourse” as the meaning in Rom 1:26-27 (2000:1089; see “relations” in NIV; “intercourse” in NRSV). However, the reader who consults Fredrickson on *chresis* (199-205) may conclude that Jewett also was (uncharacteristically) incurious about the word, since Fredrickson’s study supports his agreement with Miller that Rom 1:26 does *not* refer to female homoeroticism (201). He points out that, although *chresis* is *occasionally* used of a wife’s “use” of her husband, he finds no examples involving other females (201, note 15). Since *chresis* rarely is used with reference to women, the female reference in Rom 1:26 may suggest the mannishness of women who seek to control the sexual act to avoid procreation. Gagnon emphasizes that in 1:26 *chresis* first refers to the females’ “use” of a male sexual partner but argues that the second use (implied but not explicit in the Greek) refers to unnatural relations with a female partner. He then finally manages to conclude that for Paul sex is “first and foremost self-giving rather than self-gratifying” and has its function in “giving pleasure to a complementary sexual ‘other,’” citing 1 Cor 7:3-5 and Christ’s self-emptying in Phlp 2:5-11; 2001:236-37). This final edifying point undoubtedly is true for the texts he cites (1 Cor 7:3-5 and Phlp 2:5-11), but according to both Gagnon and Jewett the governing emphasis in each verse in Rom 1:24, 26-27 is on sexual lust, not sacrificial love (2007:178)!

Much attention has been given to New Testament and Pauline cultural-anthropological perspectives **on honor/shame** (Moxnes 1988:207-18; Brooten 1996:208-212; Jewett 1997:25-73). Few recognize, however, that this perspective signals the third element in Paul’s deconstruction of Rom 1:24, 26-27 (Hanks 2000:92). Just as each verse focuses on unclean excess desire, three times we find a similar emphasis on the shameful consequences of excess desire, which indicate a lack of self-control and discipline:

- “to be *dishonored their bodies among themselves....*” (1:24)
- “females...passions of *dishonor*” (1:26)
- “males...the *shamelessness* working” (1:27).

However, in Paul's Gospel, Jesus' crucifixion — the most shameful experience in antiquity — is the central element (Rom. 3:21-26)! Thus Paul later deconstructs his earlier rhetoric with the presentation of Jesus' shameful crucifixion (together with the resurrection) as central to God's redemption and liberation of the cosmos. In evident anticipation of the later emphasis on a crucified Messiah, Paul has already declared himself "not ashamed" (1:16) of his Gospel. The Apostle proceeds to encourage the humble members of the tenement churches in Rome (overwhelmingly sexual minorities, mainly slave-class, led by women) to assert their human dignity as God's sons and heirs and learn to "*boast*" of culturally shameful experiences. Thus the three-fold references to shame in 1:24, 26-27 would seem to find echo in the three references to appropriate *boasting* in Romans 5:1-2, 11, where humble, marginalized church members, formerly falling short of the glory of God, are now justified (3:23; 5:1). Troels Engberg-Pedersen points out that Paul uses the term *kauchasthai* (boasting) "in a reinterpreted manner that almost makes it a term of art for the new relationship with God" (2000:222). One of Jewett's earlier insights is also especially relevant:

On one level, shame is the embarrassment in getting caught. But at another level, **shame** is felt when others demean people on prejudicial grounds, not because of what they have done but because of their identity, whether it be racial, cultural, *sexual* or religious. The most damaging form of shame is internalizing such evaluations, which imply that persons or groups were worthless, that their lives are without significance (lecture, "Honor and Shame in Pauline Theology: A Preliminary Probe" (ACTS Colleague Presentations, 14 December 1995, p. 1; italics mine).

Amazingly, Jewett totally ignores the fact that Paul uses "*para phusin*" ("against/beyond nature") **both in Romans 1:26 (2007:175-77) and 11:24 (692-93)**—the only uses of this phrase in the entire New Testament! Thus, neither in treating *para phusin* in 1:26(-27), nor in his treatment of the identical phrase in 11:24, does Jewett recognize as significant that in 11:24 it is *God* who "against nature" engrafts the gentiles into the Jewish Olive Tree (cf. Hanks 2006:587-88). However, in 11:24 Paul clearly deconstructs his rhetoric about sexual acts "against nature," affirming that God himself acted "in excess of nature" by grafting unclean Gentile branches into the pure olive tree (Israel). Paul then proceeds to show that such divine action that transcends "nature" was to be celebrated (Rom 11:32-36; 15:7-13), not condemned. The significance of God's acting "against nature" (11:24) for interpreting Paul's rhetoric in 1:26-27 had been clearly emphasized by John Boswell (1980:112), William Countryman (1988:113-114; 2007:112-114), and Daniel Helminiak (2000:80-86) but ignored in the polemics of Thomas Schmidt (see 1995:191 note 41) in his determination to equate "against nature" in 1:26-27 with sin; cf Robert Gagnon (2001:390, note 68). Bernadette Brooten (1996) in a footnote cites Helminiak's reference to this double occurrence of *para phusin* in Romans 1:26 and 11:24, but dismisses its significance as "methodologically problematic...because the two contexts differ so sharply" (246, note 88). *The contrast between the two contexts, however, is precisely what gives weight to Paul's deconstruction!*

Thus, as William Countryman (2003) pointed out, regarding Rom 11:24:

The inclusion of the Gentiles in the Christian community represents a break with the preceding order of things as substantial as God's handing over of the Gentiles to their unclean culture...The constant, in both cases, is an assumption that there was a clear Gentile identity that God has altered not once, but twice: first in punishing the Gentile foundational sin of idolatry, and now, a second time, in incorporating Gentiles in the Christian community for reasons entirely of God's own grace. Both acts were 'unnatural' acts (2003:196; see also p. 174).

Moreover, as Ted Jennings emphasizes, Paul (like Jesus; Mat 19:12; Lk 14:26; 18:29) counsels disciples to avoid marriage and procreation (1 Cor 7:7-8, 32-35; Jennings 2009:131-38). Instead of "natural" procreative sex (abandoned in Rom 1:26-27 and never practiced or recommended by Paul), the aim of the Apostle to the Gentiles is to "bear much fruit" (John 15:1-17) in winning more Gentiles to the faith, who are then engrafted by God "against nature" into the Olive Tree (God's people; Rom 11:11-24).

Paul even begins his **deconstruction of "against nature"** (*para phusis*, 1:26) immediately in chapter 2 by making circumcision itself a cultural imposition, an act *against* nature that God himself commanded (2:27; neglected ammunition in his Galatians argument)! As commentators universally recognize, Paul refers to

nature (*phusis*) in its most common meaning in 2:27, when he refers to the Gentiles as those who are “not circumcised *by nature*.” Even Robert Gagnon admits that Paul in effect says that the cutting of the foreskin in the act of circumcision is an act “against nature” (2001:372, note 34)—and hence when God commanded Abraham and his male offspring and slaves to be circumcised (Gen 17), he was commanding them to undertake an act “against nature.” The NIV, rushing to protect evangelical readers from tumbling into such heresy, disguises Paul’s deconstruction process by translating “by nature” as “physically” (2:27), so the reader misses the link Paul established with the phrase “against nature” in 1:26 and 11:24. But as Tom Wright points out, “All males are ‘naturally uncircumcised’ in the sense that they are *born that way*” (2002:448, note 73). Wright, in fact, concludes that, except for the reference to an abstract nature in 1 Cor 11:14 (male and female hair length), all the other Pauline usages refer to the status people have *by birth or race* (even Rom 1:26).

Moreover, even the earlier, more ambiguous text (2:14) is best translated:

For whenever Gentiles who do not *possess Torah by nature* (*phusei* [birth]) the things of the Torah *do*, these, though not having the Torah, are a law to themselves (cf. the NIV “*do by nature*,” instead of “*Gentiles...by nature*”).

The two recent major evangelical commentators recognize that Paul uses “by nature” in the same sense (“by birth”) in both 2:14 and 27 (Schreiner 1998:123; Wright 2002:441-42; earlier Cranfield; *pace* Gagnon 2001:371, note 32; Swancutt 2004:69). Wright points out that Paul always uses *phusis* in an adjectival phrase (“*Gentiles by nature*,” 2:14), not adverbially (“by nature *do*”; 1996:145, citing Paul Achtemeier 1985:45).

The significance of Paul’s deconstructive use of “against nature” in Romans 11:24 is most helpfully clarified by Eugene Rogers:

“Both the first and the second *para phusin* have to do specifically with Gentiles....Gentiles are so foreign to the God of Israel that Paul can say that God acts ‘contrary to nature,’ *para phusin*, in grafting them in. A phrase more liable to provoke...is difficult to imagine. Does Paul mean to compare God’s activity to homosexual activity?” (1999:64).

Elizabeth Stuart adds:

“Paul’s use of this phrase in Romans 11:24 is shocking considering his previous use of the phrase earlier in this letter to describe, not homosexual people, but Gentiles who characteristically engage in same-sex activity, a characteristic that distinguishes them, not from heterosexuals, but from Jews....Paul is making the outrageous claim that God stands in solidarity with these Gentiles; God like them acts against, or more accurately, in excess of nature.” (2003:96).

Rogers concludes:

“Just as God saved flesh by taking it on [in Jesus’ incarnation, Rom 8:3] and defeated death by dying [Rom 8:11], so God saves those [Gentiles], who act in excess of nature (Rom 1:26-27), by an act in excess of nature. Gentile Christians owe their very salvation to God’s unnatural act” (Rom 11:24; Rogers 1999:65, also cited in Stuart 2003:96).

Jewett points out that that in **Rom 1:27** the male “leaving/abandoning” the “natural use of the female” is the rough equivalent of the term female “exchange” in v. 26b and then concludes that this leaving “implies a departure from a divinely intended, originally heterosexual relationship between males and females” (178). **His translation of 1:27 contains three controversial elements:**

- “And likewise also the males, after they abandoned the natural use (*chresin*) with females, were inflamed (*exekáuthesan*) with their lust (*oréksei*) for one another, males who work up (*katergadzómenoi*) their shameful member (*aschemosúnen*) in [other] males, and receive back for their deception (*plane*, error) the recompense that is tightness (*édei*) in themselves.” Quite possible is Jewett' understanding that the males “work up (*katergadzómenoi*) their shameful member (*aschemosúnen*) in [other] males” [specifying anal sex]; highly improbable, however, is his interpretation that for their “error” (*plane*) of sexual perversion the passive receptive males receive back the recompense of “tightness (*edei*, from the verb *dei*) in themselves.
- Jewett points out that *aschemosúne* may either refer to an “unseemly deed” or be a euphemism for sexual organs and concludes that in this case his translation “shameful member” is supported by the singular form of *aschemosúne* that follows the plurals of “males in males” (2007:179; see “indecent acts,” NIV). Although he cites only BAGD (1979:119) in support of his translation, BDAG (2000:147) also provides evidence: “nakedness euphem. = genitals”, citing Ex 20:26; Dt 23:14; Lev 18:6ff and in the NT Rv 16:15). In the case of Rom 1:27, however, Danker prefers “shameless deed” BDAG (2000:147). For *katergadzomai* Jewett can cite Hippocrates in support of an “explicit sexual sense of ‘work up for use’ or produce juices ‘in the body’ (2006:179), but other Pauline and New Testament uses commonly are general and positive and provide no support for any specialized medical sexual sense (BDAG 2000:531).
- Jewett then concludes that “In the context of anal intercourse, the verb *dei* has a special sense of ‘tighten’” and again cites Hippocrates in support of the translation “tightness” or “soreness” (Jewett 2007:179 and note 156), interpreting the soreness as the “recompense” that [passive] homosexual males purportedly receive. However, neither other commentaries nor BDAG 2000 provides any support for Jewett’s recourse to Hippocrates and the translation of *dei* as “tightness” (2000:213-214).

Much more convincing is the conclusion of Diana Swancutt that in Rom 1:27 the requital Paul refers to is what Philo of Alexandria (Paul’s Jewish contemporary) called “the disease of effemination” which commonly was thought to result in the case of males who submitted to anal penetration (2003:193-233; 2004:56; Hanks 2006:596-97). Although Jewett refers to the context of Hippocrates’ reference to “tightness” as being that of “anal intercourse” (2007:179), he then contradictorily concludes that “Paul’s language served to remove any vestige of decency, honor, or friendship from same-sex relations [generally!]. Neither distinguishing pederasty from relationships between adult, consenting males, nor distinguishing between active and passive partners as Roman culture was inclined to do, Paul simply follows the line of his Jewish cultural tradition by construing the entire realm of homosexual relations [not just male-male anal sex!] as evidence that divine wrath was active therein” (179). Undoubtedly Jewett correctly holds that we should take into account Paul’s Jewish cultural tradition, which limited its concern to male-male *anal* intercourse (Lev 18:22; 20:13) and never condemned lesbian relations. But why limit the punishment to the passive partner (a raped slave?)? And why deny that the Apostle who penned Rom 12:1-2 may at times transcend both his Jewish and Greco-Roman cultural tradition, rather than being so totally conformed to “the world”? (cf Hanks 2000:91; 2006:594-95).

**1:27e planes error, wandering from the path of truth** (cf planet, a wandering body). Most understand the “error” (*planes*) in 1:27b to refer to the idolatry of 1:19-23, 25 and the “recompense/payback” to be the sexual uncleanness of 1:24, 26-27 (Schreiner 1998:97; Byrne 1996:77; BDAG 2000:822). Thus, William Countryman concluded that we should “take the ‘error’ as idolatry and the ‘recompense’ as the [sexual] uncleanness of Gentile culture” (1988:115): “because the progenitors of the Gentiles forsook the true God to worship idols, God visited on them and on their progeny a characteristic kind of uncleanness and disgrace, namely the desire for and practice of same-gender sexual relations [rather non-procreative anal sex?]. This is not a matter of individual idolaters receiving a recompense for their errors, it is a cultural characteristic. The Gentiles receive *among* themselves the due recompense [unclean, disgraceful sexual practice] of their error [idolatry]” (2007:114-15). Similarly, Robert Gagnon translates: “receiving in themselves the payback which

was necessitated by their straying (from the truth about God)” (2001:260). He also interprets: “The ‘straying’ or ‘error’ (*plane*) as that of not acknowledging the true God (i.e., idolatry)”, which he calls “the consensus view” (2001:260 and note 19; see Calvin, Hodge, Godet, Murray, Cranfield 126-27, Wilckens, Dunn 165, Schmidt 83-84, Nissinen 109, Byrne 1996:77, Helminiak 2000:98-99; Schreiner 1998:97; Hultgren 2011:102-03; TDNT). As Gagnon says, both Countryman and Schmidt point out “that Paul consistently used *plane* ...of wrong belief rather than wrong conduct” (2001:260 note 19). BDAG also backs them up, defining *plane* in Rom 1:27 as “an erroneous view of God, as exhibited in polytheism, resulting in moral degradation” (2000:822, citing Wisdom 12:24).

Jewett, however, is among those who oppose this interpretation and rather interprets *plane* in 1:27b as the error of sexual misconduct (1:24, 26-27a) and the payback, recompense or penalty (1:27b) as the anal tightness or soreness suffered as a result of being penetrated (2007:180), thus implicitly limiting the sexual misconduct to male-male *anal* sex but with the penalty suffered only by the penetrated male. Others similarly designate the “error” to be excessive passion or homosexual activity (Schmithals, Fredrickson 215-217, Moo 116, Fitzmyer 288, Wright 434, Talbert 68, Swancutt 2003:212) while, Brooten leaves the question open (1996:257-58; *pace* Hultgren 2011:102, note 83). Countryman argues that if we depart from the meaning of *plane* as a reference to idolatry we are left with a mysterious “recompense/ payback/requital” that is undesignated in the context, while the sexual uncleanness is clearly indicated in 1:24, 26-27 as God’s punishment for idolatry. Jewett’s interpretation does suggest a coherent development in 1:27: leaving → lust → anal penetration → punishment. Preferable, however, to Jewett’s definition of the punishment as anal “tightness/soreness” would be Swancutt’s “disease of effemination” that would affect both penetrator and penetrated. Jewett recognizes that the antecedents in 1:27 refer the punishment only to the males (2007:180), even though the purported “lesbian” behaviour of 1:26 was supposed to be the worst offense.

**2:1-16** Bernadette Brooten concludes her interpretation of Romans 1:18-32 by referring to Paul as trying “to persuade his readers” with his purported “condemnation of homoeroticism” (1996:302). More wisely, Jewett concludes that regarding homoerotic acts *no persuasion* would have been *necessary*, and that Paul would have counted on the audience in Roman house and tenement churches in 57 AD to agree with the negative rhetoric (2007:173), but that the text did have “persuasive power” to make its case “that the human race was involved in a consciously vicious campaign to suppress the truth” (2007:191). Wisest of all, however, is the conclusion of **Diana Swancutt** that *Paul’s aim* in 1:18-32 is *not to persuade*, but to **entrap**, and that to interpret 1:18-32 correctly we must recognize that the rhetoric reaches its climax only when the trap is sprung in 2:1-16 and the judgmental members of the audience tumble in (Swancutt 2003:193-233; 2004:42-73).

Swancutt (2004:45), developing the conclusions of Stanley Stowers (1994), shows the importance of not breaking our reading of Rom 1:18-32 at the end of Chapter 1, but continuing through 2:1-16, since this section springs the **rhetorical trap** with “a sweeping sting operation” (so even Gagnon 2001:278) and constitutes the immediate goal of the rhetoric in 1:18-32 (Hanks 2006:596-98). Paul’s purpose in 1:18-32 is thus not to persuade his audience that homoeroticism is a terrible sin, nor even to convince them that “all have sinned” (3:23), both Jews and Greeks (3:9). Rather his references to the “uncleanness” (1:24) of females avoiding procreation by lustful anal sex (1:26) and males similarly practicing lustful anal sex with one another (1:27) is held out as a kind of bait to their prejudices in order to then convict them of the sin of judgmental hypocrisy like that of the pretentious censorious bigot in the diatribe of 2:1-16. Jewett correctly insists that Paul’s “brilliant” (200) and “elaborate rhetorical trap” (203) only will have the desired effect when the audience finally hears the reproaches about their own judging of one another in Chapter 14 (14:3-5, 10, 13, 22; Jewett 2007:197, 202 note 91). There Paul exhorts them to refrain from judging one another regarding diverse lifestyles and welcome one another in order to unite in support of his mission project. Paul’s rhetorical entrapment of hypocrites (both Gentiles and Jews, 2:1-29) who are judgmental of others thus fits perfectly with Jewett’s understanding of the letter’s purpose in uniting the strong and the weak in the five tenement and house churches in support of the Apostle’s prospective mission to the barbarians in Spain.

Although thus Jewett captures better than anyone the complexity of Paul’s trap, especially its relation to Rom 14, he cites only Stowers’ earlier work on Diatribe (1981), but not the later one (1994; emphasizing the relationship of 2:1-16 with 1:18-32), nor does he refer to Diana Swancutt’s development of this point (2004).

Thus, although commentators may now recognize that in Rom 1:18-32 Paul lays a rhetorical trap that is then sprung in 2:1-16 (and then applied more fully in Rom 14), the question has not been faced as to what, if any, “ethical weight” should be given to the elements in the rhetorical trap that coincide with common Jewish prejudices (Hanks 2006:598 raises the question). Obviously, Paul would want the Roman house churches to avoid impiety and idolatry and the 21 items in his vice list (1:18-23, 25, 28-32), but why does he bracket 1:24, 26-27 with the description “uncleanness” (1:24; cf. his later deconstruction)?

If clear sexual ethics guidelines be his goal in 1:24, 26-27, why is Paul so vague about the “unnatural use” of “their females” in 1:26, especially if he really intends to invent a new prohibition against lesbianism notably absent in the Hebrew Bible and from 1 Cor 6:9 (his specific, limited reference to “bed-*males*”)? And if Paul intended to invent a new law against lesbianism to add to Moses’ 613, why was the language so misleading that no one interpreted it correctly for 350 years (centuries when most Church Fathers like Clement of Alexandria were fluent in Greek; though not Augustine), until John Chrysostom (around 400 AD) finally made things “clear”? And for the males of 1:27 would he only insist that covetous sexual lust and exploitation be avoided and love for neighbor that does no harm become the norm (13:8-13)? Or does he really intend his audience to deduce a clear code of sexual ethics from his rhetorical “Decline of Civilization” narrative in 1:18-32? The growing multiplication of possibly intended “codes” (1:27 as prohibiting only “perversion”—*homosexual acts by heterosexual males*—or paedophilia, or sexual abuse and exploitation of slaves, or participation in cult prostitution) suggests that Paul’s intention in 1:24, 26-27 was not to provide clear behavioral norms, since when he clearly aims to do so the ambiguity is greatly reduced (13:8-13).

### Three Hermeneutical Horizons:

**(1) Holy War against homosexuality (Gagnon) vs Paul’s mission to Spain (Jewett):** To understand Paul’s purpose in 1:16-2:16 we must recall (1) the nature of the house churches as consisting largely of the poor (slaves and freed persons), sexual minorities and led mainly by women (Rom 16), (2) the divisions in these churches between the strong, mainly gentiles, and weak, mainly Jews (14:1-15:13) and (3) the Apostle’s effort involve these feuding Roman churches to help launch his mission to Spain (15:14-33) and thus usher in Jesus’ return and earthly rule. The complex situation Paul addressed resulted in a subtle use of rhetoric in 1:16-2:16 that easily confuses modern readers, unaware of the variety of listeners, Paul’s multiple intentions and his purposeful baiting of his rhetorical trap with ambiguous language.

Obviously, arrogant prejudice against the “barbarians” and “foolish” (1:14) in Spain would be a major obstacle to any effort to get support in Rome for Paul’s proposed mission, and it is this imperial prejudice that the laying (1:18-32) and springing (2:1-16) of the rhetorical trap devastatingly addresses. The foolish pagan option for idolatry (1:18-23, 25) and God’s resulting abandonment of them to sexual uncleanness (1:24, 26-27) and social injustices (1:28-32) perfectly describe those barbarians in Spain (“they....them”), as seen from Rome. The rhetorical sting operation in 2:1-16 drives home the point: anyone who presumes to condemn those barbarians in Spain had best take a look in the mirror first.

Traditional interpreters commonly place great emphasis on the significance for us of Paul’s rhetorical structure with the 2d “God gave them up” (1:26; cf 1:24 and 28) and the related “exchange” (26) and “leaving” (27; cf 23, 28) of natural procreative sex for practices against nature. They thus seek to make the *gender* of the sex partner a factor of transcendent importance, comparable to the option for idolatry (1:19-23, 25) and the destructive social vices of 1:28-32). At the other extreme would be those who take as prophetic the 1963 British Quaker dismissal of homosexuality as simply “sexual left handedness.” Should the small minority of left handed persons be permitted to freely indulge their preference/orientation, few today would consider such freedom a threat to true religion, traditional families or civil society, nor would anyone prohibit them from serving in military forces, baseball teams, nor deny them marriage rites or clerical ordination. Is the gender of one’s sexual partner really of such transcendent importance as to justify all the related cultural wars and ecclesiastical battles (coherent only when patriarchy is assumed to be normative)?

Before we acquiesce in taking “seriously/literally” all that many take as implied in Paul’s rhetoric, we should scrutinize carefully the context he provides. The option of certain women for nonprocreative heterosexual anal sex (26) and the male abandonment of women are not simply decisions to practice anal sex, which in the case of the males of v. 27 was homoerotic. The sexual practices referred to are those of persons whom Paul describes as [1] impious idolaters (1:25, 18-23) [2] whose abuses of power (oppression, 1:18, 29) and [3] burning sexual desires (1:24, 26-27), most commonly were manifest in (a) the exploitation of slaves and prostitutes, (b) the abuse of minors, and (c) the promiscuity of pagan fertility cults. Nowhere on Paul’s canvas can we detect a devout Christian gay or lesbian couple in a committed, loving relationship.

**(2). Patriarchal slave society.** Jewett has long insisted (2000; Hanks 2000:93, note 20) that researchers have given little attention to the correlation between homosexuality and slavery (see Note below). The right of masters to demand sexual services from slaves and freed men is an important factor in grasping the impact of Paul’s rhetoric (2007:180), as illustrated in Seneca the Elder’s oft-cited comment: “Sexual servicing is a crime for the freeborn, a necessity for a slave, and a duty for the freeman” (Jewett 180; 2013:26; on slavery see also Jennifer Glancy 2002/6; J. Albert Harrill 2006:119-144). Paul purports to bring the “wonderful news” of God’s liberating justice to some five house and tenement churches in Rome (1:16-17), but if this news consists of a theocratic yearning to reinstate the Leviticus death penalty for all males who submit to anal penetration (Rom 1:32; Lev 20:13), it could hardly expect to be greeted with enthusiasm on the part of the vast majority (slaves, freedmen and women) in Rome’s churches, nor was the situation in Corinth where Paul dictated the letter any different (Glancy 2006:49-50). James Dunn challenges Jewett’s emphasis on the mission purpose of Romans, arguing that the absence of Jewish communities (with their Gentile “God-fearers”) and ignorance of the Greek language in Spain would have made expectations of support from the poor Roman tenement churches unrealistic (2007). Dunn, however, forgets that slaves and former slaves from Spain in such churches may well have represented the cultures, known the crucial languages and maintained useful contacts with their former homeland (see the key role of the Israelite slave girl in Naaman’s healing, 2 Kings 5:2-3).

**Note. Romans 16:1-16; \*(S/S? = names of slaves/liberated slaves; J = Jewish)**

- 3 Greet *PRISCA and AQUILA*, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles, 5 and the church in their house.  
Greet my beloved Epaenetus [S1?], who was the firstfruit of Asia for Christ.
- 6 Greet Mary [S2?, J?], who has worked very hard for you.
- 7 Greet *Andronicus* [S3?, J] and *Junia* [S1, J], my fellow Judeans and fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who indeed were in Christ before me.
- 8 Greet Ampliatus [S2], my beloved in the Lord.
- 9 Greet Urbanus [S4?], our fellow worker in Christ and my beloved Stachys [S5?].
- 10 Greet Apelles [S6?], who is approved in Christ.  
Greet the slaves (+) who belong to the household of Aristobulus.
- 11 Greet Herodion [S3, J], my fellow Judean.  
Greet the slaves (+) who belong to the household of Narcissus, those in the Lord.
- 12 Greet Tryphaena [S 4] and Tryphosa [S 5], who labor in the Lord.  
Greet Persis [S 6] my beloved, another woman who has worked hard in the Lord.
- 13 Greet Rufus [S 7?], chosen in the Lord; also his mother, a mother to me also.
- 14 Greet Asyncritus [S 8?], Phlegon [S 9?], Hermes [S 7], Patrobas [S 10?], Hermas [S 11?], and the brothers (+) with them.
- 15 Greet *Philologus* [S 12?] and *Julia* [S 8], Nereus [S 9] and his sister [S?], and Olympas [S 13?] and all the saints (+) who are with them.
- 16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you....

Jewett’s reminder about slavery forcefully raises the question whether commentators are wise when they try to squeeze an ethical absolute out of a perplexing mythico-historial “decline of civilization” narrative loaded with ambiguous terms. However, if we allow Rom 1:19-32 to be interpreted within the framework of the proclamation of the Gospel of liberating justice (1:16-17) and the description of God’s wrath as targeting oppression (1:18, 29), we can agree with Jewett when he suggests that “Paul’s rhetoric may provide entrée into the similarly unhappy experience of Christian slaves and former slaves who had experienced and resented sexual exploitation both for themselves and for their children, in a culture marked by aggressive bisexuality” (181, citing Cantarella, *Bisexuality*, 156-64). Jewett himself, however, then concludes that Paul intends a

“moral condemnation of same-sex and extra-marital relations *of all kinds*” (181) implying a “damnation” that would provoke terror rather than comfort for slaves! Best recognize, then, that Paul targets only those same-sex acts that were acts of oppression (1:18, 29). Moreover, if we hesitate to make a flying leap from Jesus’ parable about the shrewd but dishonest steward to an ethical absolute approving dishonest stewards (Luke 16:18; Harrill 2006:66-83), Paul’s employment in Romans 1:19-32 of a puzzling “decline of civilization narrative” should give us similar pause, especially given the Apostle’s deconstruction in the course of the letter of four of his five basic descriptions of the sexual practices referred to (Hanks 2000:91-94) and the limited, coherent norms provided later (Rom 13:8-14), where hyperbolic rhetoric aiming to entrap gives way to sober instruction.

However, Paul was projecting a mission to Spain as representing the “ends of the world,” the uttermost extremes of his [flat]-earth geography. When this mission was completed and the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible thus fulfilled, he expected Jesus to return within his own lifetime. Robert Gagnon (presupposing that gay sex must always involve a male being penetrated anally by another male) concludes that such a phenomenon as a godly Christian committed gay couple engaging in loving, consensual sex that was not exploitative was similarly simply off Paul’s erotic map: “for both Philo and Paul same-sex relationships were *inherently exploitative*” (2001:311; italics mine). Paul’s writings are thus reduced to the level of his sexist, heterosexist and homophobic contemporaries and despite his theological genius and his claim to apostolic authority, he is not permitted to transcend common ignorance and prejudice.

Such a conclusion is highly questionable (Hanks 2006:601-04). Scholars will forever debate how much Paul might have known about the complex scene of homoerotic relations in ancient Greco-Roman cultures, but Gagnon’s conclusion is significant, since he insists that Paul’s two references to homoerotic acts refer *only to sexual exploitation*: sexual abuse by anal penetration (Rom 1:26?-27; 1 Cor 6.9?, probably homoerotic; cf 1 Tim 1:9, abuse of enslaved prostitutes, probably deutero-pauline). However, Gagnon then concludes that (1) since Paul only knew of homoerotic *exploitation*, such was the only kind of homoerotic relations that existed in antiquity, and (2) that such are the only kinds that exist today and (3) hence that the church must condemn all homoerotic acts today as sexual exploitation that is contrary to God’s will (2001:311-12).

Paul, however, makes no pretense of describing every homoerotic act or relation in his day, but refers rather to humanity as a whole at some supposed time in the ancient past after the invention of idolatry. To leap from an element in such rhetoric to conclude that all homoerotic relations today involve sexual exploitation and must be condemned is quite a stretch, comparable to that of the theologians in Galileo’s day, so overly confident of their skill in biblical exegesis that they arrogantly refused to peer thru a telescope and learn that the earth was neither flat nor the centre of the universe. Unquestionably, the Psalmist’s enthusiastic description of the sun bursting forth like a bridegroom from its heavenly “tent,” and racing across the earthly horizon like strong warrior, is majestic poetry that can still inspire praise to the Creator (Ps. 19:5-6), but for rocket scientists planning the next moon shot, such inspired poetry is no substitute for a modern astronomy textbook. No more should Paul’s references to idolatry and resulting sexual uncleanness be taken as a modern psychological textbook for “eradicating homosexuality” (stamp out its “only cause”: pagan idolatry?).

If we grant Gagnon’s contention that Paul referred only to sexual exploitation, his rhetoric may have been convincing and appropriate for his limited goals with his first-century Roman readers (despite obvious ancient prescientific limitations regarding sexual orientations, the origins of idolatry and homoerotic practices). Nevertheless, like an ancient poem or parable that limps badly if read as literal science (mustard seed size?), Paul’s text needs to be scrutinized and repackaged for modern readers. It may still represent divine wisdom that serves to warn against and condemn the kind of harmful exploitative sexual practices that Paul mainly had in view and which still abound in both gay and straight circles. But Paul’s limited focus on his proposed mission to Spain as representing the ends of the earth (15:24, 28) should not be cited to deny the existence of the Americas or China; nor should we cite his expectation of Jesus’ return before Paul’s death (13:11-12; 1 Thes 4:15; 1 Cor 7:29-31) to deny 2000 years of world history since the Apostle’s martyrdom in Rome. Neither, then, would it be wise to cite Paul’s focus in Rom 1:24-27 on lustful exploitation to deny the very existence today of devout Christian gay and lesbian couples in committed loving relationships.

Moreover, in the kind of rhetorical denunciations of human folly and injustice that Paul sets forth in 1:18-2:16, biblical writers commonly resort to hyperbole—exaggerations that no sensible exegete would want to take literally as scientifically accurate descriptions. Two chapters later the Apostle provides abundant examples of such hyperbole in a diatribe containing a catena of quotations, which in the Hebrew Bible denounced specific groups of oppressors, but which Paul applies universally to all humanity (3:9-18). John Reuman wisely cautions: “Diatribe is not doctrine,” (2003:1286) but that is how Gagnon interprets Paul reference to homoerotic desire and exploitation in Rom 1:27. A glance at the rhetoric of prophetic denunciations of sin should warn us against such literalism (see Hosea 4:1-19; 6:8-10). Evangelicals now hasten to apologize to modern Jews and agree that not all Pharisees in Jesus’ day are justly and accurately described in the seven woes against the hypocrites in Matthew 23, nor are all Jews (either in Jesus’ day or since) fairly described as having the devil as their father (John 8:44). But though humility and apologies for anti-Semitism are in vogue since the Holocaust, cruel homophobic caricatures of homoerotic relations are still often applauded.

However, the wisdom of a balanced alternative approach that takes seriously not only the inspiration and value but also the scientific *limitations* of Rom 1:26-27 for dealing with the problems of homophobia and abusive homoerotic practices today are already evident even in Paul’s own sober guidelines for Christian sexual practices later in Rom 13:8-14. There the Apostle refrains from any sweeping condemnation or prohibition of homoerotic practices and draws on the Hebrew Bible commandment to love one’s neighbour with its implication to avoid anything that would harm the neighbour, including covetous sexual lust (*koitais*, “beds” 13:13 + *epithumía*, 13:14) and excesses (*aselgeiais*, 13:13)—wisdom applicable to persons of all sexual orientations (Jewett 2007:826).

Jewett, however (similarly to Gagnon), argues as follows regarding the “change” of sexual practices in 1:26 and the males who “abandoned” the use of females (1:27):

Convinced that heterosexuality was part of the divinely created order for humankind [1 Cor 7 and 11] and that sexual desire is essential to humans as *soma* [body], he [Paul] presents deviations from traditionally Judaic role definitions as indications of an arrogant assault on the Creator and as a sign of current and forthcoming wrath.... [In 1:27] the aorist participle *aphentes* (“abandoning”) is the rough equivalent of the term “exchange” in v. 26b. It implies a departure from a divine intended, originally heterosexual relationship between males and females (2007:177-178).

We should note, however, that after describing the males as “leaving the natural use of the female” Paul first emphasizes (as he did in 24 and 26) that the persons referred to “burned with desire/lust” (not love) for one another. In each of the three verses specifying sexual activity, the first emphasis is on sexual desire/lust, and 24 and 26 do not specify any homoerotic expression. The “arrogant assault on the Creator” that reflects divine wrath would be in each verse, above all, the breaking of the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment, not ignoring some detail of the Leviticus Holiness Code. However, although Jewett would appear to agree with Gagnon that Paul intended to imply a universal prohibition of same-sex relations, like Bernadette Brooten, he holds that Paul’s implicit norm was the result of his ignorance about **homosexual orientation** and thus should *not* be binding on churches today. Jewett does not follow Gagnon (2001) and fall into the trap of defending heterosexism and homophobia with pseudo-scientific notions of “cures” for the disease of homosexuality (420-29) nor by inventing a hypothetical divine demand for heterosexual “complementarity” in all sexual relations (56-62).

**(3) In fact, Gagnon’s concept of gender “complementarity” (a product of 18<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> century romanticism) is something he anachronistically reads back into biblical texts, where gender relations were assumed to be hierarchical, not complementary (Rebecca Alpert, 1992; Gareth Moore, 2001; Swancutt 2003:207, note 30; W.S. Johnson 2006:275-76, note 16; Hanks 2006:597-98). Regarding Gagnon’s usage, Mary Ann Tolbert observes: “What exactly *complementarity* might mean for that [male and female] relationship is rarely touched on or explained....Being clear about the meaning of *complementarity* would almost surely lose popularity for the term and the idea behind it” (2006:176-77, note 13). Aside from the anatomical fit for procreation (now usually thwarted “against nature,”) gender “complementarity” is only the new politically correct evangelical jargon promoting female inferiority and passive submission to “complement” male superiority.**

We cannot know how much Paul may have understood about what modern science calls “**sexual orientations.**” Unlike Galileo’s dependence on the telescope and sophisticated mathematics, the scientific comprehension of sexual orientations, which blossomed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, did not depend on any technological invention but rather was the fruit of psychologists like Freud (with his “listening cure”), open minded and compassionate enough to *listen at length* to countless persons who, with no extraordinary provocation, experienced lifelong attraction to those of the same sex (see James 1:19 “*quick to hear, slow to speak*”). Simply by intent listening psychologists thus gradually came to recognize the horrendous error perpetrated for centuries by majority (heterosexist, homophobic) ideology and propaganda.

As Bernadette Brooten has shown, certain astrologists/astronomists in antiquity, accustomed to contemplate the starry heavens in silence, also were particularly keen observers and listeners to persons whom today we might call “homosexual.” Paul himself obviously was deeply impacted by the star-gazer founder of the Jewish faith, father Abraham (Gen 15:4-6; Rom 4:18-25; cf the magi in Mat 2:1-12) and if he experienced permanent same-sex attraction since adolescence (Rom 7) and listened intently to the stories of unmarried intimates with similar experiences (Barnabas, Timothy?), conceivably he might have arrived at the same insights of the astrologists/astronomists Brooten cites (1996:115-141). Brooten concludes: “Some ancients believed that the stars can cause behaviour deemed unnatural—a striking concept if we see the stars as part of nature....Further, contrary to the view that the idea of sexual orientation did not develop until the nineteenth century, the astrological sources demonstrate the existence in the Roman world of the concept of a lifelong erotic orientation” (140).

In his controversial Australian doctoral thesis, gay theologian and astrologist Rollan McCleary (2004:328-336) correctly concludes that “astrology...must be perceived for what it is: a leading form of gay spirituality” (328—and not just gay!). Although recognizing that the study of astrology is “academically forbidden,” McCleary commends Brooten’s chapter on astrology as providing a near approach to modern “essentialist justification” (329; see the works of John Boswell on homosexuality as biologically innate). According to Jewett, Paul differs from Brooten’s ancient astrologists in explaining what we would call a variety of sexual “orientations” as a *result*, not some configuration of the stars, but of divine wrath (not the *cause* of wrath; Rom 1:18; 2007:173; 2013:25; additional categories, such as “active” or “passive” dominated ancient descriptions of sexual behavior). Jewett cites Brooten’s astrological and medical sources (177, note 131), but concludes:

In view of the complex variations of sexual inclination discussed in ancient astrological and medical sources, the popular application of the modern concept of individual sexual orientation based on biological differences is **anachronistic**. Such exegesis misreads Paul’s argument as dealing with individual sins rather than the corporate distortion of the human race since Adam’s fall (177; cf Gagnon’s citation of Brooten on astrology, 2001:385, note 54).

Brooten’s citation of ancient astrologists and medical writers who observed persistent sexual preferences and inclinations may warn us against oversimplifications. Nevertheless, the attribution to ancient writers who viewed such phenomenon as explained by astrology or as purported illnesses to be cured is still far removed from modern scientific concepts of sexual orientation as a normal human variant (whether biological and/or socially constructed) to be accepted, not treated as criminal nor as an illness to be cured (cf Gagnon’s continued recommendation of “ex-gay” therapies, long ago scientifically discredited; 2001:428-29).

## Summary of Jewett and Gagnon on Romans: Despite remaining sharp differences, in recent years informed commentators basically agree that

1 Romans 1:18-32 does not provide an explanation of how modern *individuals* become “homosexual” but recounts rather how ancient humanity purportedly abandoned the worship of the one true God for idolatry and were punished by being given over to unclean sexual desires and practices (Jewett 177, who follows Morna Hooker in relating this ancient apostasy to Adam’s “fall”; Schreiner 1997:81-82; cf. Gagnon 2001:286; Wright 2002:435). Hence, Rom 1:27 does not refer to individual males characterized by a “homosexual orientation” but to ancient humanity as a whole, its option for idolatry and being handed over to “unclean” sexual acts.

2 In Rom 1 sexual uncleanness (v. 24, 26-27) did *not cause* God’s wrath but is the *result* of God’s wrath against idolatry (Käsemann, Romans 47; similarly Hays 8-9; Schreiner 1997:91; Jewett 173 and note 101).

3 Rom 1:18-32 echoes Lev 18:22 and 20:13, which refer only to male-male anal sex [idolatrous/abusive/incestuous?], not just any manifestation of homoeroticism, as worthy of death (Brooten; Gagnon; Jewett).

4 Rom 2:1-16 completes a sting operation aimed to entrap hypocritical readers who judge and condemn those described in 1:18-32, while practicing the same (Gagnon; Jewett; Swanson).

### Jewett = Gagnon

1 1:24 implies that the “unclean” sexual acts further detailed in 1:26-27 are *sinful*.

2 1:26 implies reference to female homoeroticism (lesbian sex).

3 1:26-27 condemns *all* same-sex acts as sinful (Paul’s *mistaken* view; see Jewett 2007:181).

4 References to “change” (Rom 1:23, 25-27) imply that for males to “leave” female partners in 1:27 is sinful.

### Jewett not = Gagnon

1 Paul has a prescientific (limited/mistaken) understanding of what we call “homosexuality” (also Furnish 1985:79-80; Margaret Davis 1995, whose article Jewett recommends).

2 Paul in 1:26-27 only describes and condemns homoerotic acts that are covetous/lustful and hence harmful to neighbour and destructive of communities; Gagnon believes that Rom 1:24 anticipates 1:26-27 and refers *only* to same-sex intercourse; 2001:252, note 14).

3 Paul’s rhetoric provides entrée into the “unhappy experience of Christian slaves and former slaves who had experienced and resented sexual exploitation” (Jewett 2007:181).

4 Male-female sexual relations embody hierarchical relations, not “complementarity” (2007:176).

5 Rom 1:24-27 constitutes a theological analysis of homoeroticism unique in antiquity but, due to Paul’s limited understanding of what we call “homosexuality,” should not be accepted as normative today

### Neither Jewett nor Gagnon recognize that

1 When Rom 1:24-27 categorizes sexual acts not as “sinful” but only as “uncleanness” (Countryman; Helminiak; *pace* Schreiner 1997:95 note 8), this category is deconstructed later in the letter (Hanks 2000:92).

2 Rom 1:26, which refers only to females engaged in *unnatural* acts (not lesbian sex), is a second category later deconstructed (beginning in 2:14, = “by birth”; Cranfield 1975:162; Stowers 1994:115-116; Schreiner 1997:121-123).

3 When Rom 1:24, 26-27 refers to sexual acts as “shameful,” this is a third category also later deconstructed.

4 The four references to change (Rom 1:23, 25-27; see Ps 106:20) do not imply an ethical absolute against change but represent a fourth category later deconstructed (in 12:1-2 etc.) as well as in other Pauline letters.

### **Error of Jewett (not found in Gagnon)**

1 For Jewett the ‘straying’ or ‘error’ (*plane*) in 1:27 is “sexual misconduct” (2007:180), while Gagnon recognizes that it is a refusal to acknowledge the true God (i.e., idolatry)” (2001:260 and note 19; Byrne 1996:77; Schreiner 1997:97).

### **Errors of Gagnon (not repeated by Jewett)**

1 Gagnon cancels out his many correct **exegetical** observations by imposing a late 19<sup>th</sup> century concept of “**complementarity**” which he continually imports to undermine concessions to alternative interpretations.

2 With the exception of one irrelevant allusion to Crompton (2003), Gagnon shows no awareness of the **history of homophobia** and the church’s complicity in the persecution and torture of sexual minorities—as if someone were to exegete and set forth as normative biblical teaching supporting monarchy, slavery, anti-Judaism, or female inferiority, while showing no awareness of the history of tyranny, racism, anti-Semitism and sexism..

3 Regarding modern **scientific studies** on homosexuality Gagnon dismisses the overwhelming consensus of reputable scientists and scientific organizations as ideologically motivated and rather cites as alone worthy of confidence a few Wheaton college professors and fundamentalist ideologues whose pseudo-scientific conclusions are dictated by their fundamentalist views and interpretations of the Bible.

4 Pastorally, Gagnon recommends the disastrous and scientifically discredited “**Ex-Gay**” approaches, which have resulted in many being overcome by depression, substance abuse and suicide.

### **Eight Conclusions: Rom 1:18-2:16 (especially 1:24-27)**

1 Paul refers to an **ancient corporate experience** involving all humanity, who at some unspecified point rejected the true God and opted for idolatry (a “Decline of Civilization Narrative”); hence the text provides no explanation of why today certain *individual* humans or animals (observed in 450+ species; Bruce Bagemihl, 1999) are hetero-, bi- or homosexual in orientation (perspectives unknown to Paul or questions he did not address).

2 The first and **fundamental “exchange”** (twice emphasized) is changing **from knowing and worshipping the true God** and substituting the fabrication and worship of idols (18-23, 25, 28). The second “change,” when females changed “natural” procreative sex for “unnatural” non-procreative (anal) sex (26), resulted from God’s *abandoning* idolatrous humanity (1:24, 26; cf v. 28). A third implied change resulted with the males “leaving” natural (procreative) sex with females to indulge in anal sex with other males (27).

3 Divine wrath is being revealed from Heaven against **all idolatry, injustice and oppression** (1:18-23, 25, 28-32). The unclean sexual practices (1:24, 26-27) framed and interspersed with references to idolatry (1:18-23, 25) and oppression (1:18, 28-32) further exemplify potential abuses of power (oppression, injustice) that harm the neighbor rather than expressing love that edifies the neighbor (13:8-10).

4 **Sexual uncleanness** (1:24, 26-27) and desire/lust instead of love manifest in such unnatural (non-procreative) practices as anal sex, **is not the cause but the result and effect of divine wrath**, manifest in God’s abandoning of humanity to the consequences of idol worship (see “God handed them over,” 24, 26, 28).

5 Paul inserts a reference to idolatry (1:25) in the midst of the unclean sexual practices (1:24....26-27) to emphasize the idolatry associated with empires. Pagan idolatry does not represent just a silly mathematical error, but the religious ideologies that rationalize oppression and violence. Idolatrous humanity was thus

handed over by God to be enslaved to *inordinate (excessive?) desire* (not *disoriented* desire). What moderns commonly view as the “disorientation” of 1:27, ancients understood simply as a further manifestation of *inordinate* desire (the text says nothing about any lack of “complementarity”; Hanks 2006:585; Martin 342).

**6 Paul subversively deconstructs four basic elements** in his negative rhetoric in order to entrap judgmental hypocrites. He refers to desires and behaviours that are (1) “unclean,” (2) “dishonourable/shameful,” (3) “unnatural” (Hanks 2000; 2006). Any sinful dimension implied when idolatrous males’ “left” their female partners for males (27) was not due to being “unnatural” (non-procreative; cf. 11:24) but for being motivated by egotistical lust (#10 coveting), not love. Similarly, (4) Paul later deconstructs his negative rhetoric regarding “change” (1:23, 25, 26-27) by calling for a *transformation* (radical change) and renewal of the mind that had become “reprobate” (1:28 → 12:1-2), with sacrificial love replacing any lust (13:8-13).

7 Unclean female-male and male-male anal sex, whenever expressing covetous lust and exploitation, was already condemned in the 10<sup>th</sup> of the Ten Commandments. When Paul refers to the idolatrous males in antiquity “leaving” the natural (procreative) use of females he first emphasizes their strong desire (“burned with desire/lust”), not the “males among males” element” (1:27). His emphasis in 24, 26-27 is thus on the shameful unclean desire/lust and the options (by both females and males) for non-procreative “unnatural” sex. The males’ leaving female partners is specified only in 1:27 but not emphasized. *Even if Gagnon and Jewett were correct that sinfulness is implied in the ambiguous desire/lust vocabulary of 1:24, 26-27, then Paul only condemns lustful anal sex, not all homoerotic expressions. Paul says nothing about “unnatural” (nonprocreative) sex in the context of loving, committed relationships.* Perhaps such relationships were unknown to him, but *his words cannot legitimately be interpreted to condemn something he either chose not to mention or did not even know to exist.*

**8 Paul’s rhetorical purpose** in 1:18-32 is thus not to convince his audience that anal sex or male homoeroticism is always sinful (26-27), but **to entrap** hypocrites (both Jews and Greeks) who presume themselves superior and exempt from God’s just judgment while judging/condemning others (2:1-29). Thus, what Paul condemns in Rom 1:18-2:16 is not “homosexuality” but the kind of arrogance today manifest in nationalism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism (homophobia) whereby **powerful arrogant oppressors** provoke schism and divide churches and societies in cultural wars waged against the weak in order to protect their own privileges (Rom 14:1-15:13).

**Excursus. Robert Gagnon (2001; 2003; [www.robagnon.net](http://www.robagnon.net)), Presbyterian New Testament professor (Pittsburgh Seminary) who defends traditional views on the Bible and homosexuality.**

1 In the exegesis of relevant texts, Gagnon grants many, if not most of the valid points that pro-Gay scholars have made in recent years. Except in the area of homosexuality his approach cannot be labeled fundamentalist, since he refers frequently and competently to the original languages, uses standard scholarly methodologies and takes for granted the common conclusions (the four JEDP sources in the Pentateuch, multiple authorship of Isaiah, deuteropauline letters in the New Testament, etc). Thus should any fundamentalist carefully study Gagnon’s works he/she can learn a great deal about modern scholarly interpretation of the Bible and will soon discover that biblical interpretation is not the simple matter of citing any old translation and interpreting it according to traditional prejudices. Gagnon’s most common tactic, however, is to grant what previous scholars have pointed out about a text that would tend to undermine the validity of its use against sexual minorities today, but then “trump the trick” by uncritically imposing his uninformed concept of “complementarity” and thus seek to reenlist the text to support traditional heterosexists conclusions.

2 Even were Gagnon some day to succeed in “winning” the battle with theological “liberals” and “gay revisionists” over the classic Bible “clobber texts” traditionally used to promote violence against sexual minorities, he would only further discredit the Bible as an authority in the cultural wars. Every time a Hollywood star or sports hero/ine comes out—or a Republican senator is outed—media attention is such that the event has far more impact, with the younger generation especially, than what academics are saying in their interminable debates about the meaning of obscure Bible texts. And perhaps an even greater impact occurs when a teen-ager’s friend comes out or succeeds in taking a same-sex date to the high school prom, or a high

school club is started to defend sexual minority students from peer violence and abusive language. For centuries the world has witnessed dominant sectors in the Christian churches rush into battle with countless crystal-clear Bible texts in hand, claiming to defend the sacred authority of the Bible by (1) opposing usury to prevent the rise of capitalism, (2) opposing Galileo and modern astronomy to perpetuate the notion of a flat earth in a geocentric universe, (3) supporting divine right of absolute monarchs to prevent the rise of democracy, (4) advocating the perpetuation of racist slavery and (5) insisting on the inferiority of “the weaker sex” to oppose votes and ordination for women and women’s equality. That Gagnon and allies should succeed in turning back the clock on gay rights requires more faith than Joshua exercised to make the sun simply “stand still” (Josh 10:1-15). Using Bible proof-texts to promote oppression and violence is contrary to the intent of the Author, whose cosmic project is characterized by liberation, freedom and justice for all.

3 In the process of Gagnon’s tireless investigations and heavily footnoted writings he has unintentionally managed to mainstream a whole body of what he calls “pro homosex” scholarly literature that previously was ignored in conservative academic circles. He often accepts many of his opponents’ key exegetical points (Saul Olyan on anal sex in Lev 18 and 20) and even defends certain such authors from misrepresentation and caricatures of their views (Boswell; *Plain Science* 201-02, note 50, ref to RJ 2000:234 and Hays).

4 In his prodigious efforts to defend his view on homosexuality, Gagnon ends up referring to virtually all the Bible says and to all our modern questions related to sexuality: adultery, divorce, remarriage, polygamy, concubines, incest, zoophilia/bestiality, eunuchs, pedophilia, masturbation, etc. etc., etc. Originally gay advocates sought to keep the focus of the debate *limited* to homosexuality, lesbian soldiers, gay marriage, gay ordination, etc. and vociferously objected when opponents sought to inject other controversial subjects into the debate as if they were intrinsically linked with homosexuality (the “slippery slope” argument). However, decades ago we learned that the problem in the churches is not that people don’t want to think about or talk about homosexuality—given our western neo-platonic heritage most people in the churches don’t want to talk about anything related to sexuality but keep the church focused on what they understand as “spirituality,” which—Jesus’ incarnation and resurrection notwithstanding—never seems to have anything to do with the body, much less sex. Gagnon’s frequent reference to texts dealing with all sorts of sexual expressions and values, if studied seriously, can force the churches to restudy and rethink the whole area of human sexuality in the light of related biblical texts and current scientific insights. With the abandonment of the Augustinian paradigm (sex only within marriage for the purpose of procreation), churches have entered into crisis regarding sexuality, but unable to talk about it. Gagnon encourages everyone to think and talk about the whole area of human sexuality and attempts to correlate biblical and scientific data (an effort vitiated, since his scientific expertise is sadly inferior to his capacity as exegete).

### Note. Brigette Kahl, *Galatians Reimagined* (2010) on Jewett’s Romans

“A major point of departure from the prevalent paradigm of Pauline studies was the emergence in the early 1990’s of **empire-critical studies**, under the guidance of Richard Horsley....This new exploration contributed invaluable groundwork to reveal the Roman context and the Rome-critical implications of Paul’s theology and practice. The contextual framework of Paul’s letters was fundamentally reconceived, culminating in the landmark publication of **Robert Jewett’s** monumental Hermeneia commentary on Romans (2007), a volume that represents the first verse-by-verse effort to integrate the best of historical critical and empire-critical scholarship in interpreting Romans. The letter to the Galatians up to now has not been subjected to a thorough exegetical exploration that considers the Roman Empire as a major textual and contextual factor” [5; and citing Jewett 2007:307 note 12: “In general, empire-critical studies are ore advanced with regard to Romans than with regard to Galatians, especially through the work of Neil Elliott...2008]....In starkest terms: What if Paul were targeting Greco-Roman imperial *nomos* much more than Jewish Torah?” (7).

**Kahl 2010:346, note 118:** “Robert Jewett has written the first major commentary on a Pauline letter that programmatically switches the interpretational focus of ‘works’ and works-righteousness ‘boasting’ from its traditional (anti-)Jewish lens to the wider framework of imperial status and honor competition, including Rome as the ‘boasting champion of the ancient world, filled with honorific monuments and celebrations of imperial glory.’ Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis:Fortress Press, 2007), 295-96.”

## Appendix 1 Romans 1:26 and the late patristic invention of “lesbophobic” misinterpretations

26 “Therefore God gave them up to dishonorable passions, for even *their* females have changed the natural use (*chresin*) for that *against nature* (*para phusin*).” 27 Similarly also the males....”

Bernadette Brooten once wrote “This [Rom 1:26] is the only passage in the entire Bible referring explicitly to lesbians” (1985b:287). However, Dale Martin points out: “Both Gagnon and Brooten contradict themselves, stating in places that the text does ‘explicitly’ condemn female same-sex activity and then admitting elsewhere that the condemnation is not ‘explicit’” (2006:196 note 24) citing Gagnon 2001:229, 298; Brooten 1996: 216, 240; 1985b: 287-88). However, all careful scholars now recognize that in Romans 1:26 Paul does *not* speak of women [lesbians?] who “changed” male sexual companions for female (cf. the males in 1:27), but only of females in acts termed *unnatural*, that is, according to the sexual ideology of the day, acts that avoid procreation. The interpretation of Rom 1:26 as referring to *heterosexual* anal sex is the only one attested in the patristic sources until almost 400 AD and even afterwards still even in Augustine (354-430 AD) and Anastasios (7<sup>th</sup> century?)!

In 1995 Adventist scholar James E. Miller resurrected this once standard (but long ignored) patristic interpretation of 1:26 as referring to “unnatural” [=non-procreative] heterosexual acts (Novum Testamentum 35:1-11). Miller’s reaffirmation of the patristic interpretation has been supported by a growing number of scholars, including David Fredrickson in David Balch 2000:201; Helminiak 2000:86-90; Hanks 2000:90-91; 2006:591-93; Christopher Bryan 2000:86-87; Mathew Kuefler 2001:283-84, note 55; Francis Schaeffer 1998:42-43; Diana Swancutt 2003:196, 209-10, note 36; Theodore Jennings 2009:143-147; and Mark D. Nanos 2011:256; see Martin Stowasser, NTS 43, 1997:517; and earlier Peter Tomson, 1990:94. Those who oppose Miller’s interpretation include: Bernedette Brooten 1983:287-90; 1985:61-87; 1996:248-53; Martti Nissinen 1998:108; Robert Gagnon 2001:297-299; Stephen Moore 2001:143-144; Robert Goss 2002:200-202; Robert Jewett 2007:176, note 127; Arnold Hultgren (“most likely”) 2011:99 and William Loader 2010:17-19. Miller and those who follow him point out that

- as modern readers we tend to prejudice our interpretation of Rom 1:26-27 by approaching the text anachronistically with our modern construct of sexual *orientations* (contrasting male and female homosexuality), forgetting that ancient readers thought almost exclusively in terms of sexual *acts* (procreative, anal, oral, etc);
- very few ancient texts refer to lesbians (only 18 out of the 447 cited in Hubbard 2007; see Leviticus);
- only five texts reflect observation of stable same-sex preferences (Hultgren 2011:101, 619);
- the ancient sources commonly compare *male* love for women with *male* love for boys (pederasty), *not* male homosexuality and lesbian relations. According to Hubbard, only four texts out of 447 *link* male preferences for males with female preferences for females (2003:69, 190, 261, 518) and evangelical Thomas Schmidt, recognizing only two, admitted: “Ancient authors did not, as a rule, connect male and female same-sex relations; 1995:81 and 192, note 52);
- our modern obsession with (male) “homosexuality” prompts us to leapfrog to the male-male reference in Rom 1:27 but then read backwards to impose the same meaning on the previous female reference in 1:26. However, for the original readers, following Paul’s order, the female’s partner obviously would have been male, so the apostle in 1:27 then must specify that the *males* abandoned the natural partner for an unnatural one (Miller 1995:2). Since the ancient reader first would have interpreted 1:26 with no clue regarding the following male reference in 1:27, most naturally 1:26 would have been understood to refer to women offering themselves simply for “unnatural” (non-procreative) sexual acts with other males. The “similarity” that links 1:26-27 (“similarly/likewise”) would thus refer to the similar “unclean” *acts* of anal sex (females with males // males with males; see Loader’s clarification below). Most recent authors recognize that Paul does not make use of our modern concept of homosexual orientation and that anal sex acts are implied 1:27, but inexplicably they then fail to see how coherently *anal* sex acts would link 1:26 and 1:27 and thus anachronically insist that the link must be the modern concept, “homosexuals,” in *same-sex* acts.

According to Loader (2010:18) Bernadette Brooten showed that female-female sex was (1) known and (2) almost universally condemned as abhorrent: “Contrary to earlier claims, Brooten has shown through her

extensive survey of Graeco-Roman and Jewish literature, as well as magical, astrological and medical texts, that the phenomenon of female-female sexual relations was known and almost universally condemned as abhorrent” (Brooten 1996 passim). As Brooten recognizes, however, “Interpretations of Rom 1:26 occur only rarely in the patristic sources” (1985a:287-88). She cites only 4 but misinterprets Clement (see below) leaving only John Chrysostom ca. 400 a.D. as introducing and supporting the lesbian interpretation. So we might respond: “Known,” yes, but largely ignored! (see Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10; Rev 22:15—all explicitly limited to males; also the attempt to rape angels in Gen 19 and Jude 7). Hence “universally” condemned but only by those very few sources (Hubbard’s citations above) referring to females:

**(a) Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215 AD)** was the church’s first significant theologian of sexuality and the first to interpret Rom 1:26 specifically. Miller points out that though Brooten (1983:287) named Clement as a supporter of the lesbian reading of Rom 1:26, in fact he is the opposite. The text she cites makes no reference to Rom 1:26. However, one of the correlated passages (*Paed.* 2.10.86-87) quotes Rom 1:26-27 followed by this statement: “Yet nature has not caused even the most lewd beasts to have intercourse (or ‘mount’) in the excrement passages.” He goes on to condemn, ‘male penetration, barren seed-sowing, anal intercourse (lit. ‘rear bedding’) and unsuitable androgynous coming together.’ Apparently for Clement both verse 26 and 27 speak of a single practice—anal intercourse (Miller 2006/07: Ch.18; “Romans 1 Revisited” (1997b:8, unpublished; cited Hanks 2000:90 with reference to (*Paidagogus*, 2.10.86-87, ca. 198 AD). Clement thus revealed that he viewed both verses to refer to anal sex (women with men, 1:26; males with males, 1:27). Brooten also has indicated: “My primary reason for interpreting verse 26 as referring to same-sex love...is the word *likewise* of verse 27, which clearly refers to male homosexuality” (Brooten 1985a:85 note 48; also 1996:249). However, what links the two verses (*homoios*, best “similarly, not “likewise,” 1:27) is not our modern concept of “homosexuality” but the ancient anti-conceptive practice of anal sex, which (as in Rom 1:24) Clement categorizes as “unclean,” and (as in Rom 1:26) as unnatural (non-procreative).

**(b) A medieval scribe’s marginal notes (scholia) in two manuscripts of Clement’s *Paidagogus* refer to the interpretation of Romans 1:26 by Anastasios/Anastasius (probably Anastasios of Sinai, late 7<sup>th</sup> century):** “Clearly they do not go into one another, but rather offer themselves to the men.” Anastasios/Anastasius thus confirms Clement’s interpretation that both 1:26 and 1:27 refer to anal penetration, and seems to deny even the possibility of sexual relations between women (Brooten 1985:287, 1996:337-38; Miller 2006:131).

**(c) Even St. Augustine (354-430),** the greatest and most influential theologian in the area of sexuality in church history, clearly taught that Romans 1:26 speaks of women in relations “against nature,” but in anal sex with men to avoid procreation. As Bernadette Brooten recognizes: “In spite of Augustine’s awareness of female romantic friendship, he interpreted Rom 1:26 as referring to unnatural sexual relations between a female and a male rather than to female homoeroticism. For him ‘unnatural’ means that which does not allow for procreation, such as anal intercourse. He defines anal intercourse between a husband and a wife as ‘unnatural and grossly wicked,’ since it is nonprocreative” (1996:353). Brooten thus corrects Joseph Fitzmyer’s misinterpretation of Augustine in his Anchor Bible Commentary, 1993, pointing out that “In both *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 20:35 and *De bono coniugali* 11f, Augustine quite explicitly connects Rom 1:26 with anal intercourse (Brooten 1996:353, note 207).

Brooten spells out in detail Augustine’s preoccupation with and strong opposition to lesbian sex especially as evidenced in his instructions to nuns in a convent (*Epistles* 211.14 and 211.13, dated 423 AD and cited in Brooten 1996:351 notes 203-204): “He tells the nuns to go to the public baths only once a month and then only in groups of three or more,” in fact always in groups of three when they left the convent and never with only one other nun of their choosing (1996:351). Yet Augustine never cited Rom 1:26 to bolster his opposition to lesbian temptation. Amazingly, then, as late as 423, the church’s two greatest sexual theologians had evidenced *no awareness* that in Romans 1:26 Paul might be condemning lesbianism! Like Clement of Alexander two centuries earlier Augustine takes for granted that Paul was referring to females submitting themselves to anal sex with males (“unnatural” because non-procreative). Nevertheless, evangelical Baptist Thomas Schreiner, arguing against Miller’s resurrection of the universal patristic interpretation, labels it “creative” instead of recognizing that the post-patristic interpretation of 1:26 as referring to lesbians is the real

innovation (1997:94 note 5; see similarly, Wold, who labels authentic ancient interpretations as “revisionist,” but imports the modern category of “homosexual” to misinterpret the ancient texts (1998:185).

**(d)** Brooten refers to **Ambrosiaster (Pseudo-Ambrose, ca. 366-84 AD)**, an obscure pseudonymous Latin commentary writer, and apparently the first patristic source to take Rom 1:26 as “referring to sexual relations between women” (1996:356, note 213; Kuefler 2001:384 note 55): “mulier mulierem turpi desiderio ad usum adpeteret” [“a woman seeks after a woman for use with shameful desire”]. Ambrosiaster’s date: “the first Latin commentary on all the Pauline Epistles, written in Rome during the pontificate of Damasus (366-84), wrongly attributed to Ambrose” *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, Daniel Patte, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University (2010:26). James Miller (*Raw Material* 2006/07:133-34), however, points out the significant change that occurred in Ambrosiaster’s interpretation as follows:

Ambrosiaster...wrote three editions of his commentary on Romans. In the first edition (*a*) he briefly comments on Romans 1:26, stating that because of idolatry women allowed themselves to be *used by men in an unnatural way*... However, in the second and third editions of the commentary he changed his mind and said that in lust woman sought to use woman (*b*) or female sought to use female (*c*). This is followed by a lengthy paragraph explaining his choice of interpretation, a paragraph which he did not find necessary for his first edition. Clearly for Ambrosiaster a heterosexual reading for Romans 1:26 was unexceptional and seemingly obvious. Understanding this verse as a reference to same-sex relationships between women, in contrast, is a reading which he felt required extensive explanation – it is not the simple reading of the text for him.

**(e)** Thus, not until John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407 AD), bishop of Constantinople, does any recognized patristic authority (mis)interpret Romans 1:26 as referring to relations between two women (“lesbians”)! Boswell (1980:156-57, 359-363) and Brooten (344-48) provide summaries and citations from Chrysostom’s contradictory diatribes, where he pilloried the women and the men Paul refers to in Rom 1:26-27 (he also was famous for virulently anti-Jewish harangues promoting anti-semitism in the church). Chrysostom even expressed fear of “some danger that womankind will become in the future unnecessary, with young men instead fulfilling all the needs women used to” (cited in Boswell 1980:362), which suggests that this lifelong bachelor may have used his homophobic diatribes to suppress his self-hatred and internalized homophobia (1980:131-32). **Thus, for more than first three centuries after Paul wrote, patristic references to Rom 1:26 understood the text as referring to women engaged in unnatural=nonprocreative anal sex with males, until finally Pseudo Ambrose and John Chrysostom (ca. 400 AD) introduced their “revisionist” lesbian interpretations, which became standard in the Middle Ages and until the modern period.**

Jewett, Hultgren and Loader all recognize that Rom 1:26 only specifies females who had changed the “natural use” of a sex partner for a use “against nature” and that Paul does *not* indicate that this use involves another female. However, though recognizing that 1:26 does not refer explicitly to lesbians nor to homoeroticism, Jewett insists that a reference to lesbianism is clearly implied (176, note 127, following Brooten 1996:248-53, note 99 and accepting her linguistic argument against Miller’s 1995 article; see below). Moreover, since pederasty was not associated with lesbians, Jewett proceeds to reject Robin Scroggs’ conclusion that Paul targets only pederasty (177). Miller and Hultgren (2011:618) accept Scroggs’ *emphasis* on pederasty as correct, but not as an absolute limitation; similarly Craig Keener 2009:37 and note 91).

**Brooten’s and Moore’s argument on the linguistic usage of 1:26: “against nature.”** Like many, Stephen Moore accepted Brooten’s argument that Romans 1:26 must refer to female homoeroticism: “As for the women’s unnatural intercourse being anal or oral sex with men, explicit castigations of either activity as being contrary to nature are lacking in Greco-Roman sources (even including Jewish sources, whereas sexual relations between women are *denounced as unnatural* by an impressive array of authors over a long span of time....” (2001:143-144; citing Brooten, 1996:241-53; similarly Loader 2010:18-19). However, Brooten’s seven (1-7) and Moore’s twelve references (1-7 + 8-12) span a period of more than 800 years with only four even roughly contemporaneous with Paul, two of whom were elite Latin authors. Only one (Pseudo-Phocylides) was Jewish and the only other who wrote in Greek was the astrologist, Dorotheos. *None represented Paul’s*

*own peculiar Hellenistic-Jewish-Christian cultural-linguistic mix (Bold Face = roughly contemporary with Paul):*

- 1 Plato, [427-347 BC], Greek Philosopher (Hubbard 2003:171-207, 221-59)
- 2 Ovid, [43 BC-18 AD], elite Latin author (Brooten 1996:44; Hubbard 2003:373-82)
- 3 **Seneca the Elder [55 BC – 40 AD], elite Latin rhetorician** (Brooten 1996:43-44; Hubbard 2003:388-89)
- 4 **Martial, [40-103/4 AD], elite Latin author** (Brooten 1996: 46-47; Hubbard 2003:423-27)
- 5 Ptolemy, [2d century AD, Alexandrian astronomer] (Brooten 1996:124-128)
- 6 Artemidoros of Dalldis in Lydia, 2d c. AD, dream interpretation (Brooten 1996 175-86, esp 183)
- 7 **Dorotheos of Sidon (25-75 CE); his astrological poem, “implies” women having sex with women is “unnatural”** (Brooten 1996:119-123 cites Greek original preserved only in Latin:).
- 8 **Pseudo-Phoc/kylides, 30 BC-40 AD, Jewish, Alexandrian? (Brooten 1996:63-64, 248, note 99)**
- 9 Manetho, 4th century AD(?) astrologer, Greek poem cited by Brooten (1996:123)
- 10 Clement of Alexandria, [c 150-c 215 AD], church father, wrote in Greek c. 198 AD
- 11 Tertullian, [c 160-c 225 AD, church father, wrote mainly in Latin]
- 12 John “Chrysostom” of Antioch [c 347-407 AD] (Brooten 1996:344-48; Boswell 1980:131-32)

That Paul in Romans 1:26 should provide us with our only example of male-female anal sex described with the phrase “against nature” may be of interest to linguists, but hardly significant exegetically for establishing Paul’s meaning. For centuries (since Plato’s *Laws*) Greco-Roman authors commonly denounced as “*against nature*” all sexual relations that were *non-procreative*. Only penis in vagina sex for procreation was categorized as “natural” (Ward 1997:263-84; Kuefler 2001:383, note 55; Swancutt 2003:196, 209-10, note 36; Hanks 2006:591-593). Hence, were we to interrogate the seven authors cited by Brooten (or Stephen Moore’s dozen) whether male-female anal/oral sex is “against nature,” their answer would be an unqualified “obviously!” (It would not be a question to debate, just a dumb question). Thus, as Diana Swancutt says of Brooten’s case: “Her main argument, that ‘ancient sources depict sexual relations between women as unnatural’ (250) works only if ancient sources depicted *only* sexual relations between women as unnatural. But the bottom line is that they do not (and when they do discuss same-sex intercourse, it is the psychic and/or physical manliness of one of the women that is deemed unnatural” (2003:209, note 36).

Paul’s description of male-female anal sex as “against nature” thus requires no more explanation than Philo’s *unparalleled* reference to relations during female menstrual periods as *para physin* (see Brooten’s citation from Paul’s Jewish contemporary, 247). Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Paul, gives only three examples of sexual relations *para physin*: (1) relations of man and woman during her menstrual period; (2) relations between different species of animals; (3) relations between a man and a boy, all indicating concern for *procreation* (Brooten 247), but he does not so describe relations between women. If we then scrutinize the sources to discern *why*, in our very limited (elite male) literary data base, sex between two women is referred to as “against nature” (once or twice per century) but male-female anal/oral sex is never explicitly so described, we may observe that:

- As Jewett and others recognize, **references to women are few** in the works of the **elite males** who did almost all the writing, references to female eroticism are even fewer, so references by such authors to anything as specific as oral or anal sex, not surprisingly, are very rare (Brooten 1996: 25 and 44 recognizes the peculiarities of her “elite” Latin male sources).
- Literary references are much more likely to refer to **public** characteristics and relationships than **private** sexual practices (Brooten 1996:10). Our elite Greco-Roman males mainly refer to heterosexual procreative sex or male-male pederasty and rarely refer to female-female sex, much less anal/oral sex of either male-female or same-sex variety (Thomas Hubbard 2003:16-17 and index).
- Lacking our modern categories of homo/heterosexual orientation, ancient elite male authors rarely referred to male and female same-sex relations in the same context but overwhelmingly tended to refer to focus on **sexual acts** (of the penetrator, the penetrated, etc.; Brooten 248, note 99; Gagnon 2001:299). Hence the “similarly/likewise” linking 1:26 to 1:27 more likely would refer to the common unnatural (nonprocreative) *act* of anal sex, **not** to our modern **concept** of a common (homo)sexual orientation.
- As in the Bible and modern cultures, Greco-Roman sexual references tend to be **euphemistic**, making any precise legal/ethical conclusions exceedingly tentative. That a dozen such references scattered over almost a millennium of sources refer only to female eroticism as “against nature” and nowhere describe heterosexual anal or oral sex with this philosophical term is hardly surprising—when ordinary people (such as the slaves Paul addressed in Romans) refer to sex they commonly employ vague euphemisms, not philosophical jargon (see Paul’s “beds” in Rom 13:13, the many references to *porneia*, etc.).

- This isolated linguistic phenomenon in Paul is of little or no weight when compared with **other factors significant for exegesis**, such as (1) the absence of any description/denunciation of same-sex female relations in the Hebrew Bible, Jesus' teaching and other New Testament literature; (2) the unanimous patristic tradition (Clement of Alexandria, 250; Augustine, 423) interpreting Romans 1:26 as referring to non-procreative (anal) male-female sex until around 400 CE (John Chrysostom).
- To suppose Paul decided to invent a new ethical absolute condemning lesbians as a gesture manifesting equality for women, as both Gagnon and Jewett suggest, is grotesque when we recall that most women so condemned would have been slaves with no option of refusing the sexual demands of their owners.

Brooten (1996:249, note 99) critiques Miller for not taking into account all the ancient sources she cites in her two earlier articles (1995a and b). Christopher Bryan (2000:86-87) cites Brooten's 1985a article, which considers the possibility that Rom 1:26 refers to unnatural heterosexual relations (virtually attributing to Brooten the conclusion of Miller, whom he does not cite; Brooten argues strongly for the lesbian interpretation). Dale Martin finds "more persuasive" the view that "female 'unnatural use' of sex, as understood more generally in the ancient world, may have included female same-sex intercourse, but would have meant, for most ancient readers, all sorts of activities, including masturbation, oral sex, and the woman being the 'insertive partner' in heterosexual sex" (2006:196, note 24)—a both/and interpretation!

Mathew Kuefler aptly comments "In her otherwise superlative book on sexual activity between women in antiquity, Brooten (*Love Between Women*, 195-302), is mistaken in her assertion that Paul condemned sex between women in this passage" (2001:383, note 55). Perhaps the fact that James Miller's article on Romans 1:26 (1995) was published shortly before Brooten's work (1996) contributed to her rather hasty response in a lengthy footnote (99, pp. 248-250, which was accepted by Stephen Moore (2001:143-44), Robert Gagnon (2001:297-99), Tom Wright (2002:403) and Robert Jewett (2007:176) amongst many others. Citing Roy Bowen Ward (1997:263-84), Kuefler points out that "unnatural" implied "all types of nonprocreative sex".

Following Simon Jan Ridderbos (1963), Kuefler also argues that both Romans 1:26 and 27 refer specifically to **cultic prostitution** and thus considers Brooten mistaken when she says "Roman-period sources on homoeroticism do not focus on cultic prostitution" (1996:253, note 106). Against some recent scholarly denials, Kuefler argues that the cultic prostitution and male cultic prostitutes (*qadesh/qedishim*, "holy ones"; *kelebh/im*, "dogs") referred to in biblical texts *really existed* and were not just the literary invention of late biblical authors (2001:255-56, 381, notes 44-50; see "holy ones" in Deut 23:17-18; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 2:47; 2 Kings 23:7; Job 36:14). He concludes that various biblical texts reflect common elements of cultic prostitution related to fertility cults: (1) castration of priests (Deut 23:1); (2) sexual penetration of males (Lev 18:22; 20:13); (3) transvestism (Deut 22:5); and (4) the prohibition of wearing mixed cloth of linen and wool, the type worn by cultic prostitutes (Deut 22:11; Lev 19:19). Kuefler also argues that Rom 1:26-27 refer to cultic prostitution in the puzzling climactic reference to the males as having "received in themselves the due penalty for their error" (1:27e). Most conclude that the "error" is the idolatry denounced (1:23, 25) with the penalty being enslavement to unclean sexual practices (1:24, 26-27). Kuefler concludes that the penalty is rather the self-castration practiced by the eunuch priests: "since the priests of the goddess acted like women they deserved the castration that turned them into women (257)

Although Kuefler correctly credits Miller (1995) for reopening the case for the dominant patristic interpretation of 1:26 as heterosexual, he mistakenly describes Miller as "the *only* scholar to recognize the phrase does not refer to sex between women" (2001:384, note 55; see citations above). Kuefler also refers to Brooten's citation of the *Apocalypse of Peter* (ca. 135) in the earliest version (Ethiopic): "These are they who cut their flesh [castration], sodomites and the women who were with *them*", which refers only to *male* homoeroticism and castration (see *New Testament Apocrypha*, Wilhelm Schneemilcher, ed., 2:631). He finds additional support in Brooten's perplexity that the *Apocalypse of Paul* (ca. 200-300) also refers *only* to male homoeroticism: "the iniquity of Sodom and Gomorrah, men with men [anal sex]" (Brooten 314; Schneemilcher, ed. 2:733).

Significantly for evangelicals, already in lectures taped in the 1960's, Francis Schaeffer recognized that Romans 1:26 "does not speak of homosexuality" (1998:42-43). A survey of both exegetical and historical evidence thus leads us to conclude that the New Testament, just like the Hebrew Bible and the Koran, contains no mention nor prohibition of sexual relations between women ("lesbians"). Furthermore, although patriarchal

apologists tend to forget that women exist and that “homosexuals” include lesbians, once we properly interpret Romans 1:26, it becomes clear that **the Bible nowhere condemns “homosexuals”**: all other relevant texts specify males (see list above) and the condemnations have in view a specific male sexual act (anal sex, in contexts indicating idolatry and/or abuse/exploitation/ oppression/violence)—not a person’s sexual orientation.

## Appendix 2. Romans 16. Poor slaves, women leaders, and sexual minorities in 5-10 house churches in Rome

6 married persons (only three couples!; slaves could not legally marry);  
32 apparently unmarried (sexual minorities: single persons, divorced, widows, etc.);  
10 women, eight of them leaders: one deacon (Phoebe); Prisca; one apostle (Junia); five workers;  
12-22 slaves or liberated slaves (mainly poor); only PRISCA and AQUILA clearly are not slave names;  
(details, Peter Lampe [2003:153-183]; see under slaves and poor);  
11 Jews: six of those 28 greeted in Rome were Jews; five (Paul + four) of the nine in Corinth.

Key: MARRIED COUPLES (all caps)  
S or S? = common names for slaves and liberated slaves (mainly poor); (J) = Jew

6:1-2 Phoebe, bearer of the letter from Paul in Corinth, deacon/minister (masculine form in Greek);  
benefactor of Paul and others

16:3-16 Greets **28+ persons** in some 5-10 tenement and house churches: 1-5a; v. 10; v. 11; v. 14; v. 15

Only three *married couples* (six persons)

PRISCA (J) and AQUILA (J), (vv. 3-5a);  
See 2 Tim. 4:19; Acts 18:26; cf. 1 Cor.16:9; Acts 18:2  
ANDRONICUS (S? J) and JUNIA (S J), both “apostles” (v. 7a)  
PHILOLOGUS (S?) and JULIA (S; v. 15a)

Six SINGLE WOMEN, etc., five of the six commended for their work for the church; five S /S?

Mary (S? J?) (v. 6a), worker for the church  
Tryphaena (S) + Triphosa (S; v. 12a, sisters), work for the church  
Persis (S; v. 12b), “*the beloved...who worked much*”  
The mother of Rufus (S?; v. 13b), “like a mother to me” (hospitality)  
The sister (S?) of Nereus (v. 15b)

16+ SINGLE MALES: only one is designated a worker; Paul calls three his “beloved”

Epaenetus (S?; v. 5), “my beloved”

Ampliatius (S; v. 8), “my beloved”

Urbanus (S?; v. 9a), “our fellow-worker in Christ” + Stachys (S?; v. 9b), “my beloved”

Apelles (S?; v. 10)

The slaves of Aristobulus’ house [he died 48-49 AD] (v. 10b)

Herodion (S; J; v. 11)

The slaves of Narcissus [he died 55-57 AD] (v. 11)

Rufus (S; v. 13); cf. Mark 15:21

Asyncritus (S?), Phlegon (S?), Hermes (S), Patrobas (S?), Hermas (S?) + brothers (v. 14)

Nereus (S; v. 15)

Olympas (S?; v. 15)

16:21-24 Greetings from Corinth: eight male companions living with Paul in Gaius’ house (total nine)

Timothy (J) (v. 21a)

Lucius (J), Jason (J) and Sosipater (J) (v. 21b)

Tertius (v. 22), Paul’s secretary

Gaius (v. 23a), the host

Erastus, the city treasurer (v. 23b)

Quartus (v. 23b)

**Summary. If we include Phoebe and Paul, Rom 16:1-16 and 21-24 refers to 38 persons (mainly slaves and sexual minorities in assemblies in Rome usually led by women)**

**Bibliography:** Hanks 1997a:139-45; 2000:88-89; 2006:604-05; 2010/12: 143, 151-52.

**Appendix 3. John Shelby Spong (1991). *Rescuing the Bible from fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture*. HarperSanFrancisco, pp. 116-20, 125-26; see Google, “Paul, homosexual”):**

Some have suggested...that Paul was plagued by homosexual fears.... With the softening of... [the traditional] homophobic stance we might consider that **Paul may have been a gay male**. We might test that theory by assuming it for a moment as we read Paul. When I did this for the first time, I was startled to see how much of Paul was unlocked and how deeply I could understand the power of the gospel that literally saved Paul's life.... I see no evidence to suggest that Paul ever acted out his sexual desires and passions.... Paul felt tremendous guilt and shame, which produced in him self-loathing. The presence of homosexuality would have created this response among Jewish people in that period of history. Nothing else, in my opinion, could account for Paul's self-judging rhetoric, his negative feeling toward his own body, and his sense of being controlled by something he had no power to change. The war that went on between what he desired with his mind and what he desired with his body, his drivenness to a legalistic religion of control, his fear when that system was threatened, his attitude toward women, his refusal to seek marriage as an outlet for his passion—nothing else accounts for this data as well as the possibility that Paul was a gay male (1991:116-117).

He drew, through love and grace, all people to himself as he restored them to themselves, building finally that inclusive community in which there is neither Jew nor gentile, bond nor free, male nor female, for all are one in Christ, whose love can embrace even the outcasts of society, even the one pronounced depraved and called an abomination, the one who by the mandate of the Law stood under the sentence of death. This is the way my thesis would suggest that the gospel of Jesus Christ was experienced by Paul, the man from Tarsus. To me it is a beautiful idea that a homosexual male, scorned then as well as now, living with both the self-judgment and the social judgments that a fearful society has so often knowingly pronounced upon the very being of some of its citizens, could nonetheless, not in spite of this but because of this be the one who would define grace for Christian people. For two thousand years of Christian history this Pauline definition has been at the very core of the Christian experience. Grace was the love of God, an unconditional love that loved Paul just as he was. A rigidly controlled gay male, I believe taught the Christian church what the love of God means and what, therefore, Christ means as God's agent....

When people consider scandalous this idea that a homosexual male might have made the grace of God clear to the church, I reply, “Yes, it is scandalous, but is that not precisely how the God of the Bible seems to work?” It is as scandalous as the idea that the Messiah could be crucified as a common criminal. It is as scandalous as the idea that a birth without acknowledged paternity could inaugurate the life that made known to us the love and grace of God. It also suggests that heterosexual people might be deeply indebted to homosexual people for many spiritual gifts that arise out of the very being of their unique life experience. Indeed, I have been the recipient of just that kind of gift from the gay and lesbian people who have shared with me their journey with God through Christ (1991:125-26).

**Bibliography** (note that Spong makes no reference to the works of Theissen, Fischer or Tarachow)

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## Appendix 4. Heterosexism/Homophobia in recent studies of Romans

### TRADITIONAL EXEGESIS: PAUL AS HETEROSEXIST/HOMOPHOBIC AND NORMATIVE:

Commentators who exegete Rom 1:26-27 as condemning all homoerotic acts and believe such teaching should be normative for the church today (only Keener in after 2003):

Leon Morris 1988  
James Dunn 1988  
Joseph Fitzmyer AB 1993:269-95  
John Stott 1994  
Thomas Schmidt 1995  
Douglas Moo 1996:113-117  
Thomas Schreiner 1998:97  
Robert Gagnon, 2001, 2003  
Tom Wright 2002:433-35, citing Richard Hays (1996) and Robert Gagnon (2001)  
Charles Talbert 2002, following Gagnon  
Craig S. Keener 2009

### HERMENEUTICS: PAUL AS HETEROSEXIST/HOMOPHOBIC, BUT *NOT* NORMATIVE.

Commentators who exegete Rom 1:27 as condemning *all* male homoerotic acts, but do not believe such teaching should be normative for the church today:

Bernadette Brooten 1996:215-302  
Christopher Bryan 2000:84-89  
Brendan Byrne 1996:70, 76  
Troels Engberg-Pedersen 2000:209-212, 362, notes 52 and 53  
Beverly Gaventa 1998.  
Katherine Grieb 2002:30-31  
Stephen Moore 2001  
Marti Nissinen 1998  
Robert Jewett 2007  
Russell Pregeant 2008 Excellent treatment of hermeneutical issues.  
William Loader 2010; 2012 Best for exegetical detail on all sex texts.

### ALTERNATIVE EXEGESIS: PAUL AS NORMATIVE, BUT AS DECONSTRUCTING / TRANSCENDING GRECO-ROMAN AND JEWISH SEXISM, HETEROSEXISM AND HOMOPHOBIA:

John Boswell 1980  
William Countryman 1988/2007; 2003  
James E. Miller 1995  
David Fredrickson 2000  
Daniel Helminiak 1995/2000  
Matthew Kuefler 2001  
Diana Swancutt 2003, 2004  
Theodore Jennings, 2009  
Douglas Campbell 2009  
Arland J. Hultgren 2011  
Tom Hanks 1997a; 1997b, 2000, 2006, 2010/12  
James V. Brownson (2013). *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 300 pp.

**Note** Even in recent decades, standard commentaries on Romans tend to become exceedingly superficial and thin when grappling with 1:24-27, neglecting the voluminous special studies of these verses and related controversies dividing churches. On the other hand, the specialized studies on “homosexuality” and 1:24-27 tend to focus on the Greco-Roman background and become exceedingly superficial and thin in treating the relationship of the text to the epistle and Pauline theology as a whole. Few are the authors who pay adequate attention to both the specialized studies as well as the epistle as a whole—not surprising since commentators are finite and the two disciplines immense and complex.

**Appendix 5. Douglas A. Campbell**, [associate professor of New Testament at Duke Divinity School] (2009), *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; 1218 pp.]; cf. also his *Quest for Paul's Gospel: A Suggested Strategy* [London: T&T Clark International (Continuum), 2005:112-131]; "What Is at Stake in the Reading of Romans 1-3? An Elliptical Response to the Concerns of Gorman and Tilling." *Journal for the Study of Paul and his Letters*. 1/1 (Spring), 2011:109-32. (In the same issue see the review-articles by Chris Tilling, "The Deliverance of God, and of Paul?" (83-98) and Michael J. Gorman, "Douglas Campbell's *The Deliverance of God*: A Review by a Friendly Critic" (99-107). In section **3.3 Homosexual Relations (2009:206-07)** Campbell writes (2009:206-207):

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

- First, correct theology at all points now presupposes this stance, so to tamper with it is to risk undermining the later Christian dispensation that unfolds from it. Strong paradigmatic reasons now exist for the stance's maintenance.
- Second, the stance is attributed to all humanity on the basis of innate knowledge and hence independently of special revelation.
- So, third, it is insulated from correction by special revelation. (Indeed, as we have already seen, special revelation can now unfold only in these terms.)
- Fourth, since everyone can be expected to know that such behavior is deeply offensive to God, everyone so offending is liable entirely justly to punishment. Romans 1:18-32—read in a certain way—tends to describe such punishment rather passively in terms of the divine deliverance of humanity up to the consequences of its twisted and chaotic desires, but Romans 2 will articulate almost immediately a more active and coercive response to sin (i.e., punishment). And it is a short step from divine government and retribution to such action by human governments. Hence, not only is the condemnation of homosexual sex written into the foundation of the Christian gospel, but that condemnation legitimizes coercive state reaction against such apparent wrongdoing [note 69 below].

"If Romans 1:24-27 is set to one side momentarily, it is still possible that Paul's view of sexual relations was reasonably conventional in terms of ancient Judaism. He seems to endorse heterosexual monogamy as the main alternative to celibacy, and he occasionally condemns homosexual relations in the context of vice lists (see perhaps 1 Cor. 6:9). But the setting of that opinion is rather more flexible, as his conditional endorsement of divorce in 1 Corinthians 7 indicates.

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

In three notes he adds:

"[67] My colleague Mary McClintock Fulkerson drew my attention to the appropriateness of speaking of "Queer" theory at this point so as to incorporate gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual perspectives: see also Laurel C. Schneider, "Queer Theory," in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, ed. S. K. M. Adam (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000)m 206-12.

[68] A classic contribution to this debate is Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 379-80, 391-94; see also Dale Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox, 2006; and Deryn Guest, Robert Goss, Mona West, and Thomas

Bohache, eds., *The Queer Bible Commentary* (London: SCM, 2006). On the broader theological issues, see esp. Eugene Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999). For some preliminary remarks on the Pauline interpretative questions, see “The Witness to Paul’s Gospel of Galatians 3:28,” chapter five in *Quest*, 95-111; the specific issue of gay—and by extension Queer—ordination is treated in “A Brief Case Study in the Ethical Aspect of Paul’s Gospel: Gay Ordination” chapter six in *Quest*, 112-31.

[69] So, for example, in the United States, a constitutional amendment forbidding homosexual marriage would be entirely consistent with this theological stance. A corresponding amendment that defined marriage as between a man and a woman (mooted by the GOP in 2004-6) would be similarly consistent, while both would illustrate that such a theological axiom is supposed to apply indiscriminately to Christians and non-Christians alike, and can if necessary be supported coercively by the state.”

Similarly, in his response to the reviews of Gorman and Tilling, Campbell writes: “The premises that have been established by the end of this initial argument [Rom 1:18-32] are highly significant and deeply familiar: God is interested in human ethics, which is defined in terms of aniconic monotheism, heterosexuality (and probably also monogamy), and essentially considerate interpersonal virtues. And the failure to act appropriately will be *punished*, ultimately by *death*. This is ‘right.’ So the God revealed naturally to everyone is a God of retributive justice and ethics is contractual and conditional. If people act in a certain way then they will receive from God a certain consequence—punishment for bad deeds, and so presumably reward for good deeds. Clearly, then, 1:18-32 is a foundationalist argument rooted in non-Christological analogies for God and is therefore fundamentally an Arian approach to theology, it is also a conditional and contractual variant” (2011:127-28).

**My comment:** Although in the 936 pp. of text in his *magnus opus* (with notes, bibliography and indices extending to 1218 pp.) Campbell dedicates only the above-cited page with its three endnotes to treat explicitly the subject of queer theory and homosexuality, the implications of his conclusions are profound and more devastating to traditional homophobic interpretations than the casual reader might suspect. Few scholars have accepted William Walker’s contention that Romans 1:18-32 represents a non-Pauline interpolation in the letter (1999; republished 2001, cited in Campbell 1026, note 47 and 1051, note 68). However, in recent decades, commentators commonly have concluded that in Romans 1:18-32 Paul is laying a rhetorical trap, which he then springs on the unsuspecting reader in 2:1-16 (see Hanks, “Romans” in the QBC, which Campbell cites indirectly in his note 68; also Hanks, review of Paul Jewett on → **Romans**). Now in this new work, Campbell takes this kind of analysis a step further, arguing that already in 1:18-32 Paul is *not* setting forth his own viewpoint, but citing the rhetoric of a certain Jewish Christian “Teacher” and his followers in Rome (see → Galatians) whom the Apostle proceeds to refute as the letter unfolds. If correct, Campbell’s analysis also would explain why later in the letter Paul systematically deconstructs the four key elements (uncleanness, unnatural, shameful, change) in the homophobic rhetoric of 1:24-27 (as I pointed out in my QBC chapter).

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

1 Basic to Campbell’s interpretation of Romans is the recognition of the role of the false “Teachers” (plural) in → **Galatians**, who came down from Jerusalem and sought to impose circumcision and the Law on the gentile converts to Paul’s Law-free gospel. Although in Romans Paul focuses on a single Teacher (2:17-23/24), Campbell suggests that he may be the leader of a group similar or identical to those who caused such turmoil in Galatia. Thus the switch to the plural “you” in 2:24 in the citation of Isa. 52:5 and Ezek. 36:22 may indicate that “the Teacher” is the head of a group.

2 Campbell reminds us of the common difficulty in Paul’s letters of distinguishing the Apostle’s own views from those of any opponent/s whose views he cites (without quotation marks in the original Greek) before proceeding to his own qualification or refutation. Above all, from 1 Corinthians Campbell provides a lengthy list of texts where commentators commonly affirm (8 cases) or debate (5 cases) possible citations that do not

represent Paul's own views (2009:540-41; see 1:12; 3:4; 6:12-13; 7:1; 8:1, 4, 8; 10:23; cf. 4:6b; 8:5a; 12:3; 15:12; 15:35); in English for the undisputed eight cases the NRSV provides the quotation marks lacking in the original Greek. Cf. similar speaker-identity problems in Job and Song of Songs (Tilling 2011:86).

3 To the objection that no one properly understood Paul before Campbell, he is able to point out that individually most of his points were anticipated by various commentators throughout church history and that all he is doing is, in the light of recent studies reflecting the New Perspective on Paul, taking the next step: carrying such insights to their logical conclusion, especially regarding in Galatians, 1-2 Corinthians, Philippians and Romans.

4 Most important, Campbell shows how many of the affirmations in 1:18–2:16 are contradicted or **deconstructed** as the Romans scroll unrolls. In my QBC Romans chapter (2006) and my Jewett review above I cite four examples of such deconstruction: uncleanness, against nature, shameful, and exchanges.

Campbell sees Paul's own Good News set forth in 1:16-17, with its citation of Hab. 2:4, and understands *dikaiosyne theou* not as commonly rendered in English ("the righteousness of God") but in the light of Psalm 98:2 as "the deliverance of God" with apocalyptic and royal overtones, referring to "the act of resurrection, empowerment and heavenly enthronement after [Christ's] oppression and execution by evil opposing powers" (p. 699; see my rendering, "the liberating justice of God," Hanks 2000/08:84).

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

1 1:18–2:29 represents a non-pauline interpolation ( Walker, William O. (1999). "Romans 1:18–2:29: A Non-Pauline Interpolation?" *New Testament Studies* 45, 533-52; also his *Interpolations in the Pauline Letters*, JSNTSup213 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001).

2 Paul is not expounding his own view but cites the (false) Teacher/s (as in Galatians; Campbell 2009); note that the Jewish teacher devastatingly refuted in 2:17-29 is the first clearly identified person referred to in 1:18–2:29. Thus, the notion that certain false teachings of this Teacher/s are already echoed in 1:18-32 is not as far-fetched as might first appear when we recognize the trap being laid for him therein.

3 In 1:18-32 Paul lays a rhetorical trap to be sprung in 2:1-16 and later deconstructed as the letter develops (Hanks 2000/08). However, in laying his rhetorical trap in 1:18-32, Paul may cleverly begin (1:18) with Jewish biblical tradition that represents common ground between him, the teacher and Roman readers. Similarly, what French theologian, Jacques Ellul, might identify as "majority propaganda" (the most dangerous kind) could well be represented in the rhetoric (later deconstructed) against sexual minorities in 1:26-27. Like William Loader (2010) I reject the hypothesis of speech-in-character to explain Rom 1:18-32. Though acknowledging the strength and profundity of Campbell's work, I find a simple recognition of Paul's *rhetorical trap* in Rom 1:18-32 and later deconstruction of the four *intentionally ambiguous* elements more convincing than the resort to an unmarked citation of a false teacher. Campbell acknowledges that the "for/because" (1:18; gr. *gar*) connects 1:18 to the preceding context and the series of four "*gar*'s" carry the reader without pause from 1:16-18 (2009:340-41). Note also the contrast between "oppression" (1:18ab) and integral liberation and liberating justice of the just (1:16-17). (For details on the entrapment see "Reviews", "Campbell Excursus" [www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar/ingles/ingles.html](http://www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar/ingles/ingles.html)).

In his interpretation of Paul's letters, Campbell of course prefers the interpretation of *pistou christou* as referring to Christ's faithfulness (seven times), living our present life by his faithfulness, not by our faith in Christ, for instance in Gal. 2:20: "The life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith/fulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (2009:200-01; see Rom. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16 [twice], 20; 3:22; Phlp. 3:9; cf. Eph. 3:12 [of/in him]; 4:13). This is a key element in the new perspective on Paul (see chart below for outline).

## Key elements in Romans 1:18-32, according to Campbell's analysis:

1:18 God's wrath is now revealed against all idolatry and oppression (see the Roman empire).

1:19-23 God is revealed in creation but original humanity opted for idolatry.

1:24-27 Humanity has been given over to idolatrous concupiscence.

1:28 Even before the idolatrous concupiscence of 1:24-27, humanity had been given over to 21 vices.

Excursus: Stanley K. Stower's *A Rereading of Romans* (Campbell 460-66).

1:18-32 Echoes ancient 'decline of civilization' narratives (both Greco-Roman and Jewish; cf. Hesiod's portrayal of an original golden age). The "ancient discourse of 'self-mastery' ...is especially important for Romans" (Campbell 2009:460).

## Difficulties in traditional Justification Theory (JT). Intrinsic Difficulties (Campbell 2009:36-61):

"1 Epistemology. Justification theory argues in terms of two incompatible epistemologies: a general, atemporal, philosophical, and rational conception of knowledge—"objective" philosophical reasoning; and a particular, historical, revelatory, and interpersonal conception—notably, the witness of Scripture, but also the voice of God....

"2 Natural Revelation. Justification theory builds from the objective discernment and lineage of certain positions within creation—a universal recognition and derivation that, in strictly rational terms, is impossible....theism → monotheism → divine transcendence /unimageability → divine retributive justice → divine concern for human heterosexuality → and monogamy → divine concern for a fuller ethical system....Such attributes and concerns cannot be shown to derive in strictly rational terms from the bland god of the philosophers. How do we deduce, by contemplating the cosmos, that a single transcendent god is offended by homosexuality?....

"3. Law. Justification theory asserts two sets of law within one soteriology committed to a just God and perfect obedience—a dual system that is incoherent in terms of both content and desert....

"4. Anthropology. Justification theory presupposes in humans an inherent ability to deduce and appropriately fulfill the truth of certain axioms and, at the same time, a profound universal sinfulness—that is, fundamental and simultaneous *capacity and incapacity*....[cf. Gaca on the ignorant vs. the rebellious "truth suppressors"]

"5. Theodicy. Justification theory posits a God of strict justice who holds all people accountable to a standard they are intrinsically unable to attain, and this seems unjust....

"6. Christology and Atonement. Justification theory does not explain why Christ must atone as against other people or things, and especially, in place of the established temple cultus....

"7. Faith. Justification theory harbors a cluster of complex problems with respect to faith, in two main variations. The 'Arminian' variant struggles to explain faith fully, and, in particular, how individuals can actually exercise faith in order to be saved. The 'Calvinist' variant can get beyond these difficulties by introducing revelation and election at the point of faith but then runs into further problems in relation to the privileging of faith and its gifting to individuals who have negotiated phase one. Ultimately both variants collapse...."

## Campbell gives the following summary of the very different "Soteriology apparent in Rom 5-8" (72-73):

1 "The First phase: **Unconditional Deliverance**. Salvation has arrived for the 'brothers' unconditionally, at the behest of the Father, through the Son, bringing a spectrum of blessings—life, peace, hope, glory, dominion, reconciliation, atonement, ethical capacity, and so on....It is a dramatic apocalyptic deliverance, inaugurating certain fundamental changes, and thereby prompting a reevaluation of the human problem in its light....

2 “The Second Phase: **A Retrospective Characterization of the Problem.** The powers of Sin and Death have entered the world by way of the original transgression of God’s commandment by humanity—an Adamic narrative. These hostile powers have taken up residence in human flesh. Humanity, powerless ultimately to resist, is effectively enslaved—ruled and oppressed by way of ‘sinful passions,’ and hence oriented by and toward Sin and Death. The existence of humanity is consequently wretched and its destiny is death. Any ongoing presence of a divine commandment exacerbates the problem, as Sin manipulates such instructions to create more transgressions! Unredeemed humanity now cannot comprehend either the problem or the solution.

3 “The Saving Phase [A]: **The Father Sends the Son.** The Father views enslaved humanity with benevolence, desiring to help them [as is proved by the fact that] He sends his only beloved Son into this situation, to assume its distorted Adamic ontology—its flesh. The Son consents to enter this existence, to suffer, and to die, thereby demonstrating his benevolence. In this act, Adamic ontology, or the flesh, as it is presented in him, is also executed—an event that can be described in some senses as ‘atoning.’ The Son is raised from the dead to new life, thereby entering the new age—the age to come—as its firstborn and ‘image.’ The Son is glorified and enthroned on high; his eternal messiahship and inheritance are thereby affirmed.

4 “The Saving Phase [B]: **The Spirit Incorporates Humanity in Christ.** The Spirit now ‘maps’ humanity onto Christ’s trajectory. Humans participate first in his martyrological journey, thereby dying; in so doing, their Adamic ontology is executed. Humans participate also in his messianic and eschatological journey, free from the powers of Sin and Death, and a new inheritance. This salvation is fundamentally liberative (in an instance of negative liberty); it is a deliverance from slavery! The salvific process is best symbolized by immersion, that ritual being interpreted as a dying and rising with Christ. The new situation for Christians is typically summarized by Paul with the phrase ‘in Christ,’ or its close equivalent—a metaphor of location. This new situation is fundamentally communal and interpersonal: Christians join a community rooted in a divine communion. Implicit in this is a new conception of personhood, as precisely relational—within a communion.”

This alternative Pauline Theory of Soteriology that becomes apparent in Romans 5-8 creates tensions (ten points) when juxtaposed with Justification Theory (73-89):

“1. Epistemology. The basic conception of knowledge, especially in terms of its overall direction, is different in Paul....2. Anthropology. The presupposed conception of the person is different elsewhere in Paul.... [as are] 3. Theology...the basic conception of God....4. Christology and Atonement, the role of Jesus Christ in the atonement ....5. Soteriology, the nature of salvation, including the basis and depth of Christian assurance....6. The nature and role of faith.... 7. the conception of ethics....8. Ecclesiology, the nature of the church ....9. The depiction of Judaism, including various accounts of the Torah...[and ] 10. The endorsement of coercive violence for the punishment of wrongdoing is arguably rare elsewhere in Paul....” (72-73).

Commentators have struggled to reconcile the account of the human plight given in 1:18-32 (original humanity as a whole opting for idolatry) with that in 5:12-21 (Adam *sans* Eve introducing disobedience and bringing death on the entire human race → Romans; cf. Eve alone in 1 Tim 2:14). While Campbell proposes that 1:18-32 represents the view of the false Teacher Paul opposes and 5:12-21 the genuine Jewish Paul, most educated modern readers probably would take both narrations as legendary /mythological and suggest that our plight stems rather from insufficient evolution (which assumes another myth—dearly beloved by Darwin’s heirs, that of progress). Disciples of Jacques Ellul and others technologically and ecologically concerned might propose an alternative “excess of evolution,” with a fearful glance at the threat of a nuclear holocaust.

## Two Perspectives on Paul (\* = Campbell's positions)

Old	and	New
*1 A Christian, <i>converted</i> from Judaism (forgets 1 <sup>st</sup> -century Christianity = a Jewish sect)		Always a Jew, but <i>called</i> to preach to non-Jews Gal. 1:15; Acts 9, 22, 26; Phlp. 3:4b-6
2 Judaism = caricatured Legalism Salvation by works (merit)		*Judaism = God's covenant people Divine election and grace to <i>get</i> in Good works necessary to <i>stay</i> in
3 Justification by faith = Present: <i>Declared</i> just (law court language)		Context: covenant theology Present: <i>Declared</i> just (law court language) Future: final judgment by works (Rom. 2:5-16; Mat. 25:31-46)
4 Romans theme: Justification by faith		Romans 1–8, Justification by faith Romans 9–16, Jew-Gentile relations in inclusive house churches
5 Romans problem: How individuals can get to Heaven		*God's cosmic project of liberation, chs. 1–8 House churches inclusive of Jews-Gentiles, 9–16
6 "Works of the Law" (8 times: Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16 (3x); 3:2, 5, 10 + "law of works," Rom. 3:27) = Good works generally		= Ethnic markers that distinguish Jews from Gentiles: circumcision, food laws, Sabbath observance
7 Faith <i>in</i> Christ (6 times: Gal 2:16, 16, 20; 3:22; Rom. 3:22, 26; Phlp. 3:9; + Eph. 3:12 [of/in him])		*Faithfulness <i>of</i> Messiah
8 *Christ's <i>imputed righteousness</i> : affirmed (1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 5:17; Phlp. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:21)		Denied (N.T. Wright 2009:158-167) = "embody God's covenant faithfulness"

N.T. Wright

vs.

James Dunn

First to *introduce* phrase of the "new perspective"  
on Paul (1978) (*Tyndale Bulletin* 1978:61-88)

*Popularized* phrase, became identified with it  
1983 and 1988

Emphasizes covenant context of justification

Deemphasizes covenant language and concept

Emphasizes Jesus as messiah in Paul

Deemphasizes Jesus as messiah in Paul

For Paul, Jews were still in Exile (Daniel 9)

Questions this interpretation

Dunn, James D. G. (1998). *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 128-161, 631-669.

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For more on "the new perspective on Paul" see especially [www.thepaulpage.com/Bibliography.html](http://www.thepaulpage.com/Bibliography.html)

**Excursus. Robert Gagnon (2001; 2003; [www.robagnon.net](http://www.robagnon.net)),** Presbyterian New Testament professor (Pittsburgh Seminary) who defends traditional views on the Bible and homosexuality.

1 In the exegesis of relevant texts, Gagnon grants many, if not most of the valid points that pro-Gay scholars have made in recent years. Except in the area of homosexuality his approach cannot be labeled fundamentalist, since he refers frequently and competently to the original languages, uses standard scholarly methodologies and takes for granted the common conclusions (JEDP sources in the Pentateuch, multiple authorship of Isaiah, deuteropauline letters in the New Testament, etc). Thus should any fundamentalist carefully study Gagnon's works he/she can learn a great deal about modern scholarly interpretation of the Bible and will soon discover that biblical interpretation is not the simple matter of citing any old translation and interpreting it according to traditional prejudices. Gagnon's most common tactic, however, is to grant what previous scholars have pointed out about a text that would tend to undermine the validity of its use against sexual minorities today, but then "trump the trick" by uncritically imposing his uninformed concept of "complementarity" and thus seek to reenlist the text to support traditional heterosexists conclusions.

2 Even were Gagnon some day to succeed in "winning" the battle with theological "liberals" and "gay revisionists" over the classic Bible "clobber texts" traditionally used to promote violence against sexual minorities, he would only further discredit the Bible as an authority in the cultural wars. Every time a Hollywood star or sports hero/ine comes out—or a Republican senator is outed—media attention is such that the event has far more impact, with the younger generation especially, than what academics are saying in their interminable debates about the meaning of obscure Bible texts. And perhaps an even greater impact occurs when a teen-ager's friend comes out or succeeds in taking a same-sex date to the high school prom, or a high school club is started to defend sexual minority students from peer violence and abusive language. For centuries the world has witnessed dominant sectors in the Christian churches rush into battle with countless crystal-clear Bible texts in hand, claiming to defend the sacred authority of the Bible by (1) opposing usury to prevent the rise of capitalism, (2) opposing Galileo and modern astronomy to perpetuate the notion of a flat earth in a geocentric universe, (3) supporting divine right of absolute monarchs to prevent the rise of democracy, (4) advocating the perpetuation of racist slavery and (5) insisting on the inferiority of "the weaker sex" to oppose votes for women and women's equality. That Gagnon and allies should succeed in turning back the clock on gay rights requires more faith than Joshua exercised to "make the sun stand still" (Josh 10:1-15). Using Bible proof-texts to promote oppression and violence is contrary to the intent of the Author, whose cosmic project is characterized by liberation, freedom and justice for all.

3 In the process of Gagnon's tireless investigations and heavily footnoted writings he has unintentionally managed to mainstream a whole body of what he calls "pro homosex" scholarly literature that previously was ignored in conservative academic circles. He often accepts many of his opponents' key exegetical points (Saul Olyan on anal sex in Lev 18 and 20) and even defends certain such authors from misrepresentation and caricatures of their views (Boswell; *Plain Science* 201-02, note 50, ref to RJ 2000:234 and Hays).

4 In his prodigious efforts to defend his view on homosexuality, Gagnon ends up referring to virtually all the Bible says and to all our modern questions related to sexuality: adultery, divorce, remarriage, polygamy, concubines, incest, zoophilia/bestiality, eunuchs, pedophilia, masturbation, etc. etc., etc. Traditionally gay advocates have sought to keep the focus of the debate *limited* to homosexuality, lesbian soldiers, gay marriage, gay ordination, etc. and vociferously objected when opponents sought to inject other controversial subjects into the debate as if they were intrinsically linked with homosexuality (the "slippery slope" argument). However, decades ago we learned that the problem in the churches is not that people don't want to think about or talk about homosexuality—given our western neo-platonic heritage most people in the churches don't want to talk about anything related to sexuality but keep the church focused on what they understand as "spirituality," which—Jesus' incarnation and resurrection notwithstanding—never seems to have anything to do with the body, much less sex. Gagnon's frequent reference to texts dealing with all sorts of sexual expressions and values, if studied seriously, can force the churches to restudy and rethink the whole area of human sexuality in the light of related biblical texts and current scientific insights. With the abandonment of the Augustinian paradigm (sex only within marriage for the purpose of procreation), churches have entered into crisis regarding sexuality, but unable to talk about it. Gagnon encourages everyone to think and talk about the whole area of human sexuality and attempts to correlate biblical and scientific data (an effort vitiated, since his scientific expertise is sadly inferior to his capacity as exegete).

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**2 La sociedad esclavista patriarcal → nuevos conocimientos (orientaciones sexuales).** Jewett ha insistido por varios años (2000; Hanks 2000:93, nota 20) que los investigadores han dado escasa atención a la **correlación entre homosexualidad y esclavitud**. El derecho de los amos a requerir servicios sexuales de los esclavos y los libertos es un factor importante para captar el impacto de la retórica de Pablo (2006:180) según lo ilustra el dicho muy citado de Séneca el Anciano: “El servicio sexual es un crimen para el nacido libre, una necesidad para el esclavo, un deber para el liberto” (Jewett 180; sobre la esclavitud ver también Jennifer Glancy 2002/6; J. Albert Harrill 2006:119-144). Pablo pretende llevar “noticias maravillosas” de la justicia liberadora de Dios a cinco iglesias domésticas en Roma (1:16-17) pero estas noticias de anhelos teocráticos de restaurar la pena capital del Levítico para los varones que se someten a la penetración anal (Rom 1:32; Lev 20:13 difícilmente serían saludadas con entusiasmo por la mayoría de esclavos, libertos y mujeres) de las iglesias de Roma (y la situación en Corinto donde Pablo dictó una carta era parecida (Glancy 2006:49-50). James Dunn desafía el énfasis de Jewett sobre el propósito misionero de la carta a los Romanos argumentando que la ausencia de comunidades judías (con sus gentiles “temerosos de Dios”) y la ignorancia de la lengua griega en España habrían hecho irreal la expectativa de apoyo para las iglesias vecinales de Roma (2007). Dunn, empero, olvida que los esclavos y ex-esclavos de España de tales iglesias, serían fieles representantes de las culturas, conocerían las lenguas cruciales y mantuvieron contactos provechosos con sus antiguas patrias (ver el papel clave de la esclava israelita en la curación de Naamán, 2 Reyes 5:2-3).

El recordatorio de Jewett sobre la esclavitud plantea la cuestión de si los comentaristas hicieron lo correcto cuando trataron de extraer un absoluto ético de una desconcertante narrativa mito-histórica “Caída de la Civilización”. Sin embargo, si permitimos que Rom 1:19-32 sea interpretado en el marco de la proclamación del Evangelio de la justicia liberadora (1:16-17) y la descripción de la ira de Dios apuntando a la opresión imperial (1:18, 29), podemos estar de acuerdo con Jewett cuando sugiere que “la retórica de Pablo daría entrada a la igualmente desdichada experiencia de los esclavos cristianos y ex-esclavos que experimentaron y guardaron rencor a la explotación sexual de ellos mismos como de sus hijos en una cultura marcada por la agresiva bisexualidad” (181, citando Cantarella, *Bisexuality*, 156-64). Jewett mismo, empero, concluye que Pablo dio a entender una “condena moral de *cualesquiera* relaciones homosexuales y extramaritales” (2007:181) implicando una “condena” que provocaría terror más bien que consuelo a los esclavos. Mejor reconocer, entonces, que Pablo apunta sólo a los actos homoeróticos que son actos de opresión (1:18, 29). Además, si dudamos en saltar de la parábola de Jesús sobre el mayordomo infiel a absolutos éticos (Luke 16:18; Harrill 2006:66-83), el empleo de Pablo en Romanos 1:19-32 de una misteriosa narrativa de “Caída de la Civilización” nos daría una pausa similar especialmente dada la reconstrucción del Apóstol en el curso de la carta de cuatro de sus cinco críticas básicas a la bisexualidad promiscua y abusadora (Hanks 2000:91-94) y las coherentes y limitadas normas provistas ulteriormente (Rom 13:8-13) donde la retórica hiperbólica de la ilustración del sermón apuntando a una trampa es reemplazada por una clara instrucción .

Sin embargo, Pablo estaba proyectando una misión a España representando los “fines de la tierra” los extremos finales de su geografía del mundo [plano]. Luego que completó su misión y cumplidas la profecías de la Biblia Hebrea, esperó el retorno de Jesús en su propia vida. Robert Gagnon (presuponiendo que el coito gay debe implicar siempre a un varón que penetra analmente a otro varón) concluye que semejante fenómeno de una pareja gay piadosamente cristiana comprometida en una relación sexual amorosa consensual estaba simplemente fuera del mapa erótico de Pablo: “tanto para Filón como para Pablo, las relaciones homoeróticas eran *inherentemente de explotación*” (2001:311; énfasis mía). De esta manera, los escritos de Pablo se reducen al nivel del sexismo de sus contemporáneos heterosexistas y homofóbicos. Pese a su genio teológico y reclamo de la autoridad apostólica, no se permitió trascender la ignorancia y el prejuicio comunes.

Semejante conclusión es muy cuestionable (Hanks 2006:601-04). Los biblistas debatirán eternamente cuánto sabía Pablo sobre la complejidad de las relaciones homoeróticas en la Grecia antigua y en las culturas grecorromanas pero la conclusión de Gagnon es importante, dado que admite que las dos referencias de Pablo a los actos homoeróticos refieren *sólo a la explotación sexual*: el abuso sexual por el coito anal (Rom 1:26?-27; 1 Cor 6.9?, probablemente homoerótico; cp 1 Tim 1:9, abuso de prostitutas esclavizadas, probablemente deuteropaulino). Sin embargo, Gagnon entonces concluye que, puesto que Pablo sólo supo de la *explotación* homoerótica, tal fue la única clase de relaciones homoeróticas que *existían* en la antigüedad y que tales son las

únicas clases que existen al presente y por lo tanto la Iglesia debe condenar todos los actos homoeróticos actuales como explotación sexual contraria a la voluntad de Dios (2001:311-12)

Sin embargo, Pablo no pretende describir a cada acto o relación homoerótica de su época sino que, más bien, se refiere a la humanidad toda en un cierto tiempo pasado después de la invención de la idolatría. Saltar de un elemento en tal retórica para concluir que las relaciones homoeróticas hoy implican explotación sexual y deben condenarse es, más bien, incoherente, comparable a la de los teólogos de la época de Galileo tan confiados en su exégesis bíblica que rehusaron intentar mirar a través de un telescopio y aprender que la tierra no era ni plana ni el centro del universo. Sin duda, la entusiasta descripción del salmista del sol estallando como un novio saliendo de su “tienda” celestial y corriendo a través del horizonte terrestre como un poderoso guerrero, es poesía majestuosa que inspira alabanza al Creador (Ps 19:5-6) pero para los científicos espaciales planeando el próximo viaje a la luna, esa inspirada poesía no sustituye a los textos de la moderna astronomía. Del mismo modo, la diatriba de Pablo contra la idolatría y la lujuria no deben tomarse como un texto actual de psicología para “erradicar la homosexualidad” (erradicar su “única causa”: ¿la idolatría pagana?).

Aunque concedamos la conclusión de Gagnon, la retórica de Pablo, que refleja las limitaciones científicas de la antigüedad (respecto de las orientaciones sexuales y los orígenes de la idolatría y las prácticas homoeróticas), habría sido convincente y apropiada a sus propósitos para los lectores romanos del siglo primero de nuestra era. Sin embargo, como un antiguo poema o parábola que renguea gravemente, si lo leemos como ciencia (¿el tamaño de la semilla de mostaza?), el texto de Pablo requiere ser escudriñado y desempacado de nuevo para los lectores actuales. Representaría la sabiduría divina que sirve para amonestar y condenar las prácticas sexuales explotadoras que Pablo veía abundaban en los círculos hetero como homosexuales. Pero no debemos citar el enfoque limitado de Pablo sobre su misión a España (que representaría el fin de la tierra; 15:24, 28) para negar la existencia de América o China ni debemos citar su expectativa por el retorno de Jesús antes de su muerte (13:11-12; 1 Thes 4:15; 1 Cor 7:29-31) para negar 2000 años de historia desde su martirio en Roma. Entonces, tampoco es sensato citar el exclusivo enfoque de Pablo en Rom 1:24-27 sobre la explotación lujuriosa para negar la existencia en el presente de relaciones amorosas comprometidas de parejas cristianas gay y lésbicas.

Además, en las denuncias de la insensatez e injusticia humana que Pablo expone en 1:18-2:16, los autores de la Biblia comúnmente recurren a la hipérbole, exageraciones que ningún exégeta prudente querría tomar literalmente como descripciones científicamente exactas. Dos capítulos después, el Apóstol ofrece abundantes ejemplos de tal hipérbole en una diatriba que contiene una cadena de citas que en la Biblia Hebrea denuncian a determinados grupos de opresores pero los cuales Pablo aplica universalmente a toda la humanidad (3:9-18). John Reuman advierte sabiamente: “La diatriba no es doctrina” (2003:1286) pero es así como Gagnon interpreta la referencia de Pablo a la explotación homoerótica en Rom 1:27. Un vistazo a la retórica de las denuncias proféticas del pecado deberían advertirnos contra tal literalismo (Ver Hosea 4:1-19; 6:8-10). Al presente, los evangélicos se apresuran en disculparse con los judíos modernos y están de acuerdo que no todos los fariseos de la época de Jesús están fielmente descritos en las siete maldiciones contra los hipócritas de Mateo 23, ni todos los judíos (sea en la época de Jesús o desde entonces) están fielmente descritos como teniendo al diablo por padre (Juan 8:44). Pero aunque la humildad y las excusas por el antisemitismo están de moda desde el Holocausto, aún son aplaudidas las caricaturas crueles de las relaciones homoeróticas.

No obstante, la sabiduría de un abordaje alternativo equilibrado que tome seriamente no sólo la inspiración y valor sino también las *limitaciones* científicas de Rom 1:26-27 en el tratamiento de los problemas de la homofobia y las prácticas homoeróticas abusadoras del presente, son ya evidentes incluso en las líneas sobrias posteriores de Pablo para las prácticas sexuales cristianas en Rom 13:8-13. Allí el Apóstol se abstiene de condenas amplias o prohibición de prácticas homoeróticas y desenfunda de la Biblia Hebrea el mandamiento de amar al prójimo, lo que implica evitar todo lo que pueda dañarlo, incluyendo el placer sexual codicioso (*koitais*, “camas” 13:13 + *epithumía*, 13:14) y excesos (*aselgeiais*, 13:13), sabiduría aplicable a las personas de todas las orientaciones sexuales (Jewett 2006:826).

Jewett, sin embargo, del mismo modo que Gagnon, argumenta así respecto del “cambio” de las prácticas sexuales en 1:26 y los varones que “abandonaron” el uso de mujeres (1:27):

Convencido que la heterosexualidad era parte del orden divino creado para la especie humana [1 Cor 7 y 11] y que el deseo sexual es esencial a los humanos como *soma* [cuerpo], [Pablo] presenta desvíos de definiciones de roles tradicionalmente judíos como indicaciones de un asalto arrogante al Creador y como signo de la ira actual y la por venir...[En 1:27 ] el participio aoristo *aphentes* (“abandonando”) es el equivalente grosero del término “cambio” en v. 26b. Ello implica una salida de una relación originalmente heterosexual entre varones y mujeres que fue ordenada por Dios (2006:177-178).

Debemos notar, empero, que después de describir a los varones “abandonando el uso natural de la mujer”, Pablo enfatiza primero (como lo hizo en 24 y 26) “que ardían de lujuria” (no amor) el uno por el otro. En cada uno de los tres versículos que especifican actividad sexual, el primer énfasis es sobre la lujuria y la codicia sexual y 24 y 26 no especifican ninguna expresión homoerótica. El “arrogante asalto al Creador” que provoca la futura ira está en cada versículo sobre el quebrantamiento del 10º mandamiento sin referir a algún detalle del Código de Santidad del Levítico. No obstante, aunque Jewett parecería estar de acuerdo con Gagnon que Pablo sugería que implicaba una prohibición universal de las relaciones homosexuales, como Bernadette Brooten, sostiene que la norma implícita de Pablo era resultado de su ignorancia sobre las **orientaciones homosexuales** y de ese modo *no* debería ser normativa para las iglesias actuales. Jewett tampoco sigue a Gagnon (2001) para caer en la trampa de defender el heterosexismo y la homofobia con nociones pseudocientíficas de “curas” para la supuesta “enfermedad” de la homosexualidad (420-29) e inventando una hipotética exigencia divina de “complementaridad” heterosexual en todas las relaciones sexuales (56-62).

**Jewett, Robert (2013) *Romans: A Short Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress.**