

ROMANS 1:26-27 AND HOMOSEXUALITY

**ROMANS 1:26-27 AND HOMOSEXUALITY:
A STUDY IN TEXT AND CONTEXT**

By

WILLIAM KEITH GILDERS, B.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

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**MASTER OF ARTS (1994)
(Religious Studies)**

**McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario**

TITLE: Romans 1:26-27 and Homosexuality: A Study in Text and Context

AUTHOR: William Keith Gilders, B.A. (University of Toronto)

SUPERVISOR: Professor A. Reinhartz

NUMBER OF PAGES: vii, 141

ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is Paul's statements about homosexual behaviour in Romans 1:26-27. The thesis has a two-fold focus. First, it is concerned with the interpretation of Paul's words in the light of their historical context, using the methods of traditional historical criticism. Second, it attempts to evaluate the impact of recent debates in Christian churches about the ethics of homosexual behaviour on the interpretation of this text.

The differing interpretations of John Boswell and Richard Hays are treated as paradigmatic of recent debates over the text. In the light of Boswell's and Hays' interpretations this thesis argues that Paul's words in Rom. 1:26-27 do reflect a negative evaluation of all homosexual behaviour, that Paul objected to homosexual behaviour because he believed it violated God's will for human life, that the objection was fundamentally gender-based, condemning sexual relations between persons of the same gender as "against nature." Furthermore, Paul's claim that homosexual behaviour was an expression of passions and desires is stressed, and it is argued that Paul believed, with other Jews, that homosexual behaviour was a vice characteristic of Gentile culture.

The thesis begins with an introductory discussion of the interpretations of John Boswell and Richard Hays and an overview of methodological issues. Following this, Chapter One deals with the modern context in which interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27 takes place, focusing on theories about homosexuality and Christian responses. Chapter Two reviews recent work on Rom. 1:26-27 and highlights basic issues and questions. Chapter Three focuses on Paul's historical context, dealing with homosexual behaviour in the Graeco-Roman world, and Jewish and non-Jewish responses and attitudes. Chapter Four, the core of the thesis, deals in detail with Rom. 1:26-27 and presents the major arguments

of the thesis. An outline of major conclusions follows, including a discussion of the relevance of the thesis for modern debates.

The thesis both contributes a review of recent scholarship and attempts to advance understanding of the text by considering the relationship between historical interpretation of the text and its use in ethical debates.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Adele Reinhartz for her support of my work and her invaluable contributions to helping me see this thesis to completion. As well, Dr. Stephen Westerholm deserves special mention for reading and evaluating several preliminary drafts of the thesis and offering detailed comments and criticisms. His assistance has had a significant positive impact. Thanks too to Dr. Eileen Schuller for her comments and criticisms.

Special thanks to Tinamarie Jones for advice, generous hospitality, and Nanaimo bars. Words are inadequate to express my thanks to my parents, Donna and George Gilpin, for their unfailing support, both financial and moral. I dedicate this thesis to them.

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INTRODUCTION

In Romans 1:26-27 Paul mentions and describes homosexual behaviour. His words were written almost two thousand years ago in a specific historical context. These words are, however, also regarded as Scripture by Christians, and they have become the focus of considerable attention recently, as a variety of Christian groups have debated whether the traditional Christian condemnation of homosexual behaviour should be maintained, modified, or abandoned altogether.

Scholarly interest in Rom. 1:26-27 has been shaped by these debates, as a study of the conflicting interpretations of John Boswell¹ and Richard Hays makes clear.² Boswell is a Mediaeval historian; Hays is a professional New Testament scholar.

Boswell's thesis is that intolerance of homosexual behaviour in late-Mediaeval Europe was sociological in origin rather than theological.³ As part of the argument in support of this thesis Boswell attempts to demonstrate that early Christians did not hold the negative attitudes towards homosexual behaviour which usually have been attributed to them. It cannot be maintained, according to Boswell, that the Bible is the basis for Christian opposition to homosexual behaviour. In the context of this argument Boswell offers an interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27 in which he advances two novel claims about the meaning of the text.⁴ First, according to Boswell, the fact that Paul speaks of people "exchanging" and "abandoning" heterosexual for homosexual behaviour, indicates that

¹ *Christianity, Homosexuality, and Social Tolerance: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, Phoenix Books, 1981).

² "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (1986): 184-215.

³ Boswell, *Christianity*, 3-39.

⁴ Boswell, *Christianity*, 107-113.

Paul understood those who engaged in homosexual behaviour to have a heterosexual orientation but to have turned to homosexual behaviour. Second, Boswell asserts that the passage contains no condemnation of homosexual behaviour *per se*. What Paul means when he claims that homosexual acts are *παρὰ φύσιν* is that they are more than what is normal for the individuals he criticizes. "Nature," according to Boswell, does not in Rom. 1:26-27 refer to universal norms or a divine order but to the individual natures of the persons who indulge in homosexual behaviour. Homosexual behaviour, according to Paul, is "beyond nature" for people who are by nature heterosexual, but is normal for those who are naturally "gay." The implication of this reading of Rom. 1:26-27 is that the text does not represent a basis for general condemnation of homosexual acts. Put more positively, Boswell suggests that Paul and early Christianity might have been open to sexual activity between people who were constitutionally "gay," since such behaviour is according to their "nature."

Boswell's interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27 has been extremely influential. It is repeated frequently by advocates of church acceptance of homosexual behaviour as appropriate for some Christians and has been adopted by other interpreters of Rom. 1:26-27.⁵

Boswell's interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27 has been directly challenged by only one professional New Testament scholar, Richard Hays, who in a 1986 article claims that Boswell's reading is seriously misleading and "fosters an unfortunate confusion between

⁵ Boswell's work in progress was used by the gay Roman Catholic theologian, John McNeill, in his influential book, *The Church and the Homosexual* (Kansas City: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1976). McNeill's version of Boswell's interpretation was adopted by Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott in their popular work, directed at a conservative Protestant readership, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? Another Christian View* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1978). New Testament scholars George Edwards (in *Gay/Lesbian Liberation: A Biblical Perspective* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1984)) and William Countryman (in *Dirt, Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988)) integrated Boswell's reading into their own interpretations of Rom. 1:26-27. Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural," 185, 211, n. 3., comments on Boswell's influence.

exegesis and hermeneutics."⁶ Hays criticizes both of Boswell's novel claims about the meaning of Paul's words.

Boswell, he says, fails to give careful enough attention to the argumentative context in which Paul's statements about homosexual behaviour are situated. He thus fails to recognize that Paul treats homosexual behaviour as a sign of alienation from God specifically because it involves distortion of the order established by the Creator.

According to Hays, the references to God as creator in the context in which Paul speaks about homosexuality, would have led Paul's readers to think about Gen. 1-3, with its references to humankind being created male and female and called upon to procreate, the description of the creation of Woman for Man, and its statement that sexual union makes them "one flesh" (Gen. 2:18-24). Thus, according to Hays, heterosexual marriage is fundamental to God's creative intention, and Paul opposed homosexual behaviour because it violated God's intention for human life.

Furthermore, according to Hays, Boswell's interpretation of *παρὰ φύσιν* is both grammatically and historically questionable. Paul, as he demonstrates, is using conventional language. The description of homosexual acts as *παρὰ φύσιν* was in Paul's time "a commonplace feature of polemical attacks against such behavior, particularly in the world of Hellenistic Judaism."⁷ According to Hays, the meaning of this language must be determined in the light of its use by Paul's contemporaries and not on the basis of etymology or the meaning of "nature" as employed elsewhere in Paul's writings. In Hays' view, "nature" in this context clearly refers to the created order.

In responding to Boswell's thesis that Paul condemned only heterosexual people who turned to homosexual behaviour by deliberate choice, Hays first asserts that Paul

⁶Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural," 185.

⁷Ibid., 194.

was not describing the case-history of select individuals, but rather was describing the situation of all people who stand in rebellion against God. According to Hays, "the 'exchange' of truth for a lie to which Paul refers in Rom. 1:18-25 is a mythico-historical event in which the whole pagan world is implicated. This exchange continues to find universal manifestation in the moral failings which beset human society, as exemplified by the illustrations given in 1:26-32."⁸ Hays insists, as well, that Paul could not have distinguished between those who were "gay" by orientation and heterosexuals who engage in homosexual behaviour by deliberate choice. No notion of "sexual orientation" existed in Paul's time and people were not categorized as "heterosexual" or "homosexual." Thus, "to suggest that Paul intends to condemn homosexual acts only when they are committed by persons who are constitutionally heterosexual is to introduce a distinction entirely foreign to Paul's thought-world and then to insist that the distinction is fundamental to Paul's position. It is, in short, a textbook case of 'eisegesis,' the fallacy of reading one's own agenda into a text."⁹

Hays concludes his response to Boswell by arguing that Paul's words continue to be authoritative for Christians and that acceptance of homosexual behaviour is not a legitimate option for Christians. He thus not only makes an historical argument, but also takes a position in the contemporary debate. Boswell, in contrast, insists that he is not attempting to contribute to modern debates.¹⁰ Nevertheless, as Hays notes, Boswell's "arguments have understandably been drafted immediately into the service of moral argument within the church." Moreover, "it is hard to believe that pressing contemporary

⁸Ibid., 200.

⁹Ibid., 200-201.

¹⁰Boswell, *Christianity*, xv, asserts that "this book is not intended as support or criticism of any particular contemporary points of view -- scientific or moral -- regarding homosexuality."

issues have not influenced his handling of his material. Indeed, as I have tried to show, his treatment of Rom 1:26-27 founders precisely because he scrutinizes the text through the hermeneutical lenses of modern categories alien to the first-century historical setting.¹¹ Thus, it seems fair to note that both Boswell and Hays write as historical scholars but with acute interest in the use of the Bible in modern debates about the ethical legitimacy of homosexuality.¹²

Hays and Boswell are not unique. Virtually every article or monograph dealing with biblical teaching on homosexuality has been written by a scholar who is an active participant in a Christian church, and who takes a demonstrable position on the ethical character of homosexual behaviour. Most of this scholarly work, in fact, has been produced in direct response to contemporary debates.

The present study has been undertaken in this intellectual context and, like others who have attempted to understand Rom. 1:26-27 and its statements about homosexual behaviour, I am concerned about modern debates and the use made of the Bible in these debates. I wish to make explicit the fact that my own historical interest is inspired by a more general interest in the subject of homosexuality and in religious responses to sexual relations between people of the same gender. At the same time, I want to interpret Rom. 1:26-27 as an historical document and attempt to understand as fully as possible what Paul was saying in his own time.

Reading Rom. 1:26-27 in the light of its textual and historical context, and aware of the modern context in which this reading takes place, I will discuss Paul's attitude

¹¹Ibid., 204.

¹²Hays makes no secret of his position in the modern debate in an article written for the evangelical magazine, *Sojourners*; see "Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies," *Sojourners*, July 1991, 17-21. Likewise the fact that Boswell is gay is no secret and he participates actively in the ecumenical "gay Christian" movement. Written statements from Boswell on the modern debate, however, have been impossible to obtain.

towards homosexual behaviour. I will attempt to demonstrate that Paul did hold a negative view of homosexual behaviour, as Hays argues. Furthermore, I will discuss the nature of Paul's objections to homosexual behaviour, indicating that his objections were centered on views about proper gender behaviour. Finally, I will give attention to the way in which Paul characterizes homosexual behaviour and those who engage in it. Specifically, I will note that Paul treats homosexual behaviour as the expression of passion and lust, and I will argue that he shared with other Jews living in the Graeco-Roman world the conviction that homosexual behaviour was a problem for Gentile idolaters but not for Jews.

To carry out this task it will be necessary not only to discuss Rom. 1:26-27 and its place within the letter to the Romans and Paul's thought in general but also to describe the historical context in which Paul made his statements about homosexual behaviour. Furthermore, I will attempt to clarify the relationship between recent scholarship on Rom. 1:26-27 and ethical debates about homosexuality, in order to facilitate more accurate historical reflection.

Methodology

In attempting to deal with Rom. 1:26-27 in the manner described above I have drawn on a variety of methodological and theoretical resources, and the approach I have taken is an eclectic one. It is probably best described as an approach in which traditional historical-critical methods are employed, informed by newer critical theories and methods. The following is a brief survey of methodological and theoretical resources upon which I have drawn in the course of my work.

Historical-critical Methodology

The focus of historical-critical biblical scholarship is the elucidation of the meaning of the texts in their original historical context. According to Edgar Krenz,

"modern biblical scholars use a critical method, that is, a disciplined interrogation of their sources to secure a maximal amount of verified information. They seek the truth that is valuable for its own sake."¹³ Their method is that used by other historians; it is a secular method.¹⁴ The qualities required by the critical interpreter of the Bible include, "intellectual curiosity, the possession of the necessary knowledge requisite to use historical sources, the ability to think critically, a passionate urge for truth, and a basic honesty. These lead to proper balance, humility, and self-criticism."¹⁵

In his discussion of the historical-critical method, Krenz stresses the importance of respecting "hermeneutical autonomy," which means that "the interpreter may not import meaning into the text, but must find the sense in the text; the text determines the meaning."¹⁶ He stresses, as well, that the text must be read in the light of its context, both the textual context, within a document as a whole, and the context of the surrounding world.

According to Ulrich Wilkens,

The only scientifically responsible interpretation of the Bible is that investigation of the biblical texts that, with a methodologically consistent use of historical understanding in the present state of its art, seeks via reconstruction to recognize and describe the meaning these texts have had in the context of the tradition history of early Christianity.¹⁷

Similarly, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza notes that "a fundamental methodological insight of historical criticism of the Bible was the realization that the *Sitz im Leben* or life setting

¹³*The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 6.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 33, 48.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 52-53.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁷"Über die Bedeutung historischer Kritik in der modernen Bibelexegese," *Was heißt Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift?* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1966), 133, quoted in Krenz, *Historical-Critical Method*, 33

of a text is as important for its understanding as its actual formulation. Biblical texts are...historical formulations within the context of a religious community."¹⁸

Thus, in traditional historical criticism, the focus is on the meaning a text had in its original historical setting, particularly for the community for whom it was written. It is assumed that the text itself determines the meaning that the modern interpreter finds in it. Furthermore, this meaning is determined by reading the text in the light of its historical setting.

Feminist Criticism

Like traditional historical criticism, a feminist approach to the Bible is characterized by concern with the cultural, social and political context in which a text was originally written and read. As Schüssler Fiorenza stresses, "feminist theory insists that all texts are products of an androcentric patriarchal culture and history."¹⁹ For this reason, they tend to focus on men and their concerns, and to neglect the lives and concerns of women. Feminist scholarship, therefore, "seeks to construct heuristic models and concepts that allow us to perceive the human reality articulated insufficiently in androcentric texts and research."²⁰ Feminist scholars also give attention to the modern context in which interpretation of the text is undertaken. Feminist theory points to the political significance of interpretation and the relations of power which various interpretive approaches reflect. In a society dominated by men, biblical interpretation has been performed largely by men, and frequently directed by explicitly male concerns.²¹

¹⁸*In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1983), xv.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰*Ibid.*, xvi.

²¹*Ibid.*, 43-60.

Thus, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, what is necessary "is not just a feminist analysis of biblical texts but also a metacritique of the androcentric framework adopted by biblical scholarship without any critical reflection on their systematic presuppositions and implications."²² Thus, not only is an attempt made to understand the reality of women's lives in the past, but attention is given, as well, to the impact of bringing explicit concern about women to one's scholarly work. Responding to criticism of the "biased" or "interested" nature of such an approach, Schüssler Fiorenza asserts that

the tacit assumption underlying such expressed or unexpressed reservations is that scholars who do not reflect or articulate their political allegiances are 'objective,' free from bias, nonpartisan and scientific. Yet, anyone even slightly familiar with problems raised by the sociology of knowledge or by critical theory will have difficulty asserting such scholarly objectivity on scientific grounds.²³

In the light of its impact, and the important questions it raises about how historical scholarship is carried out, it seems essential that any attempt to deal with questions of gender and sexuality give attention to the questions asked by feminist scholars and to the various answers that feminist theory offers to those questions.

"Ideological Criticism"

A case could be made for describing feminist theory as a type of ideological criticism. Ideological criticism is concerned with the ideological assumptions and concerns which shape interpretation. A masterpiece of ideological criticism is M.I. Finley's *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, in which he deals with the impact debates over Marxist economics have had on the interpretation of slavery in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds.²⁴ Finley notes that "contemporary ideological considerations are

²²Ibid., 42.

²³Ibid., xvi.

²⁴M.I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (London: Chatto and Windus Ltd., 1980).

active in that seemingly remote field of historical study -- active in the sense that they underlie and even direct, what often appears to be purely 'factual,' objective' presentation." Thus, "a full, open account of how modern interest in ancient slavery has manifested itself is a necessary prerequisite to the substantive analysis of the institution itself."²⁵ He discusses in detail the ways in which controversy over "Marxist" views of history has controlled the shape modern discussion of ancient slavery has taken,²⁶ and comments on how the ancient world has been used as a "springboard for a larger political polemic" by representatives of a variety of camps and schools.²⁷ He notes, particularly, the way in which the relationship between early Christianity and ancient slavery has been studied, "because it has been a central theme in the ideological debates about ancient slavery; indeed, a prime example of what happens when the past is summoned as witness in moral or theological disputations."²⁸ In dealing with this problem, Finley describes the "teleological fallacy," which

consists in assuming the existence from the beginning of time, so to speak, of the writer's values...and in then examining all earlier thought and practice as if they were, or ought to have been, on the road to this realization; as if men [*sic*] in other periods were asking the same questions and facing the same problems as those of the historian and *his* world.²⁹

Finley also stresses the importance of asking the "right" questions of the sources and recognizing that these are the scholar's questions, not the questions of those who wrote the sources. He also stresses the way in which questions determine, in part, the answer

²⁵Ibid., 9-10.

²⁶Ibid., 11-66.

²⁷Ibid., 63.

²⁸Ibid., 14; His discussion of scholarship on ancient slavery and early Christianity is found on pp. 14-17.

²⁹Ibid., 17 (Finley's emphasis).

the sources provide, for "all statements of fact 'presuppose concepts whose meaning is at least partly given by the context of theory'."³⁰

The relevance of Finley's work for the present study is evident. He provides a model for the application of a rigorous historical methodology to a problem in the light of modern ideological debates. Like scholarship on ancient slavery, interpretation of biblical teaching on homosexuality has taken place in a context of ideological debate, the past has been "summoned as witness," and the "teleological fallacy" has made its presence felt, with interpreters treating ancient texts as if they reflect or ought to reflect, the view of homosexuality held by the interpreter. While not often explicitly acknowledged, Finley's influence will be evident throughout this study.

Reader-oriented Criticism

There are various, sometimes rival, reader-oriented approaches to the interpretation of texts, all united by a concern with the relationship between the reader and the text.³¹ In particular, there is a concern with the role the reader has in determining the meaning of a text.

Interest in the reader is not new to biblical scholarship. As Stephen Moore notes, "a surprising feature of historical-critical style" is "a fondness for throwaway remarks on the reader."³² In fact, "appeal to a hypothetical reader's experience has long been a standard feature of exegetical style. This is hardly surprising when one considers that the

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 65 (citing M. Hesse, "Theory and Value in the Social Sciences," *Action and Interpretation*, ed. C. Hookway and P. Pettit. Cambridge, 1978, p. 2).

³¹On the various types of reader-response criticism, see Jane P. Tompkins, "An Introduction to Reader-Response Criticism," in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), ix-xxvi.

³²*Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 75.

biblical exegete himself or herself has traditionally been engaged in reenacting a role of reading."³³

In reader-response criticism frequently a distinction is drawn between the "real" reader and "implied" reader. The real reader is anyone who reads a text. The implied reader, in contrast, "exists only in the mind of the real reader." The implied readers "may be reconstructed from the text as those who are capable of understanding the text, its language, its devices, and its message. Hence the implied reader may be defined as the image of the intended reader which a real reader constructs in reading the text."³⁴

A real reader can adopt the persona of the "implied reader" or can be a "resisting reader."³⁵ The resisting reader, according to feminist literary critic Judith Fetterley, recognizes that "what we read affects us...drenches us...in its assumptions, and that to avoid drowning in this drench of assumptions we must learn to re-read."³⁶ Fetterley's explicit focus is on the way in which women are portrayed in American fiction, but her insights are relevant for other types of literature, including the Bible. She notes that in American literature women are presented from a male point of view, and that female readers are called upon by this literature to adopt a male persona when reading about women. Male-oriented literature "neither leaves women alone nor allows them to participate. It insists on its universality at the same time that it defines that universal in specifically male terms."³⁷ Women are thus deprived of power, not only because their

³³Ibid., 76.

³⁴Adele Reinhartz, *The Word in the World: The Cosmological Tale in the Fourth Gospel*. SBL Monograph Series, no. 45 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 7.

³⁵This designation is adopted from Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

³⁶Ibid., viii,

³⁷Ibid., xii.

own experiences are not communicated in most literature, but also because they are called upon to divide against themselves, to read about women from the point of view of men. The female reader "is co-opted into participation in an experience from which she is explicitly excluded; she is asked to identify with a selfhood that defines itself in opposition to her; she is required to identify against herself."³⁸ Thus, according to Fetterley, "the first act of the feminist critic must be to become a resisting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted in us."³⁹ Like the resisting female reader of American fiction, readers of the Bible may resist. The Jewish reader of John's Gospel may, for example, resist adopting the persona of the reader who agrees with the claim that Jews are children of the devil (John 8:44) and who sees Jesus as something other than a Jew. Similarly, the homosexual reader of Rom. 1:26-27 may resist adopting the persona of a reader who agrees with Paul's depiction of homosexual behaviour and who sees himself or herself as other than the "them" who engage in homosexual behaviour. He or she may, to paraphrase Fetterley, seek to exorcise the heterosexual mind implanted in him or her. In this study, therefore, I will note how adopting a different reading approach makes a difference in how one appropriates what is read.

The Structure of the Thesis

The structure of this thesis has been shaped by the various methodological and theoretical resources which have been employed in answering the questions with which it is concerned. The thesis begins with a study of homosexuality in modern Western society, focusing on attitudes and interpretations, as well as specifically Christian

³⁸Ibid., xii.

³⁹Ibid., xxii.

responses (Chapter 1). The goal of the chapter is to highlight the distinctive characteristics of the context in which modern interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27 takes place and to facilitate reflection on the impact modern ideas have had on such interpretation and on the ways in which Paul's words have been used in ecclesiastical debates.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss recent scholarship on Rom. 1:26-27 in the light of my study of the modern interpretive context. My goal will be to point to the key issues and questions with which this scholarship has been concerned, and lay the groundwork for my own exegetical treatment of the text.

Chapter 3 focuses on the historical context in which Paul wrote Rom. 1:26-27 and in which his words were originally read. As stressed by both traditional historical criticism and feminist criticism, it is necessary to interpret Paul's words in the light of the historical setting in which they were written.

Chapter 4 is the core of the thesis, in which I will present my own interpretive work on Rom. 1:26-27, drawing on existing scholarship, emphasizing the way in which what Paul says relates to what his contemporaries said, and considering how modern concerns relate to historical reconstruction.

The thesis will conclude with a summary of the major points which have been made, followed by some reflection on the possible impact of my reading of Rom. 1:26-27 on modern religious debates about the morality of homosexual acts.

CHAPTER ONE

THE MODERN INTERPRETIVE CONTEXT

The focus of this chapter is the setting in which modern interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27 takes place. The goal of this discussion is to facilitate reflection on the influences which come to bear on modern interpreters as they attempt to understand ancient texts. The chapter will begin with a description of the development of modern conceptions of homosexuality, and of attitudes and responses to homosexuality, both scholarly and popular, in contemporary North America and Europe. The stress throughout this section will be on the distinctive features of modern practices and attitudes, as stressed by much modern scholarship on homosexuality in particular, and sexuality in general. The particular responses and attitudes of modern Christians are the focus of the second half of the chapter. Specifically, I am concerned with how modern conceptions and theories about homosexual behaviour have been adopted by Christians and applied in debates about the ethics of homosexuality. Consequently, this chapter serves as a basis both for my assessment of modern scholarship on Rom. 1 :26-27, undertaken in Chapter 2, and for the discussion, in Chapter 3, of ancient Graeco-Roman and Jewish practices and attitudes, with its stress on their differences from modern practices and attitudes.

Terminology

To begin with, some discussion of terminology is required. Frequently, debates about homosexual behaviour center around the meaning of terminology. It is essential, therefore, that I explain my own use of terms and identify the sources from which I have derived my definitions.

The words "homosexuality" and "homosexual" are of relatively recent coinage. They first appeared in print in two German pamphlets, published in Leipzig in 1869. The sex researcher, Krafft-Ebing first used an adjectival form derived from "homosexuality" in the second edition of his influential *Psychopathia sexualis* (Stuttgart, 1887), and made increasing use of the terminology in subsequent editions. The word "homo-sexuality" entered English usage in 1892 through the translation of Krafft-Ebing's work.¹ Definitions of "homosexuality" vary.² One "simple definition" describes homosexuality as "an erotic, sexual, and usually genital relationship between two people who have the same genital morphology."³ "Homosexuality", however, does not simply describe sexual behaviour between persons of the same sex, but also a condition which predisposes a person to engage in such behaviour. Thus, D.J. West states that, "homosexuality simply means the experience of being erotically attracted to a member of the same sex."⁴ In this chapter, therefore, "homosexuality" will be used to designate the total phenomenon of same-gender sexual behaviour, conceptions of the motivation for such behaviour, and explanations of the etiology of such motivation. As I note in Chapter 3, ancient attitudes towards and understandings of same-gender sexual behaviour differed greatly from modern attitudes and understandings. Therefore, to avoid confusion, the term will not be employed when discussing the ancient world. Rather, I will speak only of *behaviour* that, from a modern point of view, is regarded as "homosexual," involving two persons of the

¹David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1990), 15, 155, nn. 1-2.

²Richard A. Friedman, a psychoanalyst, states that "no definition of the term *homosexuality* has been universally accepted by clinicians and behavioural scientists." *Male Homosexuality: A Contemporary Psychoanalytic Perspective* (New haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 3.

³John Money, "Forward," *Male and Female Homosexuality: Psychological Approaches*. Ed. Louis Diamant (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), xi.

⁴*Homosexuality* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967), 10.

same anatomical gender. I will also occasionally designate such behaviour as "same-gender-sexuality."

Properly, the word "homosexual" is an adjective. One can speak, for example, of a "homosexual relationship" (a relationship involving sexual activity between persons of the same sex) or "homosexual desires" (desires for homosexual behaviour). The word has, however, become a noun, serving as an abbreviation for the phrase "a person with a homosexual sexual orientation".⁵ One can, thus, speak of "a homosexual". There is some debate about just who the term designates, and it is often applied to any person who engages in homosexual behaviour, without regard for its psychological and medical connotations.⁶

The designations "gay" and "lesbian" will be used of males and females, respectively, who identify in some way with a modern homosexual community and who, to employ the terminology of modern church debates, are "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals". John Boswell insists on using the term "gay" to designate people who lived in periods when the term "gay" was not actually used to designate homosexual persons, either by themselves or by members of the wider society.⁷ He, thus anachronistically ignores the differences between people who engaged in homosexual

⁵West (Ibid.) indicates that "men and women who habitually experience strong feelings of [erotic attraction to their own gender] are called homosexuals." Judd Marmor defines a homosexual as "one who is motivated, in adult life, by a definite preferential erotic attraction to members of the same sex and who usually (but not necessarily) engages in overt sexual relations with them." Introduction to *Sexual Inversion: The Multiple Roots of Homosexuality*. Edited by Judd Marmor (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1965), 4.

⁶West (p. 10) distinguishes the "practicing homosexual," from the homosexual who is so identified only on the basis of sexual feelings. Marmor (p. 4) insists that persons who are not motivated by "specific, preferential desire" -- experimenting adolescents, and men in prison, for example -- should not be described as "homosexuals."

⁷Boswell, *Christianity*, 41-46.

activity in the past and those who identify as "gay" in the modern West. His approach has not been widely adopted, and will not be followed in this study.

The designation "gay Christian" will be used to designate those persons who identify as homosexual and believe that homosexuality can be an acceptable option for Christians.

Other terms, such as "invert", which have been used in the past, or which are used in specific contexts, will be explained as they appear.

Homosexuality and Modern Society

In the nineteenth century, a dramatic change began to take place in attitudes towards people who engaged in homosexual behaviour as compared with attitudes in previous centuries. Michel Foucault eloquently describes the nature of this change and highlights the distinctiveness of the new nineteenth century attitudes, inherited by modern society:

As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature. We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized...less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.⁸

⁸Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 43.

The modern "homosexual" is defined not so much by behaviour as by an erotic orientation; persons so classified are categorized by one element in their personality, a propensity to seek erotic interaction with persons of their own gender. While "sodomy" described behaviour, "homosexuality" identifies both an erotic predisposition and behaviour reflecting this disposition. The "sodomite" was someone who practiced sodomy. The "homosexual" is a person with a predisposition to homoerotic contact. He or she may be so designated because of desires and feelings, even if no overt behaviour has been pursued.⁹

Foucault's treatment of nineteenth century approaches to homosexual behaviour, as useful as it is, unfortunately conflates "homosexuality" with "inversion." "Inversion" was an older term, one which competed with "homosexuality" until the 1950s. It focused less on sexual acts and predispositions to certain erotic behaviour and more on the assumed unusual gender identity of persons who engaged in homosexual acts, what Foucault terms "a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself...a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul." The basis of the concept of inversion is the idea that sexual deviance is a reflection of gender deviance. A male who desires sexual contact with other males is assumed to have female sexual desires, and a female who desires sex with women is assumed to have male sexual drives.¹⁰ This conception continues to be reflected in popular stereotypes of effeminate homosexual men and mannish homosexual women. In the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, many homosexual persons

⁹Recall the definitions given above.

¹⁰On nineteenth century ideas about the connection between gender deviance and sexual deviance, see David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 373-386. Greenberg notes, as an example of the power of these conceptions, Krafft-Ebing's refusal to believe that a male he examined could have engaged in passive homosexual behaviour because he was not effeminate (p. 385).

accepted the concept of "inversion," and understood themselves to possess the body of one gender and the psyche of the other. Some understood this condition to be pathological. Others treated it as a normal, variant condition.

Foucault notes that the medical categorization of homosexuality or inversion as abnormal contained within it its own opposition.¹¹ Persons identified as "homosexual" or as "inverts" challenged the categorization of their desires as abnormal using the same conceptual tools employed by the medical community. They insisted that homosexuality was a manifestation of a normal genetic variant, that even though a minority phenomenon, it was no less "natural" than heterosexuality. Drawing on theories about inversion, the concept of homosexuals as a "third sex" or an "intermediate sexual type" was advanced.¹² Although the language used by nineteenth century defenders of homosexuality has largely been abandoned, similar approaches remain popular. A few scientists have recently undertaken research which they claim demonstrates that homosexual orientation is biologically conditioned.¹³

Besides the medical view of homosexuality as an organic disorder or variant, a conception of homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder also developed. A variety of theories were advanced explaining what factors led to the development of same-gender

¹¹Foucault, 101-102.

¹²Greenberg, *Construction*, 404-411. Greenberg provides a useful discussion of early theories, but differs from Foucault by arguing that the idea that homosexual orientation is innate was advanced by homosexual men, starting in the 18th century, and adopted by some non-homosexual members of the medical community in the 19th century. Greenberg criticizes Foucault for failing to consider the impact of popular ideas on intellectuals and for doing the "history of ideas" primarily from the point of view of the educated elite. See Greenberg, *Construction*, 330-337, 486.

¹³See, for example, Simon LeVay, "A Difference in Hypothalamic Structure between Heterosexual and Homosexual Men," *Science* 30 August 1991, 1034-1037, "Biology and Homosexuality," *Science*, 1 November 1991, 630, C. Holden, "Twin Study Links Genes to Homosexuality," *Science*, 3 January 1992, 33, D. Gelman, Donna Foote, Todd Barrett and Mary Talbot, "Born or Bred? The Origins of Homosexuality," *Newsweek*, 24 February 1992, 46-53.

attraction or gender identity confusion.¹⁴ The most common theory, which remains popular today among many psychiatrists, holds that homosexuality develops in response to inadequate relations with parents. In the case of male homosexuality, an absent or ineffective father and dominant, controlling mother are identified as causal factors. Psychiatrists and psychoanalysts who adopt this understanding of homosexuality usually claim that a change of erotic orientation can be effected by resolving the personality disorder resulting from the poor relationships with parents.¹⁵

Contemporary ideas about homosexuality can be classified in three categories. First, there is the "essentialist" perspective, which holds that sexual orientation results from an essential characteristic of the individual. The homosexual person and the heterosexual person are essentially different. Biological explanations of the etiology of homosexuality are, of course, essentialist in their assumptions. The "medical" or "psychological" approach to homosexuality is often treated as a distinct category, but it can be subsumed as a type of essentialism. Most psychological theories of the etiology of homosexuality hold that homosexual and heterosexual people have essentially different psychologies. The homosexual person's emotional and erotic inclinations are the expression of drives very different from those that motivate heterosexual persons. A male homosexual may, for example, be said to be seeking the love of his absent father by his sexual activity, while heterosexuality is not explained as a response to some lack in a person's emotional development. In contrast to the essentialism of the biological and psychological approaches to homosexuality, the "constructionist" approach to sexuality holds that "sexual identities are not 'given' by nature but are culturally constituted or

¹⁴As the discussion of "inversion" above indicates, these were not always distinguished.

¹⁵Reuben Fine, "Psychoanalytic Theory," in *Male and Female Homosexuality: Psychoanalytic Approaches*, ed. Louis Diamant (Washington: Hemisphere Publishing Corporation, 1987), 81-95.

produced."¹⁶ Neither the term "heterosexuality" nor "homosexuality" designate a constitutional characteristic of people; rather, they are categories by which experiences are both described and constituted. Constructionism's case is based in part on the observation that Western industrial societies are virtually unique in categorizing people according to the object of sexual attraction. Other societies, both ancient and modern, define people by their sexual role or their gender, as culturally defined, and homosexual behaviour is organized very differently. Involvement in homosexual behaviour does not necessarily place one in a specific category in these societies, and is usually not exclusive. Even in modern Western societies a great deal of homosexual behaviour is engaged in by persons who are categorized as "heterosexual."¹⁷ The constructionist position remains controversial. For many advocates of tolerance of homosexuality, essentialist theory has provided a useful basis for their appeal. If homosexuality is innate, and not subject to change, they reason, homosexuals deserve acceptance as a minority like any other. Constructionist theory appears to threaten this approach to gay rights.¹⁸

John Boswell, it should be noted, has vigorously challenged constructionist views of homosexuality, arguing for an essentialist approach which treats "gays" as a recognizable minority group in every culture and historical period.¹⁹ "Gay" people he defines as "persons who are conscious of erotic inclination toward their own gender as a distinguishing characteristic," and he treats "gay sexuality" as "eroticism associated with

¹⁶David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, 10.

¹⁷Mary McIntosh, "The Homosexual Role," *Social Problems* 16 (1968/69): 182-192. McIntosh's article is a clear and quite influential presentation of social constructionist ideas about homosexuality.

¹⁸Greenberg, *Construction*, 492, Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, 47-53.

¹⁹John Boswell, "Revolutions, Universals and Sexual Categories," in *Homosexuality: Sacilege, Vision, Politics* (= *Salmagundi* 58-59 (Fall 1982-Winter 1983)), ed. Robert Boyers and George Steiner (Saratoga Springs, N.Y.: Skidmore College, 1982), 89-113; "Gay History," review of *The Construction of Homosexuality*, by David F. Greenberg, in *The Atlantic*, February 1989, 74-78.

a conscious preference," distinguishing it from "other forms of homosexuality."²⁰

Boswell seems to believe that homosexual orientation is innate, a biological condition.

He suggests

that a percentage of human beings in all societies prefer their own gender sexually, that they are sometimes able to institutionalize this preference, and that the majority of human beings are sufficiently flexible to be able to derive some sexual satisfaction from either gender under institutional pressure, whether or not that gender is their first choice.²¹

Boswell offers this explanation of homosexuality as a more simple one than the various complex explanations offered in David Greenberg's constructionist work, *The Construction of Homosexuality*. He does not seem to realize that his explanation contains within it an even more simple one, that all human beings are capable of erotic attraction to other people of either gender, given the right conditions. "Behaviourists" assert that both heterosexuality and homosexuality are learned behaviour and that neither sexual orientation is innate. Alfred Kinsey, for example, argued that "homosexual" and "heterosexual" simply represented the two end of a spectrum.²² Following Kinsey, his associate C.A. Tripp asserts that "the homosexual response is so frequent as to be best seen as simply basic to humans."²³ There is considerable empirical evidence which

²⁰Boswell, *Christianity*, 44. He recognizes, however, that "it is often impossible to make clear distinctions in such matters and...many societies have failed to recognize any distinctions at all."

²¹Boswell, "Gay History," 75.

²²Alfred Kinsey, Wardel Pomeroy and Clyde Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Saunders, 1948, 610-666. Note especially, his rejection of the idea "that there are persons who are 'heterosexual' and persons who are 'homosexual', and that these two types represent antitheses in the sexual world and that there is only an insignificant class of 'bisexuals' who occupy an intermediate position between the other groups...that every individual is innately -- inherently -- either heterosexual or homosexual...[and] that from the time of birth one is fated to be one thing or the other" (636-637).

²³*The Homosexual Matrix*, 2d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1987, Meridian Books), ix.

supports behaviourist theories about sexuality,²⁴ and constructionist interpretations of homosexuality based on these theories.²⁵

Popular views cannot always be identified with any of the scholarly approaches I have discussed. In a recent poll conducted by the magazine *U.S. News and World Report*, 46% of respondents indicated that they "believe that homosexuals choose to be gay or lesbian," while 32% "think that gays are born that way."²⁶ The psychoanalytic idea that homosexual orientation is a developmental defect, not consciously chosen but potentially changeable, seems not to have been seriously entertained. In contrast, the idea that gay and lesbian people make a conscious choice to turn from heterosexual to homosexual behaviour, finds little support in scholarly treatments of homosexuality. Another feature of popular attitudes that is worthy of note is the close connection between beliefs about whether homosexuality is chosen and attitudes towards civil rights for gays and lesbians. Of those persons who told *U.S. News and World Report* that they believe homosexuality is a choice, nearly three out of five opposed extending civil rights laws to homosexuals. In contrast, more than half of those who said they believe that homosexual orientation is congenital support civil-rights protection. Clearly, the notion that people should not be condemned for something over which they have no choice is of central significance.

²⁴Ibid., 15-19.

²⁵I should make explicit my own acceptance of behaviourist and constructionist theories about homosexuality, which has led me to favour constructionist treatments of ancient Greek and Roman homosexuality (evident in Chapter 2) and which shapes my evaluation of the various approaches to homosexuality represented in recent church debates. It will become clear that I object not only to Boswell's anachronistic projection of modern ideas into Paul's words in Rom. 1:26-27 (discussed in Chapter 4) but also to his idea, which he shares with others, that the question of whether homosexual behaviour is appropriate or not, can be settled by claiming that homosexual orientation is innate and therefore "natural" for some people.

²⁶Joseph P. Shapiro, Gareth G. Cook and Andrew Kracov, "Straight Talk about Gays," *U.S. News and World Report*, 5 July 1993, 48.

Contemporary Christian Attitudes towards and Responses to Homosexuality

The modern debate over Christian attitudes towards and responses to homosexuality began in the 1950s, focusing at first on legal responses. Some Christians began to challenge traditional legal strictures, claiming that they were based on an incorrect understanding, both of biblical teaching and of the nature of homosexuality. In England, D. Sherwin Bailey, an Anglican theologian, participated in a "small informal group of Anglican clergymen and doctors" who studied homosexuality and issued a report in 1954, entitled *The Problem of Homosexuality* (published by the Church of England Moral Welfare Council).²⁷ Bailey expanded the biblical and historical work which he did for the group into a book-length study, published in 1955. *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* represents the first systematic study of the biblical sources of Christian attitudes towards homosexuality. Not surprisingly, therefore, it has influenced most subsequent work. Rather inaccurately, Bailey's work has been labelled "prohomosexual" by critics of openness to homosexuality.²⁸ Bailey, however, never argued for the acceptability of homosexual behaviour. His concern was simply to demonstrate that severe legal sanctions against homosexual behaviour were not justified by appeal to the Bible. He concentrated on the Genesis 19 story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, arguing against the viability of the traditional interpretation of the narrative as teaching that the cities were destroyed for homosexuality.

Also of significance, in its anticipation of later debates, was Bailey's insistence on distinguishing between "inverts" and "perverts". According to Bailey, the "genuine

²⁷D. Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longman, Green and Co., Ltd., 1955; repr., Hamden, Connecticut: The Shoe String Press, Archon Books, 1975), vii.

²⁸See, for example, P. Michael Ukleja, "Homosexuality and the Old Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140 (1983), 260, James B. De Young, "A Critique of Prohomosexual Interpretations of the Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (1990), 437-454, "The Contribution of the Septuagint to Biblical Sanctions Against Homosexuality," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (1991), 157-177.

invert" was the victim of an involuntary and potentially irreversible disposition to homosexuality. The invert could not be blamed for his or her condition and both the law and the Christian pastoral response had to take this into consideration. The "pervert", in contrast, was a person who chose to engage, for whatever reason, in homosexual behaviour, without being driven by any compulsion. He or she was not entitled to the same consideration as the "invert".²⁹ The relationship of Bailey's approach to the popular attitudes described above is quite evident. Like the persons polled by *U.S. News and World Report*, Bailey treats people as morally responsible only for a situation they enter by choice.

As the modern homosexual rights movement emerged and grew in the 1960s and 1970s, literature on Christianity and homosexuality proliferated.³⁰ Various churches issued reports and studies³¹ and religious magazines and journals carried more and more articles on homosexuality.³²

²⁹Bailey, *Homosexuality*, x-xii.

³⁰On Christian responses to homosexuality in the 1960s, see H. Kimball Jones, *Towards a Christian Understanding of the Homosexual*. (New York: Associated Press, 1966).

³¹On the church reports and studies, see Robert Nugent and Jeannie Gramick, "Homosexuality: Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish Issues; A Fishbone Tale," in *Homosexuality and Religion*, ed. Richard Hasbany (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1989), 19-26.

³²A review of entries in the Index of Religious Periodical Literature is quite illuminating. The 1949-52 and 1953-54 volumes list no articles under the heading "homosexuality." The 1955-56 volume lists three articles under "homosexuality," all in the journal *Pastoral Psychology*. The 1957-59 volume lists only one article, again in *Pastoral Psychology*. In sharp contrast, the 1960-62 volume lists five articles, four in German and one in English. The German articles include one by theologian Helmut Thielicke, "Erwägungen der evangelisch-theologischen Ethik zum Problem der Homosexualität und ihre strafrechtlichen Relevanz," *Zeitschrift für evangelische Ethik* 6 (1962): 141-149, and, for the first time, an article on the Bible and homosexuality: H.J. Schoeps, "Homosexualität und Bibel," *Zeitschrift für evangelische Ethik* 6 (1962): 369-374. The English article, by R. Bozarth and A.A. Gross, in *Pastoral Psychology* 13 (1962): 35-42, is entitled "Homosexuality; sin or sickness? A dialogue." The 1963-64 volumes list two German articles and two English articles, both in the liberal Protestant journal, *Christianity and Crisis*. The 1965-66 volume lists one German article, and two English articles, both again in *Christianity and Crisis*. The 1967-68 volume has seven entries, including two journals that gave entire issues to the topic: *Social Action* 34 (1967): 5-47 (a publication of the Council for Social Action of the United Church of Christ), and *Social Progress* 58 (1967): 5-47 (a publication of the Office of Church and Society of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA).

In 1976, John McNeill, a Jesuit scholar, published his influential book, *The Church and the Homosexual*. In his discussion of the Bible, McNeill made use of John Boswell's then unpublished research, and advanced Boswell's distinctive reading of Rom. 1:26-27.³³ McNeill's work was used by Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott in their more popular work, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? Another Christian View*. From McNeill, they adopted Boswell's reading of Rom. 1:26-27.³⁴

The years 1977 to 1979 saw numerous church debates taking place and several reports and study documents issued.³⁵ Of particular significance was the United Presbyterian Church report, *The Church and Homosexuality*. The report reflected the views of the majority of the members of the task-force which prepared it, and advocated full acceptance and ordination for openly gay and lesbian persons. A rival report was issued by a minority of task-force members, who opposed ordination of homosexual persons, and insisted that homosexual behaviour was sinful. Two of the sponsors of the minority report published books presenting their views on homosexuality.³⁶ Jerry Kirk, a Presbyterian minister and supporter of the task-force minority also published a book.³⁷ Each of these works deals with the biblical texts usually identified as relevant to the topic. They exemplify the approach to biblical statements about homosexual behaviour

³³McNeill, *Church and the Homosexual*, 200, n.39.

³⁴*Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*, 65-66.

³⁵In 1977, a United Church of Christ study on sexuality and a Disciples of Christ study package, in 1978, a United Presbyterian report and policy decision and, in 1979, an Episcopal study of homosexuality and ordination and an American Lutheran Church position paper.

³⁶Richard Lovelace, *Homosexuality and the Church* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1978); Don Williams, *The Bond That Breaks: Will Homosexuality Split the Church?* (Los Angeles: BIM, 1978).

³⁷*The Homosexual Crisis in the Mainline Church* (New York: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1978).

taken by conservative members of mainline churches. Jerry Kirk,³⁸ for example, begins his discussion of the biblical materials by commenting, "I am mindful that a Scripture text out of context often becomes a pretext. However, a text in context and interpreted within the total perspective of Scripture becomes God's method of revealing truth" (p. 49). He then asserts that a "proper discussion of the theological understanding of homosexuality must begin with the Creation and Fall narratives in Genesis 1:26-31, 2:18-25, and 3:1-24" (p. 50).³⁹ He claims that Gen. 1-2 teaches that "sexual differentiation is essential to understanding what is fully human," and that "to be created in the image of God includes being in relationship as male and female" (pp. 50-51). In fact, "to be human is to share humanity with the opposite sex" (p. 51). According to Kirk, Genesis 2, teaches that sex is the means by which the two opposites are united into "one flesh" (p. 51).

The Fall (Gen. 3), however, estranged people from God and from each other. "God's good gift to male and female was distorted through rebellion and pride. Strain between the sexes was the result" (p. 51). One expression of this strain is homosexuality (p. 52). Therefore, "it is in the light of the Fall and the damage done to our humanity and sexuality that homosexuality and the other deviations from God's created order must be understood" (p. 52).

Kirk's discussion of Gen. 1-3 is followed by a defense of the conventional understanding of Gen. 18-19 and Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 (pp. 52-56). He next discusses

³⁸For convenience, page references for citations from Kirk will be given in parentheses in the body of the text.

³⁹Lovelace, similarly, states that the "starting point for understanding both human sexuality in general and homosexuality should be the account of the creation of man and woman in Genesis 1 and 2" (p. 103). His own discussion of Genesis, however, follows his treatment of the standard texts adduced against homosexuality. George Edwards ("A Critique of Creationist Homophobia," in *Homosexuality and Religion*, ed. Richard Hasbany (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1989), 99) notes that "Lovelace's sentence falters. Rhetorically, the sentence should read, '...human sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular...' Adding 'in particular' would, however, make conspicuous his eisegetical...use of these primeval traditions." According to Edwards, Lovelace reads the condemnation of homosexuality derived from his reading of other texts back into Genesis 1-3.

the witness of the gospels, stressing Jesus' affirmation of marriage (pp. 56-57). Kirk then turns to Rom. 1:26-27, which he terms "the most devastating passage in the Bible for practicing homosexuals" (p. 58). "Nature," in the text, according to Kirk, refers to "God's created order," that is, "what God intends to be the way male and female should relate sexually" (p. 58). Clearly, for Kirk, God's intended order for sexual behaviour is described in Gen. 1-3. His summary of Paul's statements in Rom. 1:26-27 closely resembles the description he offers of the nature and consequences of the Fall, in his discussion of Genesis. He states:

This cataclysmic fracture in [our] relationship to God leads inevitably to a broken personal identity of which homosexuality is a prime, glaring example. Disorder in communion with God leads to disorder in all relationships including our sexuality (p. 58).

In highlighting the importance of Gen. 1-3 for understanding Rom. 1:26-27, Kirk anticipates Hays' response to Boswell, and exemplifies a common argumentative move made by Christian opponents of homosexuality.

Furthermore, Kirk comments on and criticizes McNeill's interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27. Since McNeill draws on Boswell, in this case too Kirk anticipates Hays' response to Boswell. In reply to McNeill's claim that Paul only condemned homosexual behaviour when engaged in by heterosexual persons, Kirk asserts:

It is unthinkable that Paul would not designate which kinds of homosexual behavior he would approve, especially given the place it occupies in his thesis regarding the fall of man in the first chapter of Romans. He certainly drew distinctions when it came to other ethical questions (p. 59).

Kirk completes his survey of the biblical witnesses with a discussion of 1 Cor. 6:9-10 and 1 Tim. 1:8-10 (pp. 60-61), and concludes that the message of the Bible is consistent in upholding heterosexual marriage as the only appropriate context for sexual expression and in condemning homosexual behaviour as contrary to God's purpose for human sexuality (p. 61).

Another member of the UPC task-force, the New Testament scholar George Edwards, a sponsor of the majority report, produced his own work on the biblical materials in 1984 (*Gay/Lesbian Liberation: A Biblical Perspective*). Edwards draws on Latin American and feminist Liberation Theologies to construct a gay and lesbian theology of liberation. His primary focus is on the impact of the experience of the oppressed on textual interpretation. Thus, although acutely concerned with the historical meaning of the biblical texts, Edwards seems to evaluate the worth of an interpretation primarily in terms of its capacity to facilitate gay and lesbian liberation from oppression and discrimination both in Christian churches and in the wider society. In his discussion of Romans 1:26-27, Edwards draws approvingly on Boswell's interpretation.⁴⁰

Most Christian opponents of acceptance of homosexuality seem to have adopted a psychological explanation of homosexuality, insisting that homosexual persons can change their orientation. The theory that homosexuality is an adaptive response to poor relationships with parents is the most frequent explanation adopted.⁴¹ "Ex-gay" groups, organizations which offer support to homosexual persons who are trying to change their sexual orientation or remain celibate, tend to adopt this evaluation of homosexual orientation.⁴² Advocates of acceptance, in contrast, tend to offer a biological explanation of homosexuality, insisting that sexual orientation cannot be changed. In a recent discussion of religious responses to homosexuality, Robert Nugent and Jeannine Gramick

⁴⁰Ibid., 88-89, 98.

⁴¹See, for example, Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse, "Homosexuality," *Anglican Theological Review*, Supplementary Series 6 (1976): 107-134.

⁴²For descriptions of "ex-gay" groups written from a supportive perspective, see Beth Spring, "These Christians are Helping Gays Escape from Homosexual Lifestyles," *Christianity Today* 21 September 1984, 56-58, and Randy Frame, "The Homosexual Lifestyle: Is there a Way Out?" *Christianity Today* 9 August, 1985, 32-36.

note that "the current debate between the essentialists and the social constructionists has not yet penetrated theological circles."⁴³

The considerable public interest in recent theories suggesting a biological basis for homosexuality has provoked responses from Christians opposed to the acceptance of homosexuality. In an article in *Christianity Today*, Joe Dallas, the president of Exodus International, an umbrella organization for "ex-gay" groups, comments that

to those who cannot view homosexuality as a normal condition, even if it is inborn, the researchers' assumptions sound questionable....Are we to think that because something might be genetic in origin, it is therefore 'natural'? What then, do we say about genetic deformities or birth defects? Are they, too, 'normal' because a significant number of people were born with them?...This raises a larger and more vital question: Should the standard for normality be determined by what is inborn?⁴⁴

He concludes that, "rather than continue the 'nature versus nurture' debate on origins, we ought instead to be asking whether homosexuality is desirable, healthy, and moral no matter what factors led to its existence."⁴⁵

Thus, the tendency of persons on both sides to frame the debate about homosexuality as one over whether homosexual orientation is changeable must be considered invalid. The real issue is whether or not homosexuality is acceptable, regardless of its etiology. Nevertheless, if the Bible does attribute a particular etiology to homosexuality, it would seem that this must be taken into consideration by those who appeal to the Bible as the source of their attitudes and responses to homosexuality.

In *Embodiment*, his treatment of Christian teaching on sexuality, James B. Nelson describes four types of attitudes held by modern Christians towards homosexual behaviour: rejecting-punitive, rejecting-nonpunitive, qualified acceptance, and full

⁴³Nugent and Gramick, "Homosexuality," 12-13.

⁴⁴Joe Dallas, "Born Gay?" *Christianity Today*, 22 June 1992, 21.

⁴⁵Ibid., 23.

acceptance.⁴⁶ The individual who holds the rejecting-punitive approach, as Nelson puts it, "unconditionally rejects homosexuality as Christianly legitimate and, at the same time, bears a punitive attitude toward gay persons" (p. 188). He notes that, "no major contemporary theologian holds the rejecting-punitive position and most church bodies in their formal statements have moved away from it. Yet in practice it may still be by far the most common orientation throughout the length and breadth of the church in our society" (p. 189). This is the approach of those conservative Protestants who advocate criminal prohibition of homosexual conduct. For example, Greg Bahnsen, a conservative Presbyterian theologian, maintains that the state is obliged to execute God's vengeance against evil-doers, including homosexuals.⁴⁷ Those who hold the rejecting punitive position tend to stress the responsibility of homosexual people for their condition. Being homosexual, in their view, is the result of a willful choice and is rooted in one's spiritual condition of rebellion against God. Bahnsen, for example, argues that homosexuality "represents a choice, in some sense, to set one's desires, and satisfy one's physical drives in a way contrary to God's appointment and creation....Homosexuals are made, not born; their disorder is developed contrary to their God-given identity, learned in opposition to the created order, pursued in defiance of the marriage ordinance."⁴⁸

The rejecting-nonpunitive approach shares with the rejecting-punitive approach the evaluation of homosexuality as an unacceptable option for Christians. It differs from the rejecting-punitive approach, however, in not seeking to punish homosexuals or establish social discrimination against them. This is the approach take by most "ex-gay"

⁴⁶James B. Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978), 188-199. For convenience, page references for citations from Nelson's discussion of these categories will be given in parentheses in the body of the text.

⁴⁷Greg L. Bahnsen, *Homosexuality: A Biblical View* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), 12-14.

⁴⁸Ibid., 30.

groups and remains the official policy of most mainline churches. Nelson identifies Karl Barth as an influential exponent of this approach.⁴⁹ Exponents of this approach to homosexuality tend to distinguish desires and feelings from behaviour. Most accept some version of psychoanalytic theory about the etiology of homosexual orientation, treating homosexual people as victims of their compulsions. John White, a conservative Protestant psychiatrist, for example, insists that "nowhere [in the Bible] is a man or woman condemned for having homosexual feelings. *It is the act, not the urge, that is condemned.*"⁵⁰ He asserts that homosexual persons may be unable to change their sexual orientation, refers to "Christian homosexuals" and provides guidance for the person who must live as a "nonheterosexual."⁵¹ The contrast with Bahnsen, who asserts that "in the case of homosexuality, redemption aims to bring the pursuit of this disorder to a stop, replacing it with the original creation ideal of heterosexual monogamy,"⁵² is striking.⁵³ The clash between a view of homosexuality as a manifestation of willful rebellion against God and the belief that homosexuals are, in some sense, victims of forces beyond their control is noted by Jerry Kirk. He states that

Traditionally, some persons have taken Romans 1:28-32 to indicate that the root cause of homosexuality is 'alienation from God through idolatry'

⁴⁹For Barth's statements about homosexuality, see his *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III, Part 4, trans. A.T. MacKay, et al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961 [original German, 1951]), 165-166.

⁵⁰"Two Halves Do Not Make One Whole," chap. in *Eros Defiled: The Christian and Sexual Sin* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 130 [White's emphasis].

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 130-139. Cf. Lovelace, who speaks of "nonpracticing homosexual Christians" and distinguishes between "heterosexual Christians" and "homosexual Christians" (*Homosexuality and the Church*, 13-14). The approach of these writers bears comparison with that of Judd Marmor and D.J. West, who also distinguish between practicing and non-practicing homosexuals. See nn. 5 and 6 above.

⁵²Bahnsen, *Homosexuality*, 31.

⁵³It is clear that Bahnsen understands "the pursuit of this disorder" to include homosexual desire, and that he believes that commitment to Christ leads to an end of such desires, which exist contrary to God's will, and their replacement with desires that correspond to the true nature of the individual as heterosexual. See Bahnsen, *Homosexuality*, 28-31.

and will disappear upon conversion and repentance. Two present-day Christian leaders recently stated that anyone continuing to struggle with homosexual sins is more than likely not a Christian. This, it seems to me, essentially reduces homosexual behavior to a single factor -- spiritual condition -- and when this is changed, so proponents of this view contend, so will the behavior. I believe this is an oversimplification of cause and solution.⁵⁴

Elizabeth Moberly, a research psychologist, whose approach to homosexuality is extremely influential among "ex-gays," claims that homosexual orientation is a developmental response to a poor relationship with the same-sex parent. Thus, homosexuality is "a states of incomplete development," which "does not involve abnormal needs, but normal needs that have, abnormally, been left unmet in the process of growth."⁵⁵ The way to overcome homosexuality, according to Moberly, is for homosexuals to develop healthy, non-sexual same-sex relationships by which they can fill the needs not met in childhood.

Richard Hays' attitude towards a homosexual friend who died from AIDS also reflects the rejecting non-punitive approach.⁵⁶ Hays describes his friend as "a homosexual Christian," and a "beloved brother in Christ," who "for more than 20 years,...had grappled with his homosexuality, experiencing it as a compulsion and an affliction."⁵⁷ Hays speaks of the testimonies of those, like his friend, "who pray and struggle in Christian community and seek healing unsuccessfully for years," emphasizing the "eschatological character of Christian existence," the fact that Christians do not overcome all their weaknesses and problems on this side of the eschaton.⁵⁸ Clearly, Hays

⁵⁴Kirk, *Homosexual Crisis*, 83.

⁵⁵Moberley's views are summarized in Frame, "The Homosexual Lifestyle," 33-34. Quoted material is from Moberly's *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic*, cited in Frame, "The Homosexual Lifestyle," 33.

⁵⁶See "Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies," 17-21.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 17.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 20.

accepts the possibility that not every homosexual who becomes a Christian will be able to overcome homosexual desire, and that such persons may fall into homosexual behaviour. In his view, however, one should not deny that such persons are true Christians. Such "homosexual Christians...whose lives show signs of the presence of God, whose work in ministry is genuine and effective....are evidence that God gives the Spirit to broken people and ministers grace even through sinners, without thereby endorsing our sin."⁵⁹

Those who hold the position of qualified acceptance continue to regard homosexuality as abnormal and imperfect, but do not condemn all homosexual behaviour. It is essentially a mediating position. Helmut Thielicke is its most influential advocate.⁶⁰ H. Kimball Jones takes a similar approach in his book, *Toward a Christian Understanding of the Homosexual*.⁶¹ Both Jones and Thielicke suggest that homosexuals should attempt to change their orientation, or remain celibate. Where neither of these options works, and the potential for self-destructive behaviour is present, they maintain that entering into a permanent, monogamous homosexual relationship may be the best option. This approach does not seem to have been widely accepted, for obvious reasons. Like most mediating positions, it fails to commend itself in a highly polarized situation. It cannot satisfy those who believe that homosexual acts are always sinful, nor would it appeal to homosexual persons who are happy with their orientation and do not consider themselves to be abnormal.

On the opposite pole from the rejecting-punitive position is that of full acceptance. Nelson describes the position as follows:

⁵⁹Ibid., 21.

⁶⁰See Thielicke's *The Ethics of Sex*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964), 269-292.

⁶¹Jones, *Toward a Christian Understanding*, 95-109.

Those who affirm this position most often make the assumption that the homosexual orientation is more of a given than a free choice. More fundamentally, however, this position rests on the conviction that same-sex relationships can richly express and be the vehicle of God's humanizing intentions (p. 197).

In a discussion of Nelson's four categories, Robert Nugent and Jeannie Gramick,⁶² note that advocates of full acceptance are not necessarily united in their understanding of what homosexual behaviour is acceptable. At least publicly, most advocates of acceptance claim that permanent, monogamous relationships should be the ideal for gay Christians. In practice, however, there seems to be widespread acceptance among gay Christians of "recreational sex" -- sexual activity for pleasure, without the intention of permanence or exclusivity. John McNeill, for example, while holding up permanence and monogamy as the ideal, asserts that there are "many gay and lesbian people who are incapable for many different reasons -- psychological, social, or economic -- of entering into such a committed relationship. The best many of these people are capable of is a 'one night stand' or an occasional sexual liaison with a friend."⁶³

The position of full acceptance is held by members of gay and lesbian church caucuses and their supporter. It is the official policy of the Metropolitan Community Church, a denomination founded by a gay former Pentecostal minister.⁶⁴ A report, issued by the denomination's Commission on Faith, Fellowship, and Order, states that "this church came into existence affirming that homosexuality is a valid manifestation of the divine creation of human beings in the image and likeness of God. Thus sexuality is a

⁶²"Homosexuality," 41-42.

⁶³*Taking a Chance on God: Liberating Theology for Gays, Lesbians, and their Lovers, Families, and Friends*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1988, pp. 134-135.

⁶⁴On the history and teachings of the Metropolitan Community Church, see Roy Birchard, "Metropolitan Community Church: Its Development and Significance," *Foundations* 20 (1977), 127-132.

gift of God. From the beginning MCC has preached that gay people, along with all people, share the benefits of God's grace."⁶⁵

Conclusions

The context in which Paul's words in Rom. 1:26-27 are interpreted is one in which there is widespread debate among Christians about the nature of homosexuality. Both advocates of tolerance of homosexual behaviour and critics of homosexuality tend to accept the category "the homosexual" as reflecting a valid approach to classification. As well, they usually adopt one of the "scientific" models of the etiology of homosexuality. Homosexual persons are understood to be different from heterosexual persons because they have a different "sexual orientation", a constituent element of their personality which directs them towards homosexual behaviour. Some believe that this orientation is biological in origin and unchangeable. Others regard it as a psychological adaptation potentially changeable. A few Christian thinkers reject scientific approaches, and maintain that homosexuality is entirely a spiritual problem. Christians who reject homosexuality as ethically appropriate differ, as well, over whether or not homosexual persons should be condemned for their actions only, or also for their desires. Some claim that homosexual desire is a manifestation of willful rebellion against God. Others insist that homosexuals are, in some sense, victims of forces beyond their control. In this chapter, I have commented briefly on the way in which the Bible is appealed to by Christians in debates about homosexuality. In the following chapter, I will survey recent scholarship on Rom. 1:26-27 in the light of the debates described here, attempting to highlight ways in which modern concerns have shaped the exegesis of Rom. 1:26-27. In particular, I will emphasize the impact on the interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27 of modern

⁶⁵*Reports and Directives of the Seventh Annual General Conference* (Washington: Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, 1976), 103, quoted in Birchard, "Metropolitan Community Church," 127.

"essentialist" ideas about homosexual orientation, and of the distinction between orientation and action drawn by Christian thinkers who adopt the rejecting-nonpunitive approach to homosexuality.

CHAPTER TWO

ROM. 1:26-27 IN RECENT SCHOLARSHIP

In *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* Moses Finley argues that "a full, open account of how modern interest in ancient slavery has manifested itself is a necessary prerequisite to the substantive analysis of the institution itself."¹ Similarly, it seems appropriate to consider how interest in Paul's words in Rom. 1:26-27 about homosexual behaviour has manifested itself, prior to analyzing those words. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to review recent scholarship on Rom. 1:26-27 in the light of the discussion of modern debates about homosexuality carried out in the previous chapter. My goal is to highlight key issues and questions and reflect on the impact of modern concerns on the way in which Rom. 1:26-27 has been interpreted. The review of scholarship will be structured according to the content of Rom. 1:26-27. It will serve, therefore, as a preliminary exegetical treatment of the text, anticipating my own reading of Rom. 1:26-27, the focus of Chapter 4.

Recent Treatments of Rom. 1:26-27

The major recent treatments of Rom. 1:26-27 which focus on Paul's statements about homosexual behaviour are, in chronological order: D. Sherwin Bailey's work on the passage in *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (1955), Victor Paul Furnish's study in the chapter on homosexuality in *The Moral Teaching of Paul* (1979),² John Boswell's interpretation in *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*

¹Finley, *Ancient Slavery*, 9-10.

²Victor Paul Furnish, "Homosexuality," chap. in *The Moral Teaching of Paul* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1979). Furnish extensively revised the chapter for the 2d ed. of the book, (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1985)

(1980),³ Robin Scroggs' discussion in *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (1983),⁴ Bernadette Brooten's work on Rom. 1:26 and female homosexual behaviour (1985, and continuing),⁵ Richard Hays' response to Boswell's interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27(1986),⁶ and William Countryman's interpretation in *Dirt, Greed, and Sex*, his work on early Christian sexual ethics (1988).⁷ All of this recent work is distinguished either by its originality, its influence, or the sophistication with which it approaches the text.

There has indeed been no shortage of comment on Rom. 1:26-27 and what the text says about homosexual behaviour, but much of this writing has been derivative, drawing on the major works listed above, or simply of marginal scholarly value. Influential works which contain discussions of Rom. 1:26-27, but which are largely derivative, include: *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*, *The Church and the Homosexual*, *Jonathan Loved David*⁸, and *Gay and Lesbian Liberation: A Biblical Perspective*.

Commentaries, of course, differ from monographs and articles that deal with the topic of the New Testament and homosexual behaviour in being concerned with Paul's letter to the Romans as a whole and the place of 1:26-27 within the letter, rather than with specific questions about Paul's attitude towards homosexual behaviour. Paul's statements

³Boswell, *Christianity*, 107-113.

⁴Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 109-118.

⁵Bernadette Brooten, "Paul's Views on the Nature of Women and Female Homoeroticism," in *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, edited by Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan, and Margaret R. Miles (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 61-87; "Why Did Early Christians Condemn Sexual Relations Between Women?" presentation delivered at the 1992 meeting of the SBL, cassettes BL9201A and BL9201B, ACTS, 1992. Brooten is currently preparing a book-length study of early Christian attitudes towards female homosexual behaviour.

⁶Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural."

⁷L. William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and their Implications for Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 109-123.

⁸Tom Horner, *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978).

about homosexual behaviour in Rom. 1:26-27 play a very minor role in the letter as a whole, not to mention their relatively minor importance even in the section 1:18-32. Many commentators seem to have felt, for whatever reason, that there was little need to discuss the contents of Rom. 1:26-27. Describing the information provided by commentary literature, Robin Scroggs states:

I have consulted numerous commentaries on the relevant passages in the New Testament...to see what the minister or lay person might learn. I was shocked to find that virtually none of them offered adequate information. Either the authors did not know or they considered it too indelicate to go into the detail necessary to communicate the reality of the context to the reader. I assume the reason is the latter. But if so, they have done a great disservice to us, since they have let us remain in ignorance about what the New Testament is against, and thus have made it impossible for us to know how the Bible may or may not be properly used in today's discussions.⁹

Even the reader of Romans 1:26-27 who does not share Scroggs' concerns about the modern relevance of Paul's words will share his disappointment at the information provided by most commentaries. Nevertheless, commentary literature does contain useful discussions of the textual context of Rom. 1:26-27 crucial to understanding the passage, and a few do provide helpful information on Rom. 1:26-27.

Without question, the best treatment of Rom. 1:26-27 in a commentary is that by C.E.B. Cranfield.¹⁰ Cranfield comments on virtually every word of the text, discusses differing interpretation, and in many ways anticipates recent debates, although his work was published before most of the works listed above. His contributions to understanding Rom. 1:26-27 (as well as Rom. 1:18-32 as a whole) will be noted as I deal below with the contents of the passage.

⁹Scroggs, vii.

¹⁰*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, Ltd., 1975).

Also worthy of note is James Dunn's treatment of the text in his commentary on Romans.¹¹ Dunn notes Scroggs' treatment, questions its correctness and cites texts which reflect Gentile and Jewish practices and attitudes. Dunn's treatment is on the whole balanced, and largely avoids pleading for a particular stance about the text's modern relevance.¹²

The Textual Context of Rom. 1:26-27

Any attempt to interpret Paul's words in Rom. 1:26-27, if undertaken according to the conventions of modern historical criticism, should begin with the textual context in which the passage is situated.¹³ I will, therefore, begin this preliminary exegetical treatment of Rom. 1:26-27 with a discussion of the letter to the Romans as a whole and the place of Rom. 1:26-27 within the letter.

Paul probably wrote the letter to the Romans from Corinth, just before he left Greece for Jerusalem.¹⁴ The exact date is a matter of debate, although, fortunately, knowledge of the date and place of origin of the letter is of little importance for its

¹¹James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary. Vol. 38A (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 64-66.

¹²Other commentaries that I have consulted include, C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2d. ed. Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: A. & C. Black, 1991); C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932); Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980); Franz J. Leenhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans*, translated by Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth Press, 1961); Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988); William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906); Heinrich Schlier, *Der Römerbrief*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, Band VI (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1977); Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer*, Vol. 1. Evangelisch-Katolischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament Band VI, 1 (Cologne: Benziger Verlag, 1978); John A. Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Roamns*, TPI New Testament Commentaries (London: SCM Press, 1989).

¹³A fact stressed by Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural," 188; Furnish, "Homosexuality," 74, and Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 109-110.

¹⁴Barrett, *Romans*, 2-5

exegesis.¹⁵ The reason (or reasons) for which Paul wrote the letter has been the subject of much debate,¹⁶ but, as C.K. Barrett notes, "there is perhaps a greater measure of agreement than some of the disputants allow." The letter, Barrett asserts, was written in anticipation of Paul's planned visit to Rome, a step on his way to Spain, where he intended to preach his gospel (Rom. 1:10-13; 15:22-24, 28, 29). The letter serves to introduce Paul and his message to a Christian community which he had not founded.¹⁷ The recipients of the letter are described by Paul as "all those who are in Rome, beloved of God and called holy (πᾶσιν τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Ῥώμῃ ἀγαπητοῖς θεοῦ, κλητοῖς ἁγίοις)" (Rom. 1:7).

The theme of the letter is presented in 1:16-17,¹⁸ where Paul states that the gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'" According to Paul, all people, both Jews and Gentiles are made right with God through faith. The Gospel, as God's power for salvation, reveals and makes this possible. In what follows, Paul explains and attempts to prove his point.

Paul begins by pointing to the need of all people for a salvation which is "from faith to faith." Paul's goal in the section 1:18-3:20, of which 1:18-32 forms a part, is to demonstrate that all people are guilty of and under the power of sin, and, therefore, "in the light of the gospel there is no question of [their] being righteous before God otherwise

¹⁵Dunn, *Romans*, xliii.

¹⁶On the debates, see *The Romans Debate*, ed. K.P. Donfried (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977); A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988); Dunn, liv-lviii; Morris, 7-18.

¹⁷Barrett, *Romans*, 6. Cf. Dodd, *Romans*, xxv, Käsemann, *Romans*, 3-4, Morris, *Romans*, 16-18

¹⁸See, Barrett, *Romans*, 27,30; Käsemann, *Romans*, 21; Ziesler, *Romans*, 67; Black, *Romans*, 29; Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 22, Dunn, *Romans*, 36-37.

than by faith."¹⁹ God demonstrates divine righteousness by making possible human righteousness,²⁰ but this is a righteousness that can only be attained by faith, since all human beings are under the power of sin (Rom. 3:9). There is widespread agreement on this understanding of the focus of the section.²¹

Romans 1:18-3:20 is concerned with the plight of sinful and sin-dominated humankind as a whole, but the human race is presented as consisting of two groups: Jews and Gentiles. The Gentiles and their specific predicament seem to be the focus of 1:18-32, as most interpreters note.²² This identification of the subjects of Rom. 1:18-32, however, is not explicit. Paul nowhere in the section refers to "Gentiles" (τὰ ἔθνη). Furthermore, the passage contains allusions to Gen. 1-3, which suggest that Paul is describing humankind as a whole,²³ while a fairly obvious citation from Psalm 106:20 (Rom. 1:23), which describes the Israelites' worship of the Golden Calf, seems to implicate the Jews in Paul's description of human idolatry and rebellion. Robin Scroggs argues that Paul is presenting a picture of human falseness which includes everyone, Jews

¹⁹Cranfield, *Romans*, 104. Cf. Ziesler, *Romans*, 36

²⁰Barrett, *Romans*, 30.

²¹See Barrett, *Romans*, 31-32; Käsemann, *Romans*, 33; Morris, *Romans*, 73; Dunn, *Romans*, 50-51; Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 155-163, Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 110, Brooten, "Paul's Views," 62.

²²Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 39, Käsemann, *Romans*, 33, Black, *Romans*, 39, Ziesler, *Romans*, 73-74, Morris, *Romans*, 73, Westerholm, *Israel's Law*, 157, Dunn, *Romans*, 51.

²³Emphasized by M. D. Hooker, "Adam in Romans 1," *New Testament Studies* 6 (1959-60): 297-306; "A Further Note on Romans 1," *New Testament Studies* 13 (1966-67): 181-183; and A.J.M. Wedderburn, "Adam in Paul's Letter to the Romans," in *Studia Biblica 1978*, vol. 3 JSNT Supplement Series, no. 3, ed. E. A. Livingston (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1980), 413-430. Normand Bonneau, "Stages in Salvation History in Romans 1:16-3:26," *Église et Théologie* 23 (1992): 177-194, argues that Rom. 1:18-32 describes the period between Adam and Moses, before humankind was divided into Jews who have the Law and Gentiles who do not. He stresses that Paul speaks of a time in the past, that he does not call evil "sin" (since the Law had not yet been given (Rom. 7:7-12)), and that he does not refer to "Jews" or "Gentiles," but "people" (ἄνθρωποι) (pp. 186-187).

and Gentiles. In Rom. 2, Paul attempts to demonstrate to the Jews that the situation he described in 1:18-32 applies to them as well.²⁴ This latter point is significant, however. It is not until the following chapter that Paul attempts explicitly to include the Jews in the description he has offered of human depravity in 1:18-32. Furnish insists that "the Apostle is denouncing the wickedness of the Gentiles in terms and with arguments that were the stock-in-trade of much Hellenistic Jewish teaching."²⁵ He notes, especially, the similarities between Paul's words and the denunciation of the Gentiles in the Wisdom of Solomon.²⁶ The Wisdom of Solomon clearly directs its denunciation against the Gentiles. Since Rom. 1:18-32 closely resembles the denunciation of the Gentiles in Wisdom, it seems reasonable to conclude that Paul's words are directed against the Gentiles too.

It should be noted that these differences over the subjects of Rom. 1:18-32 have a lot to do with what details of the passage are emphasized. When the resemblance to Wisdom is stressed the subjects are identified as the Gentiles; when the allusions to Genesis 1-3 are stressed the subjects are identified as all of humankind, as represented by Adam; when the allusion to Psalm 106 (v. 20) is stressed, the Jews are held to be implicated in what Paul says. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, the identification of the subjects of Rom. 1:18-32 has significant implications for the understanding of Paul's views on homosexual behaviour.

In contrast to the revelation in the Gospel of God's righteousness ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, Paul claims that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the

²⁴Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 110-111. Most of the commentators cited above, in fact, concede this point. Cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, 105-106; Morris, *Romans*, 74; Käsemann, *Romans*, 33; Westerholm, *Israel's Law*, 157.

²⁵Furnish, "Homosexuality," 74.

²⁶Ibid., 74-76.

impiety and unrighteousness of humankind, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (v. 18). The close relationship between 1:16-17 and 1:18-32 is indicated by the use of "is revealed" (ἀποκαλύπτεται) in both v. 17 and v. 18. In the first case, the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. In the second case, the wrath of God is revealed "from heaven." Much in this verse, particularly the meaning of "the wrath of God," has been the subject of interpretive controversy.²⁷ For the present purpose what is significant, however, is Paul's identification of what provokes the wrath of God. It is πᾶσαν ἀσέβειαν καὶ ἀδικίαν ἀνθρώπων. The stress on unrighteousness in this passage is evident and it is likely that Paul intended to draw a contrast between the unrighteousness of humankind and the righteousness of God (Cf. 1:17).²⁸ Moreover, since impiety and unrighteousness are linked together, it seems that Paul is stressing the close relationship between people's attitudes towards God and their behaviour towards each other.²⁹

The human beings who manifest such impiety and unrighteousness Paul describes as those "who suppress the truth in unrighteousness (τῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐν ἀδικίᾳ κατεχόντων)" (1:18b). By claiming that the truth is suppressed "in unrighteousness" Paul is evidently asserting that the act was willful. He provides proof for this claim and elaborates on it in what follows. According to Paul, "what is knowable about God is clear to them, for God has made it clear to them" (1:19). Thus, the truth which Paul claims they suppress is knowledge of God, a knowledge made clear to them. God's invisible qualities, God's eternal power and divinity, can be recognized and understood from the created world in the things that God has made. For this reason, human beings have no excuse for their suppression of the truth (1:20). According to Paul, "knowing

²⁷On "the wrath of God," see Dodd, *Romans*, 20-24, and comments and responses in Cranfield, *Romans*, 108-109; Käsemann, *Romans*, 37-38; Dunn, *Romans*, 54-55; Barrett, *Romans*, 34.

²⁸Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural," 189; Käsemann, *Romans*, 38.

²⁹Cranfield, *Romans*, 112.

God, they did not glorify or give thanks to God as God, but rather they became empty in their thoughts and their senseless heart became darkened" (1:21). Paul asserts that people could recognize the existence of God, but that they turn from this knowledge and plunge into self-deception and delusion. Their heart, their religious and moral perception,³⁰ becomes shrouded in darkness. As Cranfield puts it: "All their thinking suffers from the fatal flaw, the basic disconnexion from reality involved in their failure to recognize and to glorify the true God."³¹

Paul continues that, "claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God with the image of a likeness of a mortal human being and of birds and four-footed animals and snakes" (1:22-23). Human beings, Paul claims, are deluded about their own capacity to discern correctly. Their willful abandonment of knowledge of God comes to be expressed in the deluded substitution of a created being as an object of worship in place of the Creator, "the immortal God."

The root sin of humankind, thus, is refusal to recognize God. Human beings choose to ignore the knowledge they have of God and instead create their own understanding of reality. According to Scroggs, Paul's message is that

the real fall of humankind is its refusal...to acknowledge and be obedient to the true God. Ultimately that means the refusal to acknowledge the true reality in its entirety, for the refusal to "know" God brings in its turn a false knowledge of the entire creation, including a false knowledge of the human self. In short, to "fall" is to refuse to live in the true world and to construct a false world in its stead -- all the while thinking, believing, and claiming that the false constructed reality is actually true.³²

Similarly, Richard Hays asserts that Paul does not "posit a catalogue of sins as the cause of human alienation from God. Instead, he delves to the root: all other depravities

³⁰BAGD, s.v. "σκοπέζω," 757. Cf. Leenhardt, *Romans*, 66.

³¹Cranfield, *Romans*, 118. Cf. Barrett, *Romans*, 37.

³²Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 111; cf. Furnish, "Homosexuality," 76.

follow from the radical rebellion of the creature against the creator".³³ Käsemann comments that, "for the apostle, history is governed by the primal sin of rebellion against the Creator, which finds repeated and universal expression," and notes that Philo expressed a similar understanding of the human situation when he declared that "the source of all wrong is godlessness (πηγή δέ πάντων ἀδικημάτων ἀθεότης)" (De decalogo 91).³⁴ He adds that "Paul paradoxically reverses the cause and consequence: Moral perversion is the result of God's wrath, not the reason for it."³⁵

In vv. 24-32, Paul describes in detail the consequences of Gentile refusal to acknowledge God as God, giving examples of the revelation of God's wrath against the "impiety and unrighteousness" (1:18) of people.³⁶ Three times, Paul states that "God gave them over (παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεός)" because of their rejection of God and their worship of idols: God gave them over "in the lusts of their hearts (ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῶν καρδιῶν αὐτῶν)" (v. 24), "to passions of dishonour (εἰς πάθη ἀτιμίας)" (v. 26), and "to an unfit mind (εἰς ἀδόκιμον νοῦν)" (v. 28). In vv. 29-31 Paul declares that they were filled (πεπληρωμένους) with numerous vices (1:29-31), and concludes the section by asserting that although they knew God's decree, that those who do such things are worthy of death, yet they not only practiced them, but approved of those who did so (1:32).

The significance of the verb παρέδωκεν has been the subject of dispute. According to Dodd, God's giving over of the Gentiles means simply that he does not interfere in the natural process by which human beings plunge ever more deeply into

³³Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural," p. 189.

³⁴Käsemann, *Romans*, 47.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Dodd, *Romans*, 26, Leenhardt, *Romans*, 66, Käsemann, *Romans*, 44, Morris, *Romans*, 88, Furnish, "Homosexuality," 78.

corruption and alienation from God.³⁷ Cranfield, however, feels that the three-fold repetition of παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεός "is surely so emphatic as to suggest that a deliberate, positive act of God is meant."³⁸ He rejects, however, the suggestion that this means that God actually caused human beings to sin, because such action would impugn God's absolute goodness. He speaks, therefore of God's "permitting" humans to go their own way, to live without God's help, which would prevent them from doing wrong.³⁹ This interpretation of "God gave them over" seems, however, only slightly different from Dodd's. Somewhat more helpful is Sanday's and Headlam's explicit characterization of God's action as "judicial", "the appropriate punishment of their defection; it works automatically, one evil leading to another by natural sequence."⁴⁰ There is, thus, some logic in the behaviour in which the Gentiles engage once given over by God. It is appropriate punishment, as Paul sees it, for their refusal to worship the true God and their turning to idols.⁴¹ According to Leon Morris, Paul believed that "God willed that if people sin certain consequences follow...This is a moral universe; sin has inevitable results...God is active in the process whereby sin's consequences follow sin."⁴²

C.K. Barrett notes that in Rom. 1:24 ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις could be translated as either "in the desires" (locative) or "by the desires" (instrumental), preferring to understand the preposition ἐν as locative.⁴³ William Countryman leans much more

³⁷Dodd, *Romans*, 55.

³⁸Cranfield, *Romans*, 120. Cf. Barrett, *Romans*, 38.

³⁹Cranfield, *Romans*, 120-121.

⁴⁰Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 45.

⁴¹Cranfield himself suggests that Paul saw "a correspondence between sin and punishment" (p. 106).

⁴²Morris, *Romans*, 88.

⁴³Barrett, *Romans*, 38.

vigorously towards understanding ἐν instrumentally and offers a provocative interpretation of the significance of παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεός. He states:

Paul says, then, that God dealt with the *desires* of Gentiles in such a way as to hand them over to uncleanness. In other words, Paul took the frequency and acceptability of homosexual acts in Gentile culture as evidence that 'the desires of their hearts' were different from those of Jews and then went on to conclude that this was the result of an act of God, who had 'surrendered' them to this state.⁴⁴

Could Paul have conceived of God as actively changing human desires so that they would do what made them unclean?⁴⁵ Or, as Cranfield prefers, should we understand ἐν as "indicating men's [sic] actual condition, the character of their life....It describes the life of those who acknowledge no higher criterion than their own wayward desires"?⁴⁶ That is, does Paul simply say that God left the Gentiles to indulge desires that they already possessed? As Cranfield suggests, God's giving over of the Gentiles implies an active abandonment to a specific condition rather than simple permission. Further, Paul makes clear that he thinks of the behaviour as a fitting penalty for the basic sin of the Gentiles. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to take ἐν as instrumental. Evidence that Paul could have conceived of God actively facilitating human alienation from the truth about God and themselves is afforded by a passage in 2 Thessalonians, a disputed letter, but one which probably reflects Pauline thought. According to the author of the letter, because people "refused to love the truth and so be saved....God sends them a powerful delusion,

⁴⁴Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex*, 112.

⁴⁵Countryman's interpretation finds support in Augustine's comments on παρέδωκεν in *On Grace and Free Will* 21.43: "This shows clearly that God works in men's hearts to incline their wills wherever he wills, either to good according to his mercy, or to evil according to their merits, and with his judgment sometimes open and sometimes secret, but always just he deserts them." Quoted by the Mediaeval commentator, William of St-Thierry; see *Exposition on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. John Baptist Hasbrouck, Cistercian Fathers Series, no. 27, ed. John D. Anderson (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1980), 40. William asserts that παρέδωκεν refers to God handing people over to the destructive power of the demonic (pp. 40-41).

⁴⁶Cranfield, *Romans*, 122.

leading them to believe what is false, so that all who have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned" (2 Thess. 2:10-12). The similarities between this passage and Romans 1:18-32 are striking. Both claim that the root error of people is refusal to accept the truth, which leads to alienation from God and is punished by further alienation, leading to condemnation. This passage is not the only one in which Paul indicates that God can lead a person to act against the divine will. In Romans itself Paul insists that God "has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses" (Rom. 9:18) and claims that "a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in" (11:25). Paul's argument in the section from which these texts are drawn (chs. 9-11) is that Jewish rejection of Christ is part of God's plan, facilitating the salvation of the Gentiles. Thus, it is clear that Paul believed that God could cause people to become alienated from the divine purpose precisely in order to fulfill that purpose.⁴⁷

It is possible, therefore, that Paul could be claiming that God changed the desires of the Gentiles in order to make them engage in behaviour leading to uncleanness. This is by no means certain, however. What can be asserted with certainty is that Paul understood corrupt desire to precede corrupt behaviour. The "desires of their hearts" are directed towards acts which make them unclean (εις ἀκαθαρσίαι). Paul adds that the uncleanness leads to the dishonouring of their bodies.⁴⁸

⁴⁷It might be argued, since Paul declares in Rom. 1:32 and 2:2-3 that people will be judged and condemned for the behaviour he describes, that this could not be behaviour in which God actively caused them to engage. This objection can be answered by noting that Paul declares in Rom. 9:17-18 that God caused Pharaoh to act as he did to fulfill God's purpose, but that Pharaoh was still judged for his actions (cf. Rom. 9:19-24). Without desiring to enter into the free-will/predestination debate, it must be said that Paul clearly believed that people could be made to act in a particular fashion by God, and yet still be held responsible for their actions. Recall Augustine's words, quoted in n. 45 above.

⁴⁸Cranfield, *Romans*, 122. Barrett, *Romans*, 38, takes the phrase as epexegetic. These interpretations need not exclude each other. Clearly, the meaning of being given up to uncleanness is that the Gentiles engage in acts which, according to Paul, dishonour their bodies. The dishonour results from being unclean as a result of the behaviour to which they were given up.

Rom. 1:26-27 and Homosexual Behaviour: Major Issues

In Rom. 1:25 Paul reminds his readers that the people who had been "given over" by God were those who "exchanged the truth of God for the lie and worshipped and served the creation rather than the creator, who is forever blessed." Then, in 1:26-27, he declares that "because of this (διὰ τοῦτο) God gave them over to dishonourable passions (εἰς πάθη ἀτιμίας), for their females, exchanged the natural use (τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν) for that against nature (παρὰ φύσιν), and similarly the males, abandoning the natural use of the female (τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν τῆς θηλείας), were inflamed in their longing for each other, males with males committing the shameless deed and receiving back among themselves the inevitable penalty of their error."

These two short verses represent Paul's most detailed statement on same-gender sexual behaviour. Despite their brevity, a number of questions can be raised about them. The reader of Rom. 1:26-27 may first be confronted with questions about what Paul is describing. Traditionally, the answer was held to be obvious. Paul is describing homosexual behaviour and condemning it. John Boswell, however, claims that these verses do not contain a condemnation of all homosexual behaviour without exception.

As my summary of the debate between Boswell and Hays indicates, one's understanding of Paul's description of homosexual acts as *παρὰ φύσιν* has an impact on how one answers the question whether Paul condemns homosexual behaviour *per se*, or only some specific types of homosexual relationships. Very few commentators have attempted to explain what Paul meant when he described homosexual acts as "against nature." It seems likely that most of these commentators did not consider his language problematic since the designation of homosexual acts as "unnatural" had become such a common part of ethical language. Like Hays, Cranfield asserts that "nature" in Rom. 1:26-27 designates the creation order. *Παρὰ φύσιν* means "contrary to the intention of

the Creator."⁴⁹ Commenting on the relationship of Paul's usage to that of his Graeco-Roman contemporaries, Cranfield asserts that "for all its far-reaching and varied Greek background, the decisive factor in Paul's use of it is his biblical doctrine of creation."⁵⁰ Similarly, Käsemann states that Paul's use of "nature" is Jewish, referring to the order established by God, rather than to an abstract principle. There is, in Käsemann's words, no nature apart from nature's creator.⁵¹ In contrast, Helmut Köster claims, somewhat ambiguously, that "in both tenor and formulation [the description of homosexual behaviour as *παρὰ φύσιν*] is in every way Greek in Paul, the idea being that of a violation of the natural order."⁵²

Not every interpreter, however, agrees that Paul's words should be interpreted in the light of the use of the same terminology by his contemporaries. Boswell's approach has already been described. William Countryman, similarly, argues that consideration of Paul's use of "nature" elsewhere in his writings can help the interpreter of Rom. 1:26-27, "not so much in clarifying his usage as in warning us against certain misapplications of it."⁵³ According to Countryman, Paul usually "uses the term to refer to the continuity of an organism with its past...If this is the sense Paul has in mind in Rom. 1:26-27, he is simply reiterating the idea he has already hinted at – that Gentiles experienced only heterosexual desire before God visited uncleanness on them and have therefore changed their 'nature,' that is, lost a certain continuity with their remotest past."⁵⁴ Like Boswell,

⁴⁹Cranfield, *Romans*, 125.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 126.

⁵¹Käsemann, *Romans*, 44.

⁵²*TDNT* s.v. "φύσις κτλ.," 273.

⁵³Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex*, 114.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

Countryman understands "nature" to refer to the nature of the individuals condemned rather than to a universal order. He differs from Boswell only in stressing that Paul was referring not to individuals but to Gentiles as a group. Countryman's most provocative point is his claim that "against nature" does not have moral connotations, even though he acknowledges that Paul is dependent on contemporary Stoic usage, in which it surely did have moral connotations.⁵⁵ Countryman seems to wish to avoid a detailed discussion of the evidence. This is a serious weakness in a work which claims to be historical in focus, and which places much stress on the cultural context in which Paul wrote.

The obvious question raised by the differences between the various interpretations of Paul's description of homosexual acts as "against nature" is about whether Paul used the terminology as his contemporaries did, or whether his usage was distinctive, and best understood by considering how he uses "nature" elsewhere in his writings. In Chapter 4, I will suggest that Hays is right to note that Paul uses conventional language in Rom. 1:26-27 and that his use of "against nature" should be understood in the light of his contemporaries' use. Paul did use "nature" to designate the order established by God. Furthermore, I will attempt to bring clarity to the understanding of Paul's usage by considering what he would have considered this order to involve. That is, I will consider what it was about homosexual behaviour that Paul considered to make it "against nature."

While William Countryman agrees with Boswell's approach to Paul's "nature" terminology, his claim that Paul did not condemn homosexual behaviour depends primarily on drawing a distinction between uncleanness and sin. According to Countryman, Paul did not necessarily consider behaviour which results in uncleanness to be sinful. He notes that terminology for "sin" is not used by Paul in his description of homosexual behaviour. Rather, purity language is used. Countryman asserts that Paul

⁵⁵Ibid., 113, n. 18.

did not consider purity rules of any sort to be binding on Gentiles. From this fact, he draws the conclusion that Paul intended to describe the Gentiles who engaged in homosexual activity as unclean by Jewish standards, but not as committing sin. They were unclean, but not for this reason cut off from God. Paul does not, therefore, condemn homosexual behaviour as a violation of God's intention for human beings, and would have accepted the legitimacy of Gentiles continuing to engage in homosexual behaviour. The situation is analogous to Paul's approach to dietary laws. Jews may continue to believe that certain foods are unclean, but that does not make them so. Gentiles may eat them and commit no offense. Countryman insists that Paul could not have regarded homosexual behaviour as wrong for Gentiles because this would have contradicted the position he took towards Gentile observance of purity rules elsewhere in his writings. Countryman summarizes his interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27 as follows:

While Paul wrote of [homosexual] acts as being unclean, dishonorable, improper, and 'over against nature,' he did not apply the language of sin to them at all. Instead, he treated homosexual behavior as an integral if unpleasantly dirty aspect of Gentile culture. It was not in itself sinful, but had been visited upon the Gentiles as recompense for sins, chiefly the sin of idolatry but also those of social disruption....Paul did not deny the existence of a distinction between clean and unclean and even assumed that Jewish Christians would continue to observe the purity code. He refrained, however, from identifying physical impurity with sin or demanding that Gentiles adhere to that code.⁵⁶

Robin Scroggs offers yet another argument against understanding Paul's words to reflect a negative view of same-gender sexual relationships *per se*. According to Scroggs, Paul's condemnation was directed specifically against pederasty (sexual relations between an adult male and a boy or youth) and the abuse and exploitation that pederasty often involved. This thesis is based on a detailed study of the forms homosexual behaviour took in the Graeco-Roman world and of Jewish and Gentile

⁵⁶Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex*, 117.

evaluations of and responses to this behaviour. Scroggs maintains, with good reason, that Paul objected to homosexual behaviour from a Jewish perspective. Although Jewish writers criticized pederasty using terminology derived from the Hebrew Bible, language which focused on the genders of the participants in homosexual intercourse, Scroggs attempts to demonstrate that this language was merely conventional and that whenever Jewish writers commented on pederasty they had its specific characteristics in mind. Scroggs' explicit concern is with the modern relevance of Paul's words, but his arguments also have important historical implications. Scroggs has offered a thorough reinterpretation of Jewish and early Christian attitudes towards homosexual behaviour, maintaining that Jews and Christians did not object to homosexual behaviour *per se*, but only to pederasty. Scroggs' interpretation raises serious questions about early Jewish and early Christian attitudes towards sex and gender and, therefore, requires careful attention. Of particular interest is Scroggs' description of the background against which Paul wrote.

The approach of Victor Paul Furnish to Rom. 1:26-27 is very similar to Scroggs'. It is quite surprising, therefore, that Scroggs shows no familiarity with Furnish's work, which was published four years before his own. Furnish, too, stresses the context in which Paul wrote and his dependence on existing traditions, and, like Scroggs, he suggests that Paul's condemnations were directed specifically against the particular kind of behaviour with which he was familiar. Furnish does assert, however, that Paul's words do reflect a condemnation of homosexual behaviour as he knew it, but he maintains that they are so culture-bound that they must be applied with great caution to modern ethical decision-making. Furnish's reading of Rom. 1:26-27 is the work of an extremely competent New Testament scholar and is well-substantiated. According to Furnish, Paul shared his contemporaries' belief that homosexual behaviour was freely chosen, that those who engaged in it deliberately chose to behave in one way rather than another, that this choice was born of insatiable lust and passion, and that such behaviour was unnatural, a

violation of the created order.⁵⁷ Furnish offers an historical interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27 that is compatible with Hays', but disagrees with Hays about how Paul's words should be applied in contemporary ethical decision-making. There is also a difference of tone. Hays insists that Paul refers to homosexual behaviour in Rom. 1:26-27 because it especially represented for him the disordering of the created order that results when people turn from God. Furnish also stresses that Paul presents homosexual behaviour as a consequence of alienation from God, but he does not claim for Paul's reference the logical basis that Hays does. According to Furnish, Paul's mention of homosexual behaviour was determined by his use of traditional Jewish polemic against Gentiles.

Much of what Richard Hays says about Rom. 1:26-27 finds implicit support in the work of Bernadette Brooten, a New Testament scholar who clearly holds a very different attitude about the morality of homosexual behaviour from Hays,⁵⁸ but who nevertheless holds that Paul's words are most accurately read as reflecting a negative judgment on all homosexual behaviour as a violation of God's intention for human sexuality. She writes, for example, that

Paul sees sexual relations between women and between men to be a result of idolatry; they signify estrangement between human beings and God....Human beings, though they had the opportunity to recognize God through God's created works, exchanged the truth about God for a lie....As a result of this fundamental disorder and confusion in human beings' relation to God and to God's creation, other exchanges occurred.... The disorder and confusion that are idolatry are repeated in the disorder and confusion of same-sex love...and of other forms of unfitting behavior.⁵⁹

Besides highlighting the different emphases of various interpreters of Rom. 1:26-27 this survey points to the importance many of them place on understanding Paul's

⁵⁷Furnish, "Homosexuality," 73-74.

⁵⁸See, for example, Brooten, "Paul's Views," 80-81.

⁵⁹Ibid., 63, 71-72.

words in the light of their historical context. This emphasis is fundamental to traditional historical-critical biblical scholarship, and it is not surprising to find Hays, Brooten, Furnish, Countryman, and, particularly, Robin Scroggs, describing the behaviour and attitudes of Paul's contemporaries. In my own study of Rom. 1:26-27 I too will consider Paul's historical context. To facilitate this reflection, I will deal in detail in Chapter 3 with Graeco-Roman and Jewish treatments of same-gender sexuality.

The debate over the meaning of *παρὰ φύσιν* in Rom. 1:26-27 highlights another question, closely related to the question of whether Paul condemned homosexual behaviour. If one decides that Paul did in fact condemn homosexual behaviour, the next step is to consider why he objected to sexual relations between people of the same gender. Bernadette Brooten, focusing on Paul's statements in Rom. 1:26 about female homosexual behaviour, argues that Paul objected to sexual relations between women for the same reasons as his Jewish and Gentile contemporaries did. They understood the relationship of male and female to be asymmetrical; women were to be subordinate to men; their condition was ordained by "nature" or by God. According to Brooten, there is evidence in Paul's writings that he shared this view of the nature of women and based his condemnation of female homosexual behaviour on it. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is of central importance for Brooten's argument.

This passage, to which Brooten turns in an attempt to illuminate Romans 1:26-27, is, however, "one of the most obscure passages in the Pauline letters,"⁶⁰ "a linguistic labyrinth rivaling Daedalus's and befuddling a host of would-be Theseuses. Every turn in

⁶⁰Wayne A. Meeks, *The Writings of St. Paul* (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 38; cited in Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *There is No Male and Female: The Fate of a Dominical Saying in Paul and Gnosticism*, Harvard Dissertations in Religion, no. 20, ed. Margaret R. Miles and Bernadette J. Brooten (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 72.

this maze forces the intruder to choose from among several paths."⁶¹ Brooten gives little indication in her treatment of the text of the controversy surrounding its interpretation or the existence of numerous contradictory readings. She clearly sides with those interpreters who understand Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, to be upholding the subordination of women, a subordination reflected in the difference in dress required of them.⁶² Paul believed, according to Brooten, "that there should be gender differentiation in appearance because of the man's being the head of woman," he "was deeply concerned that what he saw to be the order of creation be maintained with respect to sex roles and gender polarity," and he demanded "strict differentiation" based on "a hierarchical ordering of the sexes".⁶³ Her summary of the import of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 bears quoting in full:

In this passage Paul requires strict gender differentiation with respect to hair style and headdress. Women and men should not look the same. For Paul, this is a theological issue. The reasons for gender polarization in dress are that the man is the head of the woman, just as the head of the man is Christ and the head of Christ is God; that woman is the glory of man, while man is the image and glory of God; and that woman was created from man and for him. There is a difference between woman and man, a difference that implies woman is to be oriented to her head, to man, in whom she has her origin. (Paul's concessive remarks in verses 11 and 12 do not alter the basic structure.) The boundaries between femaleness and maleness are not to be blurred by women cutting their hair short or men wearing it long. Nor is long hair on women sufficient to mark the

⁶¹Ibid. MacDonald discusses the various questions interpreters have asked about the passage and the conflicting answers that have been offered, and provides a detailed bibliography (pp. 72-81).

⁶²Cf. Elaine H. Pagels, "Paul and Women: A Response to Recent Discussion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 42 (1974): 538-549; John P. Meier, "On the Veiling of Hermeneutics (1 Cor 11:2-16)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978): 212-226; G.W. Trompf, "On Attitudes Toward Women in Paul and Paulinist Literature: 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 and Its Context," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42 (1980): 196-215 (Trompf, while claiming that the text advocates female subordination, argues that it is non-Pauline and was inserted by a later editor of the letter.); and scholars listed by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42 (1980): 496, n.55. For opposing views, see Murphy-O'Connor, "Sex and Logic;" Robin Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41 (1972): 283-303; M. D. Hooker, "Authority on Her Head: An Examination of I Cor 11.10," *Novum Testamentum* 10 (1963-1964): 410-416.

⁶³Brooten, "Paul's Views," 63-78

difference; women require a veil as a visible sign of their place in the order of creation.⁶⁴

Clearly, this reading of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is crucial to Brooten's evaluation of Romans 1:26-27, since she maintains that it provides evidence that Paul opposed female homosexual behaviour for the same reason his Graeco-Roman contemporaries did, because it involved women usurping the sexually assertive role that belonged to men. Because women were inferior to men, they were supposed to assume a passive role in sexual activity. Failure to do so represented a violation of "nature," the proper order of things. Women's inferior position was symbolized by their different dress and grooming. Refusal to retain this symbolic difference represented a challenge to the whole system of dominance and subordination. Thus, sexual irregularities and improper gender behaviour were linked. This, according to Brooten is the perspective on gender reflected in both Romans 1:26-27 and 1 Corinthians 1:2-16.⁶⁵

Bernadette Brooten, thus, simultaneously supports and challenges Richard Hays' treatment of Romans 1:26-27. She agrees with him that Paul opposed homosexual activity because he believed that it violated the sexual order established by God, and she implicitly challenges Boswell's interpretation of the passage. At the same time, Brooten criticizes Hays' discussion of Paul's conception of gender distinctions:

Hays fails to define these distinctions, to ask why ancient authors view them as natural, or to mention that the Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers who shaped Paul's understanding of nature, call for sexual distinctions based on female inferiority.⁶⁶

Thus, Brooten implicitly challenges Hays' assumptions about how Paul would have understood Genesis 1-3 to relate to what he says about homosexual activity in

⁶⁴Ibid., 76.

⁶⁵Ibid., 72.

⁶⁶Brooten, "Why Did Early Christians Condemn Sexual Relations Between Women?"

Romans 1:26-27. If Brooten is correct, Paul would not have read Genesis 1-3 simply as upholding heterosexual monogamy, but also as the basis for the subordination of women to men. He would not have understood Genesis 2:18-24 as describing male and female as "created for one another."⁶⁷ Rather, Paul understood women to have been created for men, not men for women, as he explicitly asserts (1 Cor. 11:9). Paul's condemnation of homosexual behaviour, which Hays treats as resting on a positive estimation of heterosexual marriage, in Brooten's view, rests on a much more sinister assumption of female inferiority. This is the same assumption that lies behind Graeco-Roman and Jewish condemnations of female homosexual behaviour. Thus, according to Brooten, Paul's approach to female homosexual behaviour provides insight into his views on women.

Most scholarly work on Rom. 1:26-27 has focused on questions about whether Paul's words represent a condemnation of all homosexual behaviour, and about the basis of Paul's objections to homosexual relationships. Much less explicit attention has been given to the way in which Paul characterizes homosexual behaviour – his claims about what motivates it, what it involves, and who the participants are.

In his commentary on Romans, Leon Morris quotes with approval Hendriksen's claim that "a person's sexual orientation, whether heterosexual or homosexual, is not the point at issue. What matters is what a person does with his sexuality."⁶⁸ Similarly, Dunn asserts that Paul's description of homosexual behaviour as involving τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην κατεργαζόμενοι "indicates clearly that not merely homosexual tendency or desire is in view, but the genital act itself."⁶⁹ Both of these readings of Rom. 1:26-27 seem to have

⁶⁷Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural," 191.

⁶⁸Morris, *Romans*, 92

⁶⁹Dunn, *Romans*, 65.

been influenced by the distinction drawn by some modern Christians between homosexual orientation and homosexual acts. This is clearly the point of the comments quoted by Morris. Homosexual people are not to be condemned for their desires, but must be held responsible for their behaviour.

In contrast, Schlier asserts, commenting on Rom. 1:26, "nicht erst die Taten, sondern schon die sie hervorbringenden und bestimmenden πάθη sind pervertiert und entehrend. Die Perversion ist ins Blut gedrungen."⁷⁰ In Rom. 1:26-27, Paul begins with desires, the motivation for behaviour, and then proceeds to elaborate on the behaviour that stems from the passions over to which God had given people.⁷¹ As Furnish notes, stressing Paul's claims that the men who indulged in homosexual behaviour were "inflamed in their longing," Paul presents homosexual behaviour as "born of an insatiable sexual appetite."⁷² It appears, therefore, that Paul was as concerned about people's sexual desires as he was about their actual behaviour. This is an issue that will require further attention in Chapter 4.

Also worthy of further consideration is the question of whether Paul presents homosexual behaviour as indulged in by deliberate choice. According to Furnish, "in Greek as in English the verbs 'exchanged' and 'gave up' imply a conscious decision to act in one way rather than another."⁷³ In this interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27, Furnish agrees with Boswell, who claims that Paul condemns people for deliberately abandoning the heterosexual behaviour natural to them for homosexual behaviour.⁷⁴ In contrast, Hays

⁷⁰Schlier, *Römerbrief*, 61.

⁷¹"The γάρ indicates that vv. 26b-27 are explanation and substantiation of v. 26a" (Cranfield, *Romans*, 125). Cf. Barrett, *Romans*, 38; Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 109.

⁷²Furnish, "Homosexuality," 79.

⁷³Furnish, "Homosexuality," 73.

⁷⁴Boswell, *Christianity*, 109.

speaks of "depravity and confusion," "tragically confused rebellion," and "blindness and self-deception,"⁷⁵ apparently emphasizing the inability of people to recognize the way in which they have departed from God's will. Hays does not, of course, claim that Paul wished to absolve people from responsibility for their behaviour, but seems to claim simply that Paul does not describe people as making a willful, deliberate choice. Like Scroggs, he believes that Paul identified the choice to engage in homosexual behaviour as shaped by having a false knowledge of reality. Like the question about the distinction between sexual orientation and sexual behaviour, this question is related to modern debates.

Finally, a question is raised by the relationship between what Paul says about same gender sexual behaviour and what other Jews said. Furnish claims that Paul, like other Jews, describes homosexual behaviour as a Gentile vice. As I noted above, the identity of the subjects of Rom. 1:18-32 is a matter of dispute. Depending on one's interpretation of Rom. 1:18-32, it is possible to argue that Paul agreed with his fellow Jews that homosexual behaviour was a Gentile problem. Would this mean, then, that Paul believed that Christians would not be troubled by homosexual desire? Or, even if he did not accept Jewish claims that homosexual behaviour was not a Jewish problem, would Paul have accepted the idea that a Christian could experience life-long homosexual desire, and never feel heterosexual attraction. This is an interesting historical question. It is, also, of course, a question with implications for modern debates. Apart from these modern debates it is unlikely it could have been asked. As I discussed in Chapter 1 above, many modern Christians who oppose homosexual behaviour as sinful, nevertheless concede that conversion to Christianity may not lead to a change of sexual orientation. Others argue that such conversion, if it is genuine, must transform sexual

⁷⁵Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural," 207, 209.

orientation. Thus, while attempting to offer an accurate historical assessment of Paul's words, it will also be necessary to suggest how Paul might have responded to modern debates. Such an approach to Rom. 1:26-27 recognizes the inescapable impact of modern concerns on the way in which exegetical work is conducted.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have discussed a variety of recent approaches to Paul's statements in Rom. 1:26-27 about homosexual behaviour, indicating both the questions with which recent scholarship has been concerned, and the relationship of these questions to modern church debates about homosexuality. The question of whether Paul actually condemns homosexual behaviour in Rom. 1:26-27 has preoccupied interpreters. Also of concern has been the basis of Paul's objections to homosexual behaviour. Less attention has been given specifically to the way Paul characterizes homosexual behaviour. Most scholars have stressed the importance of understanding Paul's words in the light of the historical and cultural context in which they were written. All of the scholarly work I have discussed here is in some sense a response to recent church debates about the morality of homosexual behaviour.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF ROM. 1:26-27

Not only are Paul's statements in Rom 1:26-27 inevitably interpreted in a particular context, but they were also written in a particular historical context. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate that latter context. In the first part of the chapter, the focus will be on same-gender sexual behaviour in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, ca. 200 B.C.E. to ca. 200 C.E. and on non-Jewish interpretations and evaluations of such behaviour. The second part of the chapter will focus on Jewish responses and attitudes towards homosexual behaviour. Throughout the chapter, my concern will be with the relevance for understanding Paul's words in Rom. 1:26-27 of information about homosexual behaviour and attitudes towards it in the Graeco-Roman world.

I. Same-gender Sexuality in the Graeco-Roman World

The sources for this investigation of Graeco-Roman homosexual practices and attitudes towards homosexual behaviour are primarily literary texts produced by upper-class males. As Robin Scroggs notes, this means that "the selective process, which the ancient historian must accept as a given, is enormous. What is known about women and the lower classes is filtered through the perspectives and prejudices of this privileged group."¹ There is, however, some material -- graffiti, legal material, popular novels, dream interpretation texts, and some archaeological artifacts -- which can be assumed to provide insight into more popular attitudes and practices. K. J. Dover, in his influential work on homosexual behaviour in ancient Greece, provides a helpful guide to the use of sources, one which will be followed here: "What is very widely known or aesthetically

¹Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 17.

striking or attractive is not always and necessarily as important for the purpose of the present inquiry as aesthetically unimpressive but unambiguous passages of uninspiring and little-read authors."²

Attention must also be given to the date and geographical provenance of the material considered. Scroggs asserts that attention to such matters is usually not necessary because "in both practices and attitudes, within the class that wrote the texts, there is no significant change reflected temporally or geographically."³ Therefore, "since there was no real change or development, Plato can inform us about the reality of homosexuality in Paul's day."⁴ In sharp contrast to this approach, Amy Richlin criticizes scholarly treatments of Greek and Roman sexuality which ignore the differences between ancient Athenian, Hellenistic and Roman cultures. Writing about Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, she states:

he collapses Hellenistic into Roman, Republic into Empire, and all the emperors into each other, skipping a hundred years of civil war and the drastic social changes that accompanied it....It is strange that the champion of local peculiarities of history should carry on like this, but it is a fact. Ironically, he was only able to make his argument for the difference between antiquity and the present by leaving out major differences between Greece and Rome, between Empire and Republic. The discussion of marriage is framed...as if Rome of the high Empire could profitably be compared directly with fifth-century B.C. Athenian society...; and as if Plutarch (a Greek from Boiotia) and Pliny (a wealthy Roman from Cisalpine Gaul) shared the same culture. The world depicted here is unrecognizable to a reader of Tacitus or Martial or Catullus, and it is not Roman.⁵

²*Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 9, n.14.

³Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 18.

⁴*Ibid.*, 18, n. 3.

⁵*The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), xv-xvi.

Bearing Richlin's comments in mind, a serious attempt will be made to recognize differences in practice and attitude between temporally and geographically distinct people and societies.

Although Robin Scroggs stresses the importance of knowledge of the sort of homosexual behaviour with which Paul was familiar, questions must be raised about the possibility of such knowledge. The sources of information on homosexual practice in Paul's time are largely literary texts, and, as Amy Richlin notes, literature can serve as a source of information on attitudes but is not so easily used as a source for determining what actual practices were.⁶ She notes, for example, that Roman political invective accusing a man of acting as the passive partner in a homosexual relationship "tells nothing about its targets but demonstrates a societal preoccupation with the possibility of one male's submission to another."⁷ The focus of this study, therefore, will be on attitudes towards and ideas about behaviour, rather than on the behaviour itself. Such a study should provide information helpful for better understanding Rom. 1:26-27 in the light of the historical context in which Paul lived.

Much of the recent work on sexuality in the Graeco-Roman world, undertaken by feminist scholars or in the light of feminist theory, reflects a concern to understand the relationship between gender norms and values and power structures in society.⁸ Even

⁶Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 220.

⁷Ibid., 221.

⁸See, for example, Eva C. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1985); Amy Richlin, "Not Before Homosexuality: The Materiality of the *Cinaedus* and the Roman Law against Love Between Men," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3 (1993): 523-573; *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Eva Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, translated by Cormac Ó Cuilleain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Jeffrey Henderson, "Greek Attitudes Toward Sex," in *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean*, Vol. 2, ed. Michael Grant and Amy Kitzinger (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), 1249-1263; John Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1990); and David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*.

scholars who are not explicitly committed to feminism have stressed the strong connection ancient Greeks and Romans drew between sexual and gender identity and social status.⁹ In drawing on this work, I am particularly concerned with understanding how Paul's Greek and Roman contemporaries conceptualized gender identities and roles and how these conceptions were applied to their evaluation of homosexual relationships. The conclusions drawn here about how homosexual behaviour was evaluated by Paul's contemporaries will be applied in the following chapter to an attempt to understand Paul's statements about same-gender sexuality.

Since the culture of classical Athens contributed in significant ways to the cultural synthesis known as Hellenism, and since the Romans imitated Athenian culture and borrowed substantially from Attic literature, it seems appropriate to begin with some consideration of the place of same-gender sexual behaviour in classical Athenian society.

There is widespread recognition that certain types of homosexual activity were accepted in ancient Athens and other Greek city states. K.J. Dover states:

Greek culture differed from ours in its readiness to recognize the alternation of homosexual and heterosexual preferences in the same individual, its implicit denial that such alternation or coexistence created peculiar problems for the individual or for society, its sympathetic response to the open expression of homosexual desire in words and behaviour, and its taste for the uninhibited treatment of homosexual subjects in literature and the visual arts.¹⁰

Most men in classical Athens seem to have assumed that it was perfectly normal for older males to experience sexual attraction to adolescent males.¹¹ There is, however,

⁹Dover, for example, stresses throughout *Greek Homosexuality* that sexual identity and social status were closely identified in classical Athens.

¹⁰Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 1.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 60-68; Henderson, "Greek Attitudes," 1255. Cf. Aeschines, *Against Timarchus* 136-139; Xenophon, *Hiero* 1.31-33. [Ancient Greek and Latin texts, including Greek Jewish texts, are cited from the Loeb Classical Library (LCL) editions and translations unless otherwise indicated. Where the Loeb translation is modified or I offer my own original translation, this is noted.]

almost no evidence suggesting that sexual relationships between adult males of the same social status were considered acceptable.¹² Robin Scroggs is correct, therefore, to note that male same-gender sexuality in ancient Athens was almost exclusively pederasty, the love of an adult male, the "lover" (ἐραστής), who assumed the pursuing, active role, for an adolescent male, the "beloved" (ἐρώμενος), who was pursued, and submitted sexually to the adult.¹³ Scroggs draws extensively, in his discussion of homosexual behaviour in the Graeco-Roman world, on the work of Kenneth Dover, who marshals substantial evidence in support of his thesis that homosexual behaviour in the Greek world can largely be identified with pederasty. Other classicists who have studied Greek sexual behaviour have supported this general thesis.¹⁴

Pederastic relationships usually took place between a free adult male, and a youth of citizen status. Such relationships were governed by a strict code of etiquette the violation of which brought social stigma and even legal penalties to bear on the

¹²As Dover notes (pp. 16, 84), "the reciprocal desire of partners belonging to the same age-category is virtually unknown in Greek homosexuality;" rather, "homosexual relationships in Greek society are regarded as the product not of the reciprocated sentiments of equals but of the pursuit of those of lower status by those of higher status." Cf. David Halperin, "Plato and Erotic Reciprocity," *Classical Antiquity* 5 (1986): 64-66. It should be noted that here I am speaking simply of the dominant social convention. For a discussion of how the convention was violated and attitudes towards such violation, see below.

¹³Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 17-28, 35. The minimum age of ἐρώμενοι seems to have been twelve, while most seem to have been in their middle to late teens. Note the discussions of ages in epigrams attributed to Straton in the *Greek Anthology* (XII.4, 205, 228). Straton was a Greek poet of Roman imperial times, but Dover believes he reflects the same preferences as classical Athenian men (Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 15 n.30). Cf. *Greek Anthology* XII.78, 125, epigrams attributed to Meleager (c. 100 B.C.E.), which refer to youths in their late teens or early twenties. For a summary and evaluation of the evidence about the socially approved ages of ἐρώμενοι, see Cantarella, *Bisexuality*, 36-42.

¹⁴Cf. Winkler, *Constraints of Desire*, Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, Keuls, *Reign of the Phallus*, Henderson, "Greek Attitudes," Cantarella, *Bisexuality*. Boswell (*Christianity*, 28-30) questions this interpretation of the evidence, arguing that relationships between adult males were frequent, and that descriptions and representations of sexual relationships between males of different ages do not conform to reality. His argument appears, however, to be based on a very selective reading of the evidence, and has largely been ignored by Classicists. See Halperin, "Plato and Erotic Reciprocity," 63-64 n.9, for comments on Boswell's views.

offender.¹⁵ Males who simply wanted to satisfy a desire to sexually penetrate another male, without going through all the difficulties involved in courting a citizen youth, could make use of a slave or male prostitute.

In the Hellenistic world and in the parts of the Roman Empire in which Greek cultural forms were dominant, homosexual practices seem to have followed the pattern characteristic of classical Athens: pederasty or the sexual use of prostitutes or slaves. Plutarch's *Dialogue on Love*, a work written in Greek in the second century C.E., presents the practice of free youths having adult male lovers as a continuing reality in Roman-ruled Greece.¹⁶ As well, one of the speakers in the text describes men who have sex with male slaves, and criticizes them for simply indulging physical desires rather than seeking out a noble youth to whom they could serve as a mentor (751B). Popular Greek novels describe relationships between males of the same social class and treat them as equivalent to heterosexual relationships.¹⁷ A document from Egypt indicates that a minor official and a young male were having a sexual relationship, apparently with the boy's father's approval.¹⁸ Most of the Hellenistic homoerotic poetry preserved in Book XII of the *Greek Anthology* clearly is addressed by an adult male to a boy or youth who, in many cases, is evidently a slave or prostitute.¹⁹

¹⁵On the etiquette of Athenian pederasty, see Cantarella, *Bisexuality*, 17-22.

¹⁶Plutarch, *Dialogue on Love* (Amatorius/Ἐρωτικός). On Plutarch as evidence for continuity between ancient Athenian practices and those in Greece under the Roman Empire, see T. Wade Richardson, "Homosexuality in the *Satyricon*," *Classica and Mediaevalia* 35 (1984): 109-110.

¹⁷In Achilles Tatius', *Leucippe and Clitophon* (written in the third quarter of the second century C.E.), for example, a young man, infatuated with a woman, goes to an older cousin, who is involved in a pederastic relationship, seeking advice on love (I.7-11). Boswell (*Christianity*, 87) notes that "novels of this sort addressed to the general reading public were the closest ancient parallel to popular literature." It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that these texts reflect both popular attitudes and popular practices.

¹⁸*Oxyrhynchus papyri* 147; see Boswell, *Christianity*, 70.

¹⁹See, for example, epigrams 1, 4, 10, 24-27, 29-30, 90, 191-192, 205, 217, 228. On the social status of the boys addressed in Hellenistic epigrams, see Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 34-38, 55.

Like the classical Athenians and people in the Hellenistic world, Roman men seem generally to have believed that it was perfectly normal for adult males to be sexually aroused by the beauty of young males and to desire to assume the dominant role in a sexual relationship with them. Such sexual interest was usually equated with the desire for women, and homosexual and heterosexual desires were not treated as mutually exclusive. Lucretius, for example, in *De Rerum Natura* IV.1052-1057, describes both boys and women as objects which might stimulate sexual desire. Robert Brown, in his commentary on *De Rerum Natura*, notes that "homosexual love is adduced by Lucretius as a perfectly natural alternative to heterosexual."²⁰

In the Graeco-Roman world, the widespread belief that it was normal for males to experience sexual attraction to other males, was combined with an extremely negative attitude towards males who willingly adopted the subordinate role in a homosexual relationship.²¹ In both Greece and Rome, being sexually penetrated was identified as the appropriate role for the female²² or for those, such as slaves, boys, and non-citizen males, who in some way could be classed with women. Men who willingly adopted the "female role" were equated with women and condemned for despising their manliness.²³ Such a man was described in Greek as κιναιδός or μαλακός. In Latin he was called *cinaedus*

²⁰Lucretius on *Love and Sex: A Commentary on De Rerum Natura IV, 1030-1287*, Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, no. 15. (New York: E.J. Brill, 1987), 194. Other Roman authors who express indifference about the gender of the object of sexual attention include Horace, *Sermones* 2.3.325, *Epodes* 11.27f.; Ovid, *Am.* 1.1.20; Catullus 100; Martial 12.96, 11.43. Cf. Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 225-226; Paul Veyne, "Homosexuality in Ancient Rome," *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Time*, ed. Philippe Ariès and André Béjine, trans. Anthony Forster (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1985), 26.

²¹Dover, 67-68: "All the evidence which tends to support the hypothesis that the Greeks regarded male homosexual desire as natural concerns the active partner."

²²Seneca, *Ep.* 95.21 asserts, for example, that women are "born to be penetrated (*pati natae*)."

²³Winkler, *Constraints of Desire*, 45-70; Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 103; Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 225.

(adopting Greek terminology), *pathicus*, or *mollis*.²⁴ Eva Cantarella demonstrates that a softening of attitudes towards male homosexual passivity took place in Rome beginning in the first century B.C.E. This led to the increasing popularity of relationships between adult males, both of whom enjoyed the sexual behaviour.²⁵ Such relationships, nevertheless, continued to be viewed with suspicion and vigorously condemned by some Roman thinkers.²⁶ Literary texts represented males who enjoyed being the passive partner as dressing and grooming in effeminate styles and aggressively flaunting cultural notions of manhood. It is impossible to know to what extent this portrait reflects actual reality. It is probable that some males who assumed the passive role in homosexual relationships did not adopt conventionally feminine dress and mannerisms. Whatever may be the case, evidence that some free adult males engaged in passive homosexual behaviour raises questions about Scroggs' insistence that the only form of homosexual behaviour Paul would have been familiar with was pederasty. While it is clear that pederasty was widely accepted and can be called the normative form of same-gender behaviour engaged in during Paul's time, there were other kinds of homosexual behaviour. The behaviour of the *κυναῖδοι*/*cinaedi* cannot be subsumed under the category of pederasty. The standards were different. Not age but preferred sexual act defined the roles each participant played. While it appears that the passive partner often adopted conventionally "effeminate" dress and mannerisms, this appears to have been a voluntary undertaking, a means of identifying as one who wished to perform a certain role in sexual

²⁴Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 258, n. 3; "Not Before Homosexuality," 530-531.

²⁵Cantarella, *Bisexuality*, 155-164.

²⁶Note, especially, Juvenal's violent tirade against effeminate males in *Satires* 2. Cf. Martial, *Epigrams* 12.42, reporting on a "marriage" between two men, one of whom wore traditional bridal garb. He asks, with a tone of obvious disgust, "Do you not yet think, O Rome, this is enough? Are you waiting also for an accouchement?" (Compare Tacitus, *Annals* xv.37, describing Nero's "marriage" as a bride to one of his associates.).

behaviour. Such relationships were consensual and mutual in the sense that both participants obtained sexual gratification.

Various explanations were offered of why a man might wish to be sexually penetrated. The dominant view seems to have been that such men were simply self-indulgent and given over to pleasure. Their sexual propensity was simply a variant on heterosexual promiscuity. However, since it was widely assumed that normal males could not find pleasure in sexual passivity, some thinkers suggested that the desire to be penetrated must result from an abnormal constitution. It was speculated that whereas semen flowed into the penis of a man who liked to penetrate women or other males, it flowed "against nature" (*παρὰ φύσιν*) into the anus of the man who enjoyed being penetrated. There was ambivalence, however, about whether such men were born with this disorder or whether it was caused by habituation.²⁷ Closely related to these speculations was the idea that *cinaedi* could be identified by certain typical characteristics. They were held to prefer certain colours of clothing, talk with a lisp, walk in a particular fashion, either wagging their hips or carefully controlling their movements, and scratch their heads with one finger. They were said to have particular facial features.²⁸

It is correct in one sense, therefore, to speak of a concept of "sexual orientation" in the ancient world and a notion comparable to that of "the homosexual," a person whose sexual preference found expression in every aspect of his life. It must be noted, however, that the distinction is not between homosexual and heterosexual, but between males who

²⁷Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.v.3-4; Pseudo-Aristotle, *Problems*, 879a 35-880a 10 (trans. E.S. Forster, in *Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes. Revised Oxford Translation Bollington Series LXXI.2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984)).

²⁸Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 221, 258, n. 3; Maud W. Gleason, "The Semiotics of Gender: Physiognomy and Self-Fashioning in the Second Century C.E.," in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, ed. David Halperin, John Winkler, Froma Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 389-416.

assumed the "normal," active role with either males or females, and males who assumed an "abnormal" passive role. It is clear, therefore, that John Boswell misrepresents the significance of ancient evidence when he claims, in the context of his interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27, that "the idea that homosexuality represented a congenital physical characteristic was widespread in the Hellenistic world."²⁹ This claim is especially surprising coming from Boswell, since elsewhere in *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, he correctly describes ancient theories about male sexual passivity.³⁰

Besides those who condemned adult male passivity, there were those who rejected homosexual behaviour entirely. An objection frequently raised against male homosexual relations was the conviction that the passive partner, whatever the sexual act performed, was used, exploited, and degraded by the active partner.³¹ This criticism was closely related to attitudes towards passivity, but went a step further by insisting that the male who assumed the active role was also guilty of an offense because he forced another male to play a "female" role for his sexual satisfaction. It was assumed that no *normal* male would enjoy being treated as a female. He was involved in an unpleasant activity to satisfy the desires of another, and got nothing out of the encounter himself.³² It is this

²⁹Boswell, *Christianity*, 109. Boswell adds (p. 109, n. 60) that "Plato and Aristotle had both suggested variations on this idea, and it was a commonplace of Roman medicine."

³⁰*Ibid.*, 75, n. 67.

³¹See, for example, Plutarch, *Dialogue on Love* 751D-E, 768E, Dio Chrysostom *Discourse* 7.149-152.

³²For an early criticism of pederasty in these terms, see Xenophon, *Symposium* VIII. 21-22: "For a youth does not share in the pleasure of the intercourse as a woman does, but looks on, sober, at another in love's intoxication. Consequently, it need not excite any surprise if contempt for the lover is engendered in him." Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 240D-E. Pseudo-Lucian (second century C.E.) has one of his debaters insist that "the active lover, according to his view of the matter, departs after having obtained an exquisite pleasure, but the one outraged suffers pain and tears at first...but of pleasure he has none at all" (*Affairs of the Heart* (Ἐρωτες) 27); see also Plutarch, *Dialogue on Love* 768F: "Young men not naturally vicious, who have been lured or forced into yielding and letting themselves be abused, forever after mistrust and hate no one on earth more than the men who so served them." Cf. 751D-E

criticism of homosexual behaviour which Robin Scroggs stresses in his treatment of Graeco-Roman attitudes. It was not, however, the criticism most frequently raised, as Scroggs himself notes.³³

Critics of homosexual behaviour usually combined their claim that it was exploitative and degrading with the assertion that it was "against nature" (παρὰ φύσιν). This characterization of homosexual behaviour seems to have originated with Plato. In his last work, the *Laws*, Plato insists that in his ideal state, homosexual behaviour would be outlawed because it is "against nature" (παρὰ φύσιν), in contrast to sexual relations between male and female for the purpose of procreation, which are "according to nature" (κατὰ φύσιν).³⁴ This approach to same-gender sexuality was highly influential, since it is reflected in a variety of sources, from different times and different locales. Philo, Josephus, Plutarch, Pseudo-Lucian, and Dio Chrysostom refer to the categorization of homosexual acts as παρὰ φύσιν, some to support it, others to question it.

The context of Plato's designation of homosexual behaviour as "against nature" is a discussion of how the ideal state would control the expression of sexual desires. Plato suggests that the Cretans and Spartans, whose laws had served as useful models for many laws he proposes, are of no help in this regard, because of their notorious tolerance for homosexual activity (836B-C). He speculates about whether he could convince anyone to ban homosexual behaviour by appealing to the fact that it was unknown before Laios, the father of Oedipus, invented it, and to the fact that animals do not engage in it (836C-D). These two facts demonstrate, so he concludes, that it is not something that occurs naturally, but that it is a human invention. As such, it can be eliminated if it is not found

³³Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 59.

³⁴Plato, *Laws*, 636C-D, 836D-842A. The attitude taken towards pederasty in the *Laws* clearly differs from the positive attitude towards it expressed in the *Symposium*. As Boswell notes, the *Laws* "are atypical of Plato's thought in a great many ways" (*Christianity*, 14).

to lead to virtue (836D). He argues that it does not produce virtue, but rather, that the active partner demonstrates weakness (*μαλακία*) because he yields so freely to pleasure, while the passive partner "plays the woman's part" and becomes like a woman as a result (836E).

For Plato, "nature" is a rational order, the same order as that manifest in the human mind. Observation of the natural world, in Plato's view, allows one to see what is rational and proper. Plato assumes, from his observation of animals, who act "according to nature", that the purpose of sexual relations is procreation (836C, 840D-E). Plato thus measures the propriety of sexual activity in terms of its capacity to produce offspring. Consequently, he indicates that one should not have intercourse with a woman with whom one would not wish to have children, and implicitly denies the appropriateness of sexual activity between a man and woman which would not be procreative.³⁵ Particularly, Plato is concerned that people not engage in sexual activity for the primary purpose of physical pleasure. Such pleasure is simply a by-product of "natural" sex, perhaps a means to draw men and women together, but not an end in itself.³⁶

Critics of pederasty who came after Plato seem to have adopted this designation of homosexual behaviour as something of a slogan, under the influence of Stoic ideas that all activities which were good were according to nature and bad activities were against

³⁵ Plato recommends, elsewhere in the *Laws* (784B), that couples should divorce, if they do not have any children within the first ten years of marriage.

³⁶ 836C, 639A-B, 841B. Dover notes that, "Plato's main concern is to reduce to an unavoidable minimum all activity of which the end is physical enjoyment, in order that the irrational and appetitive element of the soul may not be encouraged and strengthened by indulgence" (*Greek Homosexuality*, 167), but that, "while prohibiting homosexual relations because they go beyond what nature shows to be adequate in sexual pleasure, he does not express an opinion on the naturalness or unnaturalness of the desire to perform the prohibited acts; it is to be presumed, in accordance with the sentiment of the time, that he would regard the desire as an indication that the appetitive element of the soul is insufficiently disciplined, and would say that such a soul desires homosexual copulation only as one among many pleasurable sensations.... There is no sign... that a genital response to the bodily beauty of a younger male was regarded as a defect or impairment of male nature, no matter what view was taken of the duty of the law to prevent gratification of the desire aroused by this response" (*Greek Homosexuality*, 168-170). Cf. W.K.C Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. V (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 354-355.

nature. The emphasis on procreation remains important. Plutarch, for example, stresses the need for sexual unions between men and women in order to keep the human race alive.³⁷ He connects other criticisms of homosexual behaviour to these central criticisms and largely make them depend on them. For example, he argues that sexual activity for the purpose of procreation leads to a deep and lasting bond between husband and wife precisely because their sexual activity is "according to nature."³⁸ Pederastic relationships, in contrast are impermanent and unstable because they do not have a natural purpose.³⁹

According to Dio Chrysostom⁴⁰ male homosexual behaviour is engaged in by those who have given themselves over to the pursuit of pleasure. He insists that they begin with promiscuous heterosexual behaviour and the use of prostitutes. Bored with this indulgence, they cross the boundary set by nature and corrupt boys. His focus seems to be on procreation and the rational control of the passions, but he is also evidently convinced that "nature" decrees that males should not have sex with other males. Gender is a concern. Dio Chrysostom does not, however, treat homosexual desire as springing from a discrete sexual orientation. It is simply a variant of the same lust that leads men to commit adultery and seek the company of prostitutes.

While male homosexual behaviour had both critics and supporters, sexual relations between women were universally condemned.⁴¹ Condemnation of female

³⁷Plutarch, *Dialogue on Love* 752A.

³⁸Ibid. 754C. Cf. Plato, *Laws* 839B.

³⁹Plutarch, *Dialogue on Love* 770B-C.

⁴⁰*The Seventh (Euboean) Discourse* 149-152. For a helpful discussion of Dio Chrysostom's views on homosexuality, see Furnish, "Homosexuality," 62-63.

⁴¹On female homosexual behaviour in the ancient Graeco-Roman world, see Brooten, "Paul's Views," 65-71, Cantarella, *Bisexuality*, 91-93, 164-171.

homosexual behaviour, in fact, was more violent than that directed against male homosexual behaviour. Women who assumed an active, dominant role in a sexual relationship with other women were characterized as monsters and portrayed in literary texts as adopting extremely masculine manners and dress. The assumptions upon which condemnations of female homosexual behaviour were based are quite clear. Women were expected to assume the subordinate role in a sexual relationship and receive pleasure from a man who assumed the dominant role. Giving sexual pleasure was understood to be a male prerogative. As Cantarella puts it:

Given that pleasure could only be dispensed by men, love between women could be nothing other than a grotesque parody of the act of submission. And this is highly symptomatic: the most serious crime committed by lesbians was daring to think they could do without men. They were women who rejected the fundamental rule underlying relationships between the sexes, the [rule] of nature which had given men alone the power of sexual dominance, not only over women, but also over other men: inferior men, such as slaves; hated men, such as enemies; despised men, such as passive homosexuals. These lesbians were women who questioned the rule according to which men alone were entitled to rule and dominate the world.⁴²

Graeco-Roman condemnations of female homosexual behaviour, thus, were based on convictions about the inferiority of women and the belief that they were naturally to be subordinate. Women who assumed the dominant role in homosexual relationships were rejecting their natural role and status. Women who had sex with them received pleasure without a man.

Similarly, males who assumed the passive role in a sexual relationship failed to act sexually as they were supposed to. Males who assumed the dominant role in homosexual relationships were not always condemned. When they were condemned, however, they were not accused of behaving in a manner inappropriate to their gender. Rather, they were accused of pursuing pleasure "against nature," ignoring the procreative

⁴²Cantarella, *Bisexuality*, 171.

purpose of sexual intercourse, being self-indulgent, yielding to irrational passion, exploiting another male, who was degraded by being used sexually, or facilitating the perverse behaviour of the habitual pathic, and degrading themselves by associating with such a degenerate male. Both the active participant and the passive participant in male homosexual behaviour could be condemned, but they were condemned for different reasons. They were not treated as members of a single class of people, as are men and women who are identified as "homosexual" in modern Western society. Whereas the fundamental distinction in the modern West is between heterosexual and homosexual, as most interpreters of Graeco-Roman homosexual behaviour emphasize, the most important distinctions drawn in the world in which Paul lived was that between active and passive roles in sexual behaviour.

Homosexual Behaviour in the Graeco-Roman World: Conclusions

It is evident that homosexual activity was both widely practiced and widely tolerated in the Graeco-Roman world, although there were clear ideas about which specific acts were appropriate and which were not. It was generally assumed that it was normal for males to experience sexual attraction to other males, usually adolescents. In contrast with the situation in modern society, the participants in homosexual activity were not classed together in one category, "homosexuals," characterized by a specific "sexual orientation." Persons were identified, instead, by their role in the sexual act. The passive role in male homosexual activity was frequently viewed with suspicion because of the association of sexual passivity with social and moral weakness. The active role was not criticized in the same way. No one claimed that active participants in male homosexual activity were abnormal or fundamentally different from other men. Critics of male homosexual behaviour, however, suggested that the active role was offensive because it involved sexual activity which was not procreative and which led to the degradation of

another male. This degradation was understood in terms of negation of the role and characteristics that were natural to the male. Since the male nature was understood to be active, assertive, and strong, to act in a way that was passive was seen as acting against nature. Biological gender, sexual role and social identity were all treated as part of the order of nature. Sexual relations between women were condemned on a similar basis, but with even more vigour. They were held to deny the male his natural position of dominance and to involve women seeking sexual pleasure apart from men. "Nature" also decreed that the purpose of sexual intercourse was procreation. Thus, homosexual behaviour was "against nature" both because it involved violation of "natural" gender roles and because it was nonprocreative. These were the attitudes towards same-gender sexuality with which Paul and his fellow Jews would most likely have been familiar.

II. Jewish Attitudes Towards Same-gender Sexuality

There is a serious lack of work on ancient Jewish materials. Most of what has been done is of a highly polemical nature, written primarily in defense of halakic positions taken by modern Jewish scholars. It appears that not a single article has been written on Jewish attitudes towards homosexual behaviour during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Some work has been undertaken on Rabbinic materials.⁴³ None of the treatments of Jewish texts by New Testament scholars draws on existing work. There are numerous discussions of the Hebrew Bible texts, but nothing specifically on early Judaism. This oversight, apart from the problems it poses for New Testament interpretation also does a disservice to the understanding of early Judaism and its

⁴³On the state of scholarship on ancient Judaism and homosexual behaviour, see Michael Satlow, "Talking About Sex: Rabbinic Rhetoric of Sexuality" (Ph. D. diss., Graduate School of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993), 323, n. 1. Satlow fills a major gap with his treatment in his dissertation of Rabbinic texts on homosexual behaviour.

relationship with Hellenistic and Roman culture, a subject which has been the focus of considerable interest.

References to homosexual behaviour in Jewish texts are relatively few in comparison to the numerous references in Greek and Latin literature. These few references, without exception, condemn the behaviour, and serve as evidence for a consistently negative attitude towards same-gender sexuality, at least amongst those Jews whose ideas were preserved in writing. Jewish responses to the homosexual practices of non-Jews constitute one element in a general attempt to respond to the influence of Hellenistic culture. Many Jews adopted the language and ideas of Gentile critics of pederasty, but all offered, as well, a specifically Jewish critique of same-gender sexual relations. This distinctively Jewish response to homosexual activity focused on the gender of the participants and portrayed homosexual relationships as violating norms for gender behaviour established by God. This understanding of Jewish responses to Greek and Roman homosexual behaviour differs significantly from that of Robin Scroggs. Scroggs asserts that Jewish criticism was directed specifically against pederasty, rather than against homosexual behaviour *per se*. On the basis of this argument, Scroggs maintains that the differences between the "model" of homosexuality with which Paul and his Jewish contemporaries were familiar and modern homosexuality renders Paul's statements irrelevant to modern discussions. In contrast to Scroggs, I believe the evidence indicates that Jewish criticism of Graeco-Roman pederasty focused specifically on the fact that it was same-gender sexuality.

Robin Scroggs divides his detailed study of Jewish attitudes towards homosexual behaviour according to Hellenistic Jewish and Palestinian sources. He thus considers texts which were written long after Paul's time. While a case certainly can be made that rabbinic texts frequently reflect Judaism as it existed in Palestine in the 1st century C.E., these materials must be used with great caution. In this study, therefore, I will focus on

texts which can be dated either before or roughly contemporary with Paul. Paul may have been familiar with some of these writings or with the ideas they express. About this, however, there can be no absolute certainty.

Jewish Condemnations of Homosexual Behaviour

In the Holiness Code of Leviticus, Jews found the primary source for their attitude towards sexual relations between men. In a passage (Lev. 18:1-30) which lists various sexual acts which are all characterized as "abominations" (תועבה)⁴⁴ (Lev. 18:26-30), appears a prohibition of sexual relations between men: "You shall not lie with a male as you lie with a woman; it is an abomination" (ואחזכר לא השכב משכבי אשה תועבה הוא) (Lev. 18:22).⁴⁵ The list of penalties that corresponds to the list of prohibitions states that both parties are culpable and are to be executed (Lev. 20:13). This prohibition clearly comes from a time before Alexander's conquest of the Near East, and may in fact date from before the Exile.⁴⁶ It is very unlikely, therefore, that it reflects Jewish reaction against Greek homosexual behaviour. Boswell suggests that it was inspired by reaction to cultic practices engaged in by the Israelites' neighbours.⁴⁷ The text does not, however, specify that cultic homosexual practices are to be avoided. Rather, it represents a general

⁴⁴Sg. תועבה. The term comes from the root תעב, meaning "to hate" or "abhor." According to Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 259, "an abomination is literally something detestable and hated by God (e.g., Prov. 6:16; 11:1)." Cf. Psalm 5:7. Saul Olyan, (private communication, "The Meaning and Significance of Leviticus 18:22/20:13," 1) suggests that "usage in general suggests the violation of socially constructed boundaries, the undermining or reversal of what is conventional, the order of things as ancients might see it."

⁴⁵The LXX translates Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 quite literally. Lev. 18:22, for example, reads: καὶ μετὰ ἄρσενος οὐ κοιμηθήσῃ κοίτην γυναικός· βδέλυγμα γάρ ἐστίν.

⁴⁶Noth, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, rev. ed., translated by J.E. Anderson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 15, 128; Wenham, *Leviticus*, 8-13.

⁴⁷Boswell, *Christianity*, 101, n.34; cf. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, 71-85.

prohibition of all sexual intercourse between males. The reason for the prohibition is implicit in the language chosen to convey it: males should not engage in sexual activity with other males that they engage in with women. Homosexual relationships are apparently conceived of as involving one male assuming a "male" role and penetrating another male who assumes the "female" role. Throughout the Holiness Code there is an obvious concern to prevent the blurring of distinctions and the mixing of things belonging to different categories.⁴⁸ Homosexual behaviour seems to be prohibited because it is regarded as blurring the distinction between male and female. The male who performs the "female" role no longer conforms to the behaviour expected of one belonging to his category. The male who plays the "male" role facilitates this blurring of boundaries and is, thus, equally guilty of an offense.

It is this evaluation of sexual relationships between males that determines later Jewish responses to homosexual behaviour in Graeco-Roman culture. When confronted by the pederastic practices of non-Jews, Jews objected to the fact that the partners shared the same gender but that one partner failed to perform the role deemed appropriate to his gender and the other chose to perform the role appropriate to his gender with a partner who was not the correct object of sexual activity. That is, Jews did not object to pederasty as such, to sexual relations between an adult and an adolescent, but to the fact that pederasty involved sexual relations between two persons of the same gender, relations that negated the gender roles believed to be ordained by God. Obviously alluding to Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, Josephus declares: "The Law recognizes a single sexual union, the natural (κατὰ φύσιν) one with a woman, and that only for the procreation of

⁴⁸Note, for example, the prohibitions of cross-breeding animals, sowing different plants in the same field or wearing garments of mixed fibers (Lev. 19:19). Bestiality is called "confusion" (תבל) and strictly prohibited (Lev. 18:23). Compare Deut. 22:5-11, where, along with cross-dressing, sowing a second kind of plant in a vineyard, yoking an ox and a donkey together and wearing clothes woven of mixed wool and linen fibers are forbidden.

children. The sexual union of males with males (τὴν πρὸς ἄρρενας ἀρρένων) it abhors, and punishes any who engage in it with death.⁴⁹

It is evident, nevertheless, that some Jews did conceive of sexual relations between males in terms of the pederasty they were familiar with amongst non-Jews. The interpretation of the narrative of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 by Jewish authors who wrote in Greek particularly reflects this tendency.

According to the narrative, the men of Sodom surrounded Lot's home and demanded that he hand over the visitors whom he had welcomed, in order that the men of Sodom could "know" them. Most modern interpreters and translators, understand the verb יָדָע to be a euphemism for "have sexual intercourse with".⁵⁰ D. Sherwin Bailey, however, argued that a sexual meaning was not required by the context and that the Sodomites were demanding to examine the strangers, to find out who they were.⁵¹ That this was an act of inhospitable violence, he did not question. What he challenged was the idea that the violence intended by the men of Sodom was sexual in nature. Bailey correctly noted that nowhere in the Hebrew Bible is it suggested that the sin of Sodom was particularly sexual immorality. Inhospitability, pride, arrogance, and selfishness are pointed to, even by Jewish interpreters who found a sexual meaning in the demand of the men of Sodom.⁵²

⁴⁹*Against Apion* II.199-200 (LCL trans., modified).

⁵⁰See, for example, E.A. Speiser, *Genesis, Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1964), 142; John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*. International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), 307.

⁵¹*Homosexuality*, 1-6. Boswell (*Christianity*, 93-97) follows Bailey in his treatment of the Sodom story.

⁵²Josephus, for example, states that God determined to destroy the Sodomites for their arrogance and their hatred of strangers (*Ant.* I.194-195).

It seems, however, that Bailey overstated his case. He ignored the fact that Lot offers his daughters to the men to be used sexually and uses the verb עָדָה with an unambiguously sexual meaning when referring to their virginity.⁵³ It is, therefore, likely that the original readers of the narrative would have understood the men of Sodom to have wanted to make Lot's angelic visitors the objects of sexual activity.⁵⁴ Recognition that the men of Sodom wished to have sexual intercourse with the visitors does not, however, lead to any easy conclusions about what the author thought their motives were or how the act was interpreted. Evidence from ancient Greece and Rome indicates that anal rape of a male was a way of demonstrating one's superior virility and dominance over him.⁵⁵ A similar situation obtained in the ancient Near East.⁵⁶ It is probable, therefore, that the original author(s) and readers of the Sodom narrative would have understood the men of Sodom to have been motivated by a desire to degrade Lot's guests and to demonstrate their power over them, rather than by sexual attraction.

Josephus and Philo, however, ascribe a different motive to the men of Sodom, interpreting the narrative in the light of their understanding of Graeco-Roman same-gender relationships. Like Greek and Roman pederasts, the men of Sodom were overcome with powerful passions when they saw the beauty of the angels whom Josephus describes as "young men" (*Antiquities* I.200). The angels were, according to Philo, objects of the lust of the men of Sodom (*Questions and Answers on Genesis* IV. 37-38, 41). Because they express sexual attraction to young men on this occasion, Philo draws

⁵³"I have two daughters who have not known a man (לֹא יָדָע אִישׁ)" (Gen. 19:8).

⁵⁴Greenberg, *Construction*, 135-136; Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 73.

⁵⁵Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 105.

⁵⁶As reflected, for example, in the Egyptian myth about Seth raping Horus. Seth declares to the assembly of the gods, "I have played the male with Horus," and Horus is treated with contempt by the other gods. See Greenberg, *Construction*, 131-132.

the logical conclusion that they commonly engaged in pederasty. Thus, for him, pederasty becomes an important element, if not the most important element, in the wickedness of the Sodomites for which they were destroyed (*On Abraham* 137-138). Josephus differs from Philo only in that he does not claim that Sodom was destroyed primarily because of the habitual homosexual indulgence of its citizens.

Once a distinction is made between what the narrative of Genesis 19 actually says about the men of Sodom and their attack on Lot's guests and how Josephus and Philo interpreted that narrative, it is possible to gain a significant insight into the Hellenistic Jewish understanding of pagan sexual behaviour. According to Philo and Josephus, pagan males are motivated to engage in sexual intercourse with adolescent males by sexual attraction. They seem to understand this attraction to be similar to the desire that motivates men to seek sexual union with women. It is, nevertheless, a perverted desire, because it is directed at an object other than the one created to be the object of sexual desire and activity. It is possible to miss this distinctive contribution to the interpretation of Genesis 19 if one assumes that the author(s) of the text shared Philo's and Josephus' understanding of the motivating factor leading to homosexual activity. All of the texts in the Hebrew Bible that deal with same-gender sexuality concentrate on the behaviour and show no interest in what motivated it. Hellenistic Jews, on the other hand, were interested in the motivation for sexual unions between males and they ascribed the same motives to those whom the Hebrew Bible describes as engaging in homosexual behaviour as they did to their pagan contemporaries.

In his retelling of the Genesis 18-19 story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Philo states that the people of Sodom enjoyed abundant material prosperity leading to gross self-indulgence. He describes in detail the nature and consequences of this development:

Incapable of bearing such satiety, plunging like cattle, they threw off from their necks the law of nature (τὸν τῆς φύσεως νόμον) and applied themselves to deep drinking of strong liquor and dainty feeding and forbidden forms of intercourse (ὀχρείας ἐκθέσμους). Not only in their mad lust for women did they violate the marriages of their neighbours, but also men mounted males (ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄνδρες ὄντες ἄρρεσιν ἐπιβαινοντες) without respect for the nature (φύσιν) which the active partners (οἱ δρῶντες) share with the passive (τοὺς πάσχοντας); and so when they tried to beget children they were discovered to be incapable of any but a sterile seed. Yet the discovery availed them not, so much stronger was the force of the desires (ἐπιθυμίας) which mastered them. Then, as little by little they accustomed to women's roles (τὰ γυναικῶν) those who were born males, they saddled them with the formidable curse of a female disease. For not only did they render female (γυναικοῦντες) their bodies by luxury and voluptuousness but they worked a further degeneration in their souls.⁵⁷

Like Plato and Dio Chrysostom, Philo characterizes homosexual activity as the behaviour of people given over to mad self-indulgence and sensuality. The Sodomites, he insists, moved from debauched heterosexual promiscuity to male homosexual behaviour in the process of casting off restraints on the expression of their sexual appetites. Even when they realized that such behaviour could not produce children, they did not give it up, their ability to distinguish between right and wrong sexual activity having been overcome by the force of "desires." Philo's words leave the clear implication that he believed that both active and passive partners were motivated by lust and that both partners enjoyed the behaviour. Philo thus differed from many of his Greek and Roman contemporaries, who often characterized the passive role as unpleasant, claimed that it was forced upon youths, and criticized those who abused young males by forcing them to participate in homosexual activity.

What Philo found objectionable about homosexual behaviour is clear. Males, he says, mounted males without regard to the fact that the active and the passive partner share the same gender. He assumes that every sexual act involves an active and a passive

⁵⁷Philo, *Abr.* 135-136 (LCL trans., modified).

partner. Since males are by nature active, one of them must have assumed a passive female role in the act, denying his "nature." As the passive partners became accustomed to the female role, they were afflicted with "a female disease," that is, they became effeminate. For, Philo asserts, they not only became like women in their self-indulgence and moral weakness, but they made their souls degenerate. Philo's emphasis is on the consequences of homosexual activity for the passive partner. The active partner is not described as negating his maleness, but he is condemned for seeking pleasure with a sexual partner of the wrong gender and for making a male degrade himself to assume a female role.

Philo contrasts sterile homosexual unions with those blessed by God, "the unions which men and women naturally (κατὰ φύσιν) make for begetting children" (*Abr.* 137), and declares that, had God not destroyed them, others might have followed the example of the homosexual Sodomites, and "city after city would have become a desert, as though depopulated by a pestilential sickness" (*On Abraham* 136). Clearly, again like Plato, Philo believed that the purpose of intercourse was procreation. Sexual pleasure without a procreative purpose was inappropriate and sexual pleasure could not be an end in itself.⁵⁸ Thus, homosexual behaviour is wrong, according to Philo, both because it involves inappropriate gender role behaviour, and because it is nonprocreative. There is not the slightest hint here that Philo is concerned with any of the specific abuses which pederasty might involve. He does not mention the age of either partner, nor their social status. His explicit concern is with gender and procreation. His criticisms would apply just as much to a relationship between two adult males as they would to a relationship between an adult male and a boy.

⁵⁸On Philo's views on intercourse and procreation, see Richard A. Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), 94-95.

When he deals with homosexual behaviour in *The Contemplative Life*, Philo does mention the age difference of the participants (59), as Scroggs notes.⁵⁹ This text clearly indicates his knowledge of the particular form which homosexual behaviour usually took in the Greek world. It is equally clear, however, that his concern was not with the difference of age, but with the sameness of gender. He contrasts the love of women for men and men for women with the love of men for men (ἀνδρῶν ἄρρεσιν) and condemns homosexual behaviour because it leads to effeminacy and weakness in the passive partner, who becomes a creature half male and half female (ἀνδρογύνος), and who is "reduced...to the the grade and condition of a girl besieged by a lover" (60-61). He continues with his condemnation by declaring that the lover neglects both public and private needs for his beloved, his body wasting away through desire and his wealth declining through neglect and expenditure on his beloved. Finally, as a result of such behaviour, Philo declares, cities become depopulated because procreative intercourse is neglected (62). Scroggs is correct that Philo was thinking of the pederasty with which he was familiar, but it is clear that he is not condemning pederasty *per se*. Rather, he is condemning sexual activity between two males.

Philo's lengthy discussion of homosexual behaviour in his detailed commentary on the Ten Commandments, the *Special Laws*, reflects the same attitude. The immediate context of the discussion is his treatment of Jewish sexual ethics in the course of commenting on the Seventh Commandment. Prior to dealing with homosexual behaviour, Philo explains that the purpose of the biblical prohibition of intercourse with a menstruating woman was to prevent sexual intercourse that would not lead to conception (*Spec.* III. 32-33). From this, he concludes that any sexual act which cannot produce children is prohibited (*Spec.* III. 34-36). Thus, a man should not marry a woman known

⁵⁹Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 95.

to be barren, and he may even divorce his wife if she is not able to produce children. In abstaining from sexual intercourse during menstruation, a man "respects the law of nature (νόμον φύσεως αἰδούμενος)." In contrast, those who knowingly engage in non-reproductive sexual activity are "enemies of nature (ἐχθροὶ τῆς φύσεως)" and "adversaries of God (ἀντίπαλοι θεοῦ)." According to Philo, "nature" decrees that the purpose of intercourse is procreation. A "natural" relationship is one that can produce children. Thus, when Philo turns to discuss pederasty (τὸ παιδεραστεῖν) it is not surprising that he stresses its non-procreative character. The pederast, he asserts, "does his best to render cities desolate and uninhabited by destroying the means of procreation" (*Spec.* III.39).

Furthermore, as he did in his account of the destruction of Sodom and in *The Contemplative Life*, Philo points to the gender norm violations that he believes homosexual behaviour involves. The passive partner transforms "the male nature" (τὴν ἄρρενα φύσιν) into the female (*Spec.* III.37) and debases "the sterling coin of nature" (*Spec.* III.38). The active partner pursues "an unnatural pleasure" (τὴν παρὰ φύσιν ἡδονήν) (*Spec.* III.39). Thus, by "nature" Philo seems to mean simultaneously two things: the individual nature of the male involved in homosexual activity (his gender nature), and the order of things, the way things ought to be, as God designed them ("ideal nature"). God or "nature," of course, decrees both that male gender nature requires certain types of behaviour and sexual object choices and that the purpose of sexual intercourse is procreation.

Philo's treatment of homosexual behaviour as "against nature" and his concern with gender roles should not be considered apart from his treatment of the nature of the genders and the relationship of male and female.⁶⁰ It is clear that Philo believed that

⁶⁰For Philo on women, see Dorothy Sly, *Philo's Perception of Women*, Brown Judaic Studies, no. 209 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 43-54. Cf. Baer, *Male and Female*, 41-42

females were inferior to males, essentially incomplete human beings. Females are meant to be passive and subordinate, while males are to be active and dominant. The male is rational, the female is sensual. The inferiority of the female means, of course, that it would be extremely problematic if a male wished to act as a female, or a male made another male act that way.⁶¹ Like his Greek and Roman contemporaries, Philo believed that the male who assumed a passive role in sexual activity negated his true gender identity. Furthermore, such behaviour offends not only against the male nature of the individual involved, but against "maleness" in general.⁶²

Thus, Philo is not simply concerned that males should have intercourse with females and not with other males, but also with the role that an individual plays in the sexual act. While he condemns both participants in homosexual activity, Philo reserves his harshest words for the passive partner who, he insists, degrades himself by making himself like a female. He condemns pederastic efforts to prolong youthful beauty for negating masculinity, for leading to effeminacy, and describes "unmanliness" (ἀνανδρία) and "softness" (μαλακία) as "grievous vices" (οἱ μέγιστοι κάκοι) (*Spec.* III.39). There is a clear difference in the way Philo condemns the active and the passive partner in homosexual activity. The passive partner is described as a degenerate, who negates his masculinity, who is neither male nor female, and who corrupts himself. The active

⁶¹Baer (*Male and Female*, 58) comments: "Particularly abhorrent to Philo was the passive effeminate attitude of the male homosexual. A slave to irrational passion and infected by the 'female disease,' he was a blatant contradiction of man as he should be, i.e. man guided by the sovereign, active, masculine mind....Thus, in spite of the fact that the soul or mind of man must become female-passive in relationship to God, for a man to become effeminate or womanish in his relationships within society, and particularly within the sexual sphere, is totally rejected."

⁶²According to Philo: "These persons are rightly judged worthy of death by those who obey the law, which ordains that the man-woman who debases the sterling coin of nature should perish unavenged, suffered not to live for a day or even an hour, as a disgrace to himself, his house, his native land and the whole human race" (*Spec.* III. 38).

partner is condemned for seeking sexual pleasure with the wrong object, but he is not characterized with the same vitriol.

Robin Scroggs is, of course, correct when he notes that, "when Philo reads the general laws in his Bible against male homosexuality he is thinking entirely about the cultural manifestation in his own environment."⁶³ Nevertheless, he begs the question of what it was about pederasty that Philo found objectionable. It is clear that Philo was concerned with procreation and with gender norms, rather than with abuse or exploitation. He shows none of the sympathy for the fate of the exploited passive partner that a few Graeco-Roman writers do. Thus, it must be emphasized that Philo is condemning homosexual relationships in general, rather than pederasty in particular.

Homosexual Behaviour as a Gentile Vice

Jewish critics of Graeco-Roman sexual practices regularly characterize homosexual behaviour as a distinctively Gentile vice to which Jews were not prone. This attitude is particularly evident in Josephus' treatment of the parallel stories of the Sodomites' attack on Lot's guests (Gen. 19:1-11) and the Benjamites' assault on the Levite and his concubine (Judges 19:22-30).⁶⁴ Whereas Josephus claims that the men of Sodom were intent on having sexual contact with the angels, motivated by lust for their youthful beauty, in his retelling of the story from Judges Josephus does not mention the Benjamites' desire to "know" the Levite (Judges 19:22)⁶⁵ and claims that they were only after his concubine. In fact, contrary to what the story in Judges says, Josephus claims the Benjamites dragged the woman from the house themselves. Scroggs comments:

⁶³Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 88.

⁶⁴*Ant.* V. 136-149.

⁶⁵הוצא ארדהאיש אשר בא אל ביתך ותרעם

"Fellow Israelites cannot be portrayed as having homosexual desires; hence the Benjamites lust only for the concubine....In this way he removes any hint of homosexuality from the story, in contrast to his emphasis on the pederastic lust in the story of Sodom!"⁶⁶

In Book 3 of the Sybilline Oracles⁶⁷ the claim is advanced that Jews, unlike all other people, refrain from homosexual intercourse:

Greatly, surpassing all men, they are mindful of holy wedlock, and they do not engage in impious intercourse with male children, as do Phoenicians, Egyptians, and Romans, spacious Greece and many nations of others, Persians and Galatians and all Asia, transgressing the holy law of immortal God, which they transgressed (3:594-600).

Similarly, the author of the Letter of Aristeas identifies sexual irregularities such as intercourse of men with men (προάγουσι τοὺς ἄρνας) as a distinguishing feature of the life of non-Jews, and insists that Jewish separation from the rest of humankind keeps them from such behaviour (Letter of Aristeas 152-153).

Later Rabbinic dissuasions also treat homosexual practice as an exclusively Gentile vice. This understanding is reflected, for example, in the discussion of the prohibition of an unmarried man teaching children, in the Mishnah (*Kiddushin* 4.13) and the commentaries on this passage in the Babylonian Talmud and the Tosefta. The Mishnah states:

An unmarried man may not be a teacher of children, nor may a woman be a teacher of children. R. Eliezer says: Even a man that has no wife [with him] may not be a teacher of children. R. Judah says: An unmarried man may not herd cattle, nor may two unmarried men sleep under the same cloak. But the Sages permit it.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 90.

⁶⁷Composed, according to John Collins, by an Egyptian Jew c. 163-145 B.C.E (see *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 355).

⁶⁸Trans.: *The Mishnah*, trans. Herbert Danby (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

It appears that Rabbi Judah believed the rule against an unmarried man serving as a teacher was designed to safeguard the children from molestation, and he wanted to supplement it with further rules that would prevent situations from arising in which homosexual activity or bestiality might occur. Thus, he prohibited unmarried men tending animals or sleeping together under the same cover. According to the Tosefta and Talmud, his interpretation of the prohibition was challenged by those who felt that it was designed to prevent sexual activity between the teacher and parents of the children.⁶⁹ An unmarried man might seduce his student's mother or a woman teacher might be seduced by her student's father. According to these rabbis, the prohibition could not have been directed against pederasty, because "Israel is not suspected of male homosexual behaviour" (לא נחשדו ישראל על משכב זכור).⁷⁰ The same rejoinder, "Israel is not suspected of male homosexual behaviour," is given in response to the additional rules proposed by Rabbi Judah. Clearly, these sages believed that there was no need for such strictures because Jews simply did not engage in such activities as bestiality and homosexual behaviour. They would not even be tempted to engage in them, even if put in situations where, conceivably, Gentiles would be tempted.⁷¹

Jews not only claimed that homosexual behaviour was a Gentile vice; they also condemned the Gentiles for their behaviour and declared that they violated God's will for human life. They believed that indulgence in homosexual behaviour was wrong for all

⁶⁹This was apparently the majority view. See Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 79.

⁷⁰Babylonian Talmud Kid. 82a; cf. TKid. 5.10.

⁷¹The claims made by Jewish writers need not, however, be taken as reflecting actual reality. In a recent study of Philo's statements about infanticide, Adele Reinhartz suggests that Philo's tirades against Gentiles actually reflect concern about the behaviour of Jews ("Philo on Infanticide," *Studia Philonica Annual* 4 (1992), ed. David T. Runia, Brown Judaic Studies, no. 264 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 42-58). She concludes that "in family life, as in many other matters, Jews were not always different from, or better than, their neighbours" (p. 58). Similar conclusions could be reached about Jewish indulgence in homosexual behaviour.

people, not just Jews. *Sybilline Oracle* 3.600 states that Gentiles who engage in homosexual behaviour transgress "the holy law of immortal God," and 3:762-766 calls on Gentiles to shun idolatry, adultery, homosexual behaviour and infanticide, "for the Immortal is angry at whoever commits these sins." Philo was convinced that God had destroyed Sodom, a Gentile city, because its residents were wholly given over to homosexual indulgence. William Countryman's claim that Jews understood the prohibition of homosexual behaviour as a peculiarity of Jews must, therefore, be questioned.¹ The evidence indicates, rather, that at least some Jews believed that homosexual behaviour was wrong for all people, that it violated fundamental laws established by God which were binding on both Jews and Gentiles.

Judaism and Homosexual Behaviour: Conclusions

Jewish responses to homosexual behaviour were consistently negative, focusing on the gender of the parties involved in homosexual relationships and the non-procreative character of homosexual acts. Jews believed that God had established the order that Plato and others called "nature," and that sexual activity between persons of the same gender was against this order. Writers like Philo express particular concern about the gender-role violations of the passive partner in male homosexual acts, but also condemn the active partner. In particular, he is condemned for engaging in nonprocreative intercourse "against nature." Homosexual behaviour is usually treated as a distinctively Gentile vice and the claim is advanced that Jews do not engage in homosexual behaviour, nor is it even a temptation.

¹ *Dirt, Greed and Sex*, 61-64.

Conclusions

Homosexual activity between males was widely tolerated in the Graeco-Roman world. The usual form of homosexual relationship was pederastic, involving an adult male and an adolescent boy. Slaves and prostitutes were also frequently objects of homosexual attention. Relationships between two adults of similar social status were not entirely unknown, however.

Despite criticism of obvious abuses which pederasty entailed, both Jewish and non-Jewish criticisms of same-gender sexuality are usually reducible to attacks on gender-role violations and the fact that homosexual acts were non-procreative. Thus, it is appropriate to insist that Greek and Roman homosexual behaviour was attacked as homosexual behaviour *per se*, rather than to accept Robin Scroggs' argument that the primary focus was on pederastic abuses. To anticipate the discussion of the following chapter, it is likely that Paul, at least in part, shared the evaluation of homosexual behaviour that his Jewish and Gentile contemporaries did. In interpreting Romans 1:18-32, therefore, I will focus on Paul's understanding of the sexual order established by God, especially his beliefs about gender roles and the purpose of sexual intercourse, and his attitude towards procreation.

CHAPTER FOUR

ROM. 1:26-27 AND HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret Paul's statements in Romans 1:26-27 using the methods of traditional historical criticism informed by the challenges offered by newer interpretive approaches. This interpretation will be undertaken in the light of recent scholarship and the modern context in which that scholarship has been produced. Furthermore, I shall attempt to understand the place of Paul's statements in their own historical context. My goal is to offer an original contribution to the ongoing discussions of Rom. 1:26-27 and its statements about homosexual behaviour.

1 Corinthians 6:9 and Romans 1:26-27: Some Preliminary Notes

Before turning to the interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27, it is necessary to deal with 1 Corinthians 6:9, the only other passage in Paul's undisputed writings which traditionally has been understood to refer to homosexual behaviour.¹ Since this text may illuminate Rom. 1:26-27, it is important to begin with a clear understanding of what it says. In 1 Cor. 6:9-10, Paul declares that "the unrighteous (ἀδικοί) will not inherit the Reign of God," and gives a list of such unrighteous people which includes the μαλακοί and ἀρσενοκοίται.

These two terms have been variously translated. Jerome translated them with "molles" and "masculorum concubitores." Luther employed "Weichlinge" ("sissies"/"softies") and "Knabenschänder" ("abusers of boys"). The Authorized (King James) Version renders them as "effeminate" and "abusers of themselves with mankind."

¹ 1 Tim. 1:10, which was probably not written by Paul, uses one of the terms (ἀρσενοκοίτης) that Paul uses in 1 Cor. 6:9. What is said about the meaning of this term in 1 Cor. 6:9 applies to its meaning in 1 Tim. 1:10.

The commentators Robertson and Plummer offered the translations "sensualist" and "sodomite."² The first edition of the Revised Standard Version New Testament (1946) translated the two words with the single term "homosexuals." Later editions substituted "sexual perverts," again translating two words with one. The New International Version offers "male prostitutes" and "homosexual offenders." The New Revised Standard Version inexplicably renders ἀρσενοκοῖται with the archaic and extremely misleading term "sodomites", while agreeing with the NIV in translating μαλακοί as "male prostitutes."

It is perhaps not surprising that John Boswell has been at the center of controversy about the interpretation of these words. Boswell claims, in a lengthy lexicographical study, that neither word refers specifically to homosexual behaviour.³ He notes that the basic meaning of μαλακός is "soft," that in classical and Hellenistic usage it designated males who were weak, cowardly, and slaves to sensual pleasure, that in Byzantine Greek it meant "masturbator," and suggests that Paul meant by it someone who is self-indulgent. Such self-indulgence might include participation in homosexual activity, but is not limited to such behaviour. Boswell asserts that the term ἀρσενοκοῖται is never used in Greek Christian texts specifically of someone who engages in homosexual behaviour. He adds that the ἀρσειν- in ἀρσενοκοῖται could be understood either as the subject or as the object of the behaviour designated by the term. According to Boswell it is better taken as the subject, and the designation translated "males who have sex." Thus he would identify the ἀρσενοκοῖται as active male prostitutes, the Roman *exoleti*, who sexually penetrated

²Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, 2d ed. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), 117.

³"Lexicography and Saint Paul," the first appendix in Boswell, *Christianity*, 335-353.

either males or females.⁴ The term, according to Boswell, should not be understood to designate "homosexuals" in general.

Boswell's interpretation of the term ἀρσενοκοῖται has been challenged by David F. Wright, who marshals evidence to show that the term *was* used to designate males who engaged in homosexual activity.⁵ Wright cites evidence from a number of sources, but begins his critique by noting the strong verbal similarities between the LXX translation of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 and the word ἀρσενοκοῖται. According to Wright, "the parallel between the LXX's ἀρσενος οὐ κοιμηθήσῃ κούτην and even more κοιμηθῆ μετὰ ἀρσενος κούτην and Paul's ἀρσενοκοῖται is surely inescapable."⁶ He concludes that the term "came into use, under the influence of the LXX of Leviticus, to denote that homoerotic vice which Jewish writers like Philo, Josephus, Paul and Ps-Phocylides regarded as a signal token of pagan Greek depravity."⁷

Working independently, Robin Scroggs reached similar conclusions about the origin and meaning of the term ἀρσενοκοῖται.⁸ Scroggs differs from Wright only in suggesting that ἀρσενοκοῖτης is based on the Rabbinic term *בשכב זכר*, which of course is based on the wording of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13.⁹ The term *μαλακός*, Scroggs asserts, refers to "the effeminate call-boy," a young (or young looking) male prostitute who dressed in feminine clothing. According to Scroggs, therefore, the terms refer

⁴The satirist Juvenal in his *Ninth Satire* describes an *exoletus* named Naevolus, who services both his male client and the man's wife.

⁵"Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of APΣENOKOITAI (1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10," *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984): 125-153.

⁶Ibid., 129.

⁷Ibid., 145.

⁸Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 107-108.

⁹On the origin and meaning of the term, see Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 83.

respectively to male prostitutes who were penetrated by other males and to the males who penetrated them. Thus, Scroggs claims, Paul was thinking specifically of pederasty and prostitution when he used these terms.¹⁰ Scroggs's case rests on the assumption that Jewish authors were concerned specifically with pederasty even when they used the general language of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13. However, as the discussion in the previous chapter of Jewish responses to homosexual behaviour has demonstrated, this was not the case. Hellenistic Jewish writers like Philo were concerned with the gender of the participants in homosexual activity, rather than with their ages or social status. Furthermore, it is clear that the term *μαλακός* could be used of other men than simply prostitutes. Men who were called *κιναιδός* could also be called *μαλακός*, and the former term certainly was used specifically of free, adult males who, among other things, were said to enjoy being sexually penetrated by other males. In fact, as Cantarella asserts:

To maintain that *malakoi* referred to passive homosexuals of a youthful age...means falsifying the meaning of the term....The Greek word *malakia* indicates, exactly like *mollities*, the lamentable passivity of an adult Obviously, then, the term which had originally meant 'soft' in the sense of sweet or mannerly, had taken on the negative value of 'effeminate'. And for the ancient world, an effeminate person only meant a passive adult male. A boy could not be such, because he lacked the prerequisites of softness. How could a boy who was not yet a man become effeminate, despising his manliness? Intellectually still weak, like women, legally incapable of acting, also like a woman, sexually indeterminate, because he was not yet capable of fertilising anybody, the boy, by definition, could not be described as effeminate.¹¹

It is almost certainly correct, therefore, to assert that both *ἀρσενοκοῦται* and *μαλακοί* designated males who engaged in homosexual activity. Neither word, however, referred to exactly the same kind of individual that the modern word "homosexual" does. To refer to someone as *μαλακός* could identify him as a male who participated in

¹⁰Ibid., 108-109. In the 2nd edition of *The Moral Teaching of Paul*, 68-73, Furnish adopts Scroggs' interpretation of the terms.

¹¹Cantarella, *Bisexuality*, 192-193.

homosexual intercourse as the passive partner. It could also designate him more generally as a male who failed to live up to cultural ideals of right manhood. Someone who was *μαλακός* might be cowardly and weak, dress in feminine styles of clothing, perfume himself and wear his hair in an extravagant fashion, and might be generally sexually self-indulgent, while never participating in a homosexual relationship. Those who called him *μαλακός*, however, would have assumed that his other behaviour indicated his willingness to assume the passive role in homosexual activity. The best translation of the word might be "unmanly," recognizing of course that the standard of judgment is that of the ancient Graeco-Roman world. Since Paul says almost nothing about what characteristics he believes make a man "manly," it is difficult to know what behaviour he believed violated such a standard.¹² In the light of Hellenistic Jewish discussions of Gentile homosexual behaviour, it seems reasonable to conclude that Paul used the term *μαλακός* to refer to a male who was the passive participant in homosexual behaviour, and that his readers would have understood this to be the referent of the word.

There can be little doubt, as Wright demonstrates, that the word *ἀρσενοκοίτης* referred to someone who participated in homosexual behaviour. Such a person was not, however, simply a "homosexual." The word says nothing about his "sexual orientation," whereas the word "homosexual" can. Rather, *ἀρσενοκοίτης* is a behavioural designation. It is probably best translated literally as "a man who lies with males", or, to take away any ambiguity, as "a man who sexually penetrates males." Rabbinic usage of *משכב זכר* suggests, perhaps, that Paul could have used *ἀρσενοκοίτης* to designate both the active and the passive participant in homosexual intercourse. Thus, the best translation might be "a man who has sexual intercourse with males." The use of *ἀρσενοκοίτης* by itself in 1

¹²Almost certainly he did not value aggressiveness and military skill, as the Romans did. His statements about women are ambiguous enough to leave doubt about whether he felt male and female virtues and characteristics were fundamentally different.

Tim. 1:10 seems to support this approach to translation. The author of this text appears to have understood the term to be general enough in its meaning to stand alongside πόρνος to designate sexual immorality of all sorts.¹³ It must be repeated, however, that any translation must reflect the focus of the term on behaviour rather than sexual disposition, so as to avoid reading modern ideas about homosexuality into a text composed in a cultural context in which different attitudes and interpretations operated.¹⁴

If this interpretation of these terms is correct, it means that Paul condemned both the active and the passive participant in a homosexual relationship, claiming that they were excluded from the Reign of God. He designates the passive partner with a standard Greek term, but employs the language of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 to condemn the active partner. This latter usage indicates that he was drawing on Hellenistic Jewish critiques of Gentile homosexual relationships which, as the discussion in Chapter 3 makes clear, were directed against the fact that these relationships involved sexual activity between two males. Thus, it can be asserted that Paul condemned homosexual behaviour *per se*, and not specific aspects of homosexual behaviour as he knew it. That

¹³This interpretation assumes the correctness of understanding 1 Tim. 1:9-10 as a paraphrase of the Ten Commandments, with πόρνοις ἀρσενοκοίταις standing together for the Seventh Commandment, "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14). Philo's discussion of homosexual behaviour under the heading of the Seventh Commandment in the *Special Laws* should be recalled.

¹⁴Cf. William L. Petersen, "Can ΑΡΣΕΝΟΚΟΙΤΑΙ be Translated by 'Homosexuals'? (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 40 (1986): 189, who notes that the translation of ἀρσενοκοίταις by "homosexuals" "fails as a translation for it violates historical and linguistic fact by attempting to read a modern concept back into antiquity, where no equivalent concept existed. Once that error has been committed, the inaccuracies multiply exponentially: e.g., (1) the translation is inaccurate because it includes celibate homophiles; (2) it incorrectly excludes *heterosexuals* who engage in homosexual acts; (3) it incorrectly includes female homosexuals." Wright in a rather intemperate response to Petersen ("Translating ΑΡΣΕΝΟΚΟΙΤΑΙ (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 41 (1987): 396-398), defends his use of "homosexuals" by claiming that he used the term "homosexual" in its more popular meaning, to designate a male who engages in homosexual behaviour. He seems, however, to miss the point that such an assumption needs to be made explicit every time the word is used in order to avoid the sort of confusions to which Petersen points. Wright's obvious concern with the modern relevance of 1 Cor. 6:9, evident in an article written for the *Evangelical Quarterly* ("Homosexuality: The Relevance of the Bible," *Evangelical Quarterly* 61 (1989): 296-299), seems to have gotten in the way of sound exegetical judgment.

this is also the approach reflected in Rom. 1:26-27 will be made clear by the following discussion.

Did Paul Condemn Homosexual Behaviour in Rom. 1:26-27?

The question of whether or not Paul condemned homosexual behaviour, raised by John Boswell, Robin Scroggs, and William Countryman, is, of course, important for modern Christians who are trying to develop an ethical position on homosexuality. It is important, as well, as an historical question. For if Paul did not hold a negative attitude towards homosexual relationships, he would have been unique amongst Jewish thinkers of the 1st century C.E.

Since much of the debate about Paul's attitude towards homosexual behaviour centers on the meaning of *παρὰ φύσιν* in Rom. 1:26-27 it seems appropriate to focus first on this question. As I noted in Chapter 2, interpreters differ about how one should go about determining what Paul meant when he characterized the behaviour he described in Rom. 1:26-27 as *παρὰ φύσιν*. John Boswell and William Countryman maintain that other references to "nature" in Paul's writings should be considered and the meaning of "nature" in Rom. 1:26-27 deduced from this usage. Richard Hays, however, insists that Paul is drawing on existing polemical traditions, and that we must understand his meaning by considering what it meant for his contemporaries to designate homosexual behaviour "against nature." Hays' position is certainly the most tenable. Homosexual behaviour was so frequently described as "against nature" in contemporary literature that it is difficult to imagine that Paul could have used the same terminology as his contemporaries and not have intended to say about homosexual behaviour essentially what they were saying. It is likely that he would have expected his readers to draw on their own knowledge of anti-homosexual polemic, which included the designation "against nature," and to interpret his words as meaning the same thing as they would have

if written by a pagan or Jewish critic of homosexual behaviour. Since "against nature" is certainly conventional language, and Rom. 1:18-32 is a passage full of conventional language, it must be concluded that the burden of proof rests with those who would assert that Paul meant by "against nature" something radically different from what his contemporaries did. From a historical point of view it seems perfectly legitimate at least to begin with the assumption that Paul employed this conventional expression in the same way as everyone else did.

What, then, did Paul's contemporaries mean when they declared that homosexual acts were "against nature?" "Nature," for non-Jewish writers, was the rational order of the universe, the way things ought to be. This order could be recognized by rational reflection because the rational order and the rational mind corresponded. According to the dominant view, the "natural" (κατὰ φύσιν) purpose of sexual intercourse was procreation. Thus, "natural" intercourse was heterosexual, and engaged in primarily for the purpose of procreation. Furthermore, there was held to be a "natural" distinction between male and female. Males and females were defined by certain basic characteristics and expected to act in a certain way. To adopt the characteristics and behaviour which were held to belong to the other sex was "against nature," both "nature" as the rational order of the universe, and one's own "nature" as male or female.

Jews like Philo and Josephus, who began with a biblically-based objection to male homosexual behaviour, adopted much of the terminology of Graeco-Roman polemic against homosexual behaviour. "Nature" for them designated the order established by God the Creator, an order reflected in the revealed Law, but also discernible in the creation itself ("the Law of Nature"). Like their Gentile contemporaries, Jewish critics of homosexual behaviour condemned it for being non-procreative and because it involved individuals acting in a manner deemed contrary to proper gender norms, norms established by God. The discussion of Philo's treatment of homosexuality in Chapter 3

indicates that he used "nature" with two distinct meanings. Primarily, he seems to have used "natural" to designate sexual activity which was procreative and to have regarded any nonprocreative sexual activity as unnatural. Nevertheless, he regarded homosexual activity as more reprehensible than nonprocreative heterosexual activity and also used "nature" to refer to the gender nature, role, and identity of the individuals involved in sexual activity. Natural sexual activity, in this case, was that in which the participants acted in accordance with their gender nature. For Philo, homosexual activity was abhorrent, not only because it was non-procreative, but also because it involved gender identity confusion and gender role violation.

Both Hays and Cranfield claim that Paul would have looked to Genesis 1-3, the narrative of the creation, as his source of information on what "nature," the order established by God, involved. Hays notes the numerous allusions to Gen. 1-3 in Rom. 1:18-32, and concludes that Paul and his readers would naturally have evaluated homosexual behaviour in the light of the creation story. Specifically, they would have noted the procreative blessing, "be fruitful and multiply," the reference to the creation of humankind "male and female," the description of the creation of Woman, and the declaration that in marriage a man and woman become "one flesh." Thus, when Paul described homosexual acts as "against nature," he was quite specifically declaring that they violated the sexual and gender order the creation of which is the subject of the first chapters of Genesis.

Hays' interpretation of Paul's words is quite convincing, but it seems reasonable to ask whether Paul's conception of the creation order would have included every detail that Hays asserts it did. It must be noted that Hays does not actually argue for his understanding of "nature," nor for the claim that Paul alludes to Genesis 1-3, nor for why his understanding of Paul's reading of Genesis is valid. He assumes these points. These assumptions must be tested, and the nature of Hays' claims clarified.

Hays asserts that Paul's references to the creation and God as creator would have led his readers to think about the creation story in Genesis. They would then have read Paul's statements about same-gender sexuality in the light of this story. Clearly, to employ the terminology of reader-response criticism, what Hays is doing is describing the response of Paul's "implied reader." This reader is familiar with Genesis 1-3, and recognizes Paul's allusions to the Genesis creation narrative. He or she is capable of recognizing that Paul evaluates homosexual acts in the light of Genesis 1-3 and wishes the readers of his letter to do the same. The differences between this reader and a "real reader" must be stressed. The real reader is any person who actually reads and interprets a text. He or she may not necessarily assume the role of the implied reader. Historical-critical interpreters tend not to make the distinctions between typologies of reader that literary theorists do. Consequently, it is possible for them to assume, as Hays appears to do, that all of Paul's readers would read the text in the way that Hays asserts that they were supposed to. This approach is implicit in Hays' claim that the use of creation/creator language "would *certainly* evoke for Paul, as well as for his readers, immediate recollections of the creation story in Genesis 1-3."¹⁵

Many biblical interpreters who make use of literary-critical methods insist that no appeal should be made to elements outside the text under consideration. Specifically, they would assert that one should not make assumptions about what the implied reader was supposed to know apart from information supplied by the text. In contrast, it is a common element in historical-critical approaches to the biblical texts to try to reconstruct the context in which a text was read, in order to illuminate its meaning. An approach which combines recent literary critical theory with a traditional historical methodology might focus on the context in which the original readers read a text. The goal of such a

¹⁵Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural," 191 (emphasis added).

focus would be to offer an interpretation which might conceivably have been offered by one of these original readers.¹⁶ This approach is to be contrasted with one the goal of which is to discover "*the meaning*" of a text in some absolute sense. The following discussion represents an attempt to apply such a literary-historical approach to understanding Paul's treatment of homosexuality and his apparent appeal to Genesis in Romans 1:26-27. The rationale for applying such an approach to the question is that it seems required by Hay's concern with how Paul's readers would have responded to his statements in Romans.

As Hays notes, Genesis 1:27-28 proclaims that humankind was created by God "male and female" and blessed with the capacity to procreate. The distinction between male and female and the procreative purpose of sexuality would seem to be basic to God's creative purpose. It is clear, however, that some early Christians differed from at least some Jews in believing that the blessing "be fruitful and multiply" did not place every person under an obligation to marry and beget children. Their high regard for celibacy is evident.¹⁷ It can be argued, consequently, that Paul's readers might not have read his statements about homosexual behaviour in the light of the stress on procreation that one finds in Genesis. It is more likely that the narrative's stress on gender duality would have been a matter of interest. The original readers would, therefore, have been selective in their application of Genesis 1-3 to the interpretation of Paul's words.

In Genesis 2, the male-female distinction is represented in a different fashion than in Genesis 1. God creates a single human being, and from this being a female is taken.

¹⁶This "literary-historical" approach, applied to the Gospel of Mark, is exemplified in Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989).

¹⁷See, for example, the statement in Matt. 19:10-12 attributed to Jesus, in which he praises celibacy. Some of the members of the Christian community at Corinth evidently favoured celibacy, and Paul affirms this while upholding the value of marriage (1 Cor. 7:1-38). If Philo's testimony is correct, some Jewish groups, such as the Essenes and Therapeutae also valued celibacy.

The implication of the language employed is that the original human being was male and that the female was made for him out of part of himself (Gen. 2:20-23). Hays' claim that Genesis 2 "describes Woman and Man as created for one another"¹⁸ must, therefore, be questioned. It appears that Hays reads a modern focus on gender equality and mutuality into the Genesis 2 creation account. That this is the case is born out by an examination of ancient Jewish and Christian interpretations of Genesis 2. The author of 1 Timothy, for example, asserts that women should "learn in silence and full submission" and that they should not teach or exercise authority over men because "Adam was formed first, then Eve" (1 Tim. 2:11-13). The lesson this teacher draws from Genesis 2 is that the female is secondary to and dependent on the male and, therefore, should be subordinate. Similarly, Philo writes as follows in *Quaestiones et solutiones in Gen. 27*:

Why was not woman, like the other animals and man, also formed from earth, instead of the side of man? First, because woman is not equal in honor with man. Second because she is not equal in age but younger. Wherefore those who take wives who have passed their prime are to be criticized for destroying the laws of nature. Third, he wishes that man should take care of woman as a very necessary part of him; but woman, in return should serve him as a whole. Fourth, he counsels man figuratively to take care of woman as a daughter, and woman to honor man as a father. And this is proper because a woman changes her habitation from her family to her husband...one (i.e., the woman) who has made a change should give to him who has taken her the honor she showed to those who begot her.¹⁹

This evidence indicates a need for caution in attributing a particular understanding of Genesis 1-3 to Paul's readers without considering how their contemporaries read the text. While he correctly points to Paul's allusions to the Genesis creation story, Hays seems, nevertheless, to assume that Paul's readers interpreted Genesis 1-3 the same way Hays does, thus blurring the distinction between ancient and modern ideas in a way very

¹⁸Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural," 191.

¹⁹LCL trans., quoted by Murphy-O'Connor, "Sex and Logic," 496, n.56; Murphy-O'Connor notes that Philo "appeals to the actual condition of woman to justify the difference in her mode of creation" (p. 496).

similar to the way Boswell does. The evidence considered here for how others read Genesis 1-3 does not, of course, prove that Paul shared these interpretations. Readers may not, after all, read a text as the author intended. It is necessary now to focus on the question of author intention and to turn to Paul's own writings to see what light they shed on the question.

It appears certain that Paul understood "nature" to designate the order established by God. What would Paul have thought this order involved? When Paul applies nature terminology to homosexual behaviour does it have either or both of the significances that Philo gave to it? First, we need to consider whether Paul opposed homosexual behaviour because it was nonprocreative? We have seen that both Jewish and Graeco-Roman critics of homosexual behaviour pointed to its non-procreative character. Philo, in particular, saw homosexuality as a threat to the survival of the human race. Another Hellenistic Jew, the author of Pseudo-Phocylides, commands: "Do not remain unmarried, lest you die nameless. Give nature her due, you also, beget in your turn as you were begotten" (lines 175-176A).²⁰ Later rabbinic discussions of Gen. 1:28 treat "be fruitful and multiply" as a commandment binding on all human beings, but especially binding on Jews.²¹

In contrast to the strong emphasis on marriage and procreation in both Hellenistic and Palestinian Judaism, Paul's writings evince little concern with either procreation or the necessity of marriage. Paul urges his Thessalonian followers to keep away from sexual immorality, to control their bodies "in holiness and honour, not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God", and not to commit adultery (1 Thess. 4:3-6), but says nothing about procreation. In the most detailed discussion of marriage in

²⁰Trans.: P. W. Van der Horst, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed James H. Charlesworth, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985).

²¹For a detailed discussion of rabbinic interpretation and application of Gen. 1:28, see Jeremy Cohen, *"Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It": The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 65-165.

his extant writings (1 Cor. 7:1-39), Paul agrees with his correspondents, that "it is well for a man not to touch a woman", but suggests that "because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband". He insists on the mutual obligation of husband and wife to satisfy each other's sexual needs, seemingly treating sexual satisfaction as an end in itself for sexual activity. He asserts, however, that this is a concession, not a command. He prefers that everyone be as he is, celibate, and instructs the unmarried and widows that it is well to remain unmarried. If, however, "they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion." Nevertheless, Paul asserts that the unmarried state provides a better situation in which to serve Christ (7:32-34).

According to Paul, marriage is a hindrance to whole-hearted service to God. He permits marriage as a concession to those who cannot control their sexual appetites; it is better to marry than to fall into promiscuity or to be distracted by overwhelming passion. Thus, it is clear that Paul recognized satisfaction of sexual desire as an appropriate end for sexual activity in marriage, while he says nothing about procreation, except to indicate that the children of mixed pagan-Christian marriages are made holy by the Christian parent (7:14). Paul concludes his discussion of the benefits of celibacy by acknowledging that the person who chooses to marry "does well", but hastens to add that "he who refrains from marriage will do better" (7:38).

It is clear that Paul did not understand the procreative blessing of Genesis 1:28 as placing all people under an obligation to engage in procreative sexual activity, in sharp contrast to many of his Jewish contemporaries. It seems unlikely, therefore, that Paul would have been greatly concerned about the non-procreative character of homosexuality. It is difficult to imagine him insisting, as Philo did, that homosexual behaviour would depopulate cities, when he urged his own followers to remain unmarried and childless in order to serve the Lord without hindrance.

Paul's primary concern seems to have been with the gender of the participants in sexual activity. "Natural" in Romans 1:26-27, thus, refers to proper gender behaviour, while "against nature" refers to improper gender behaviour. This interpretation finds support in Paul's use of biological gender designations. Commentators have noted Paul's use of the designations "female" and "male" rather than "man" and "woman" and have suggested, correctly it seems, that he intended to stress, with his use of this terminology, the gender role violations he saw in the behaviour he condemns.²² Scroggs' suggestion that Paul is merely using conventional language derived from Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 while he is really concerned with pederasty, founders on the fact that Paul deals with female sexual acts to which he objects using the same gender language as he does of male behaviour. Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 have nothing to say about female homosexual relationships. They could not, therefore, have determined his choice of language. Furthermore, the treatment of Graeco-Roman homosexual behaviour by Philo and Josephus indicates that concern with gender roles was an important element in Jewish objections to same-gender sexuality. Paul is not alone in his concern about the genders of those involved in the behaviour he describes in vv. 26-27. The language chosen to describe homosexual behaviour in vv. 26-27, therefore, should be taken seriously.

Not only is Hays largely correct in his critique of Boswell's interpretation of *παρὰ φύσιν*, but he also rightly faults Boswell for anachronistically attributing to Paul a conception of human sexuality which he almost certainly could not have held. As the study in Chapter 3 of Paul's historical context indicates, different conceptions of sexual orientation operated in Paul's world than those which operate in the modern world. While it is true that some ancient thinkers regarded some kinds of "sexual orientation" as congenital, Boswell misinterprets the significance of this evidence by claiming that it

²²See Cranfield, *Romans*, 125

refers to homosexual orientation in general. Had Boswell given more careful attention to the documentary evidence for attitudes towards sexuality held by Paul's contemporaries, he would have recognized that homosexual behaviour was not commonly understood to be motivated by a discrete "sexual orientation." Rather, it was held to be the expression of uncontrolled lust. Both Jewish thinkers like Philo and Gentile thinkers like Dio Chrysostom claim that men who engage in homosexual behaviour begin by indulging in promiscuous heterosexual behaviour and then, yielding to unrestrained passion, they turn to sexual objects of their own gender. The passions which lead people to engage in heterosexual and homosexual behaviour are thus essentially the same. This evaluation of homosexual behaviour and its motivations goes back at least to Plato. If Paul had distinguished and categorized people who engaged in homosexual behaviour according to an innate sexual orientation, he would have been unique in the ancient world. His statements in Rom. 1:26-27 give no hint that he did. As Furnish suggests, the similarity of Paul's language to that of Philo and Dio Chrysostom indicates that he held a similar conception of homosexual behaviour. There is no evidence in the passage that he considered it significant that some Greek thinkers theorized that a male's desire to be sexually passive in a homosexual relationship was congenital, or that he was even aware of this theory. Boswell has violated a major convention of historical scholarship by failing to interpret Paul's words in the light of their historical context as reconstructed from contemporary literary and archaeological evidence. This failure is all the more conspicuous because Boswell does provide in *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* a relatively accurate, if incomplete, discussion of Greek and Roman practices and attitudes. As Hays notes, D.S. Bailey anticipated and refuted Boswell's reading of Rom. 1:26-27 in the 1950s.²³

²³Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural," 201.

William Countryman's interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27 must also be challenged. Countryman asserts that Paul believed that the uncleanness of homosexual behaviour was a punishment for idolatry. He is certainly correct, but since this was the case, it is difficult to see how Paul could have adopted a neutral attitude towards homosexual acts. If Paul had regarded homosexual conduct as a minor problem, it hardly makes sense that he would have described God as giving Gentiles over to it as punishment for the enormous sin of apostasy. It is true that Paul does not call homosexual behaviour a "sin" in this context, but his characterization of it as motivated by "passions of dishonour", and as involving men burning with lust and committing "a shameful act" hardly indicates that he would have tolerated continuing indulgence in homosexual behaviour by Gentile Christians. Would he not have anticipated that repentance for the sins of denying God and idolatry, would have freed Gentiles from the pollution over to which they had been turned as punishment for those sins? Furthermore, it is only by following Boswell's questionable interpretation of *παρὰ φύσιν* that Countryman is able to deny that Paul saw homosexual behaviour as contrary to God's will for all human beings. This designation certainly had moral significance when used by Paul's Jewish and Gentile contemporaries.

Furthermore, Countryman seems to assume a clear distinction between Gentile and Jewish attitudes towards homosexual behaviour. He ignores the fact that Hellenistic Jewish condemnations were based on Graeco-Roman condemnations, and that Gentile critics could express as much disgust towards homosexual behaviour as Jewish critics could. Calling homosexual acts unclean, dishonourable and "against nature" was just as much a part of Gentile rhetoric condemning homosexual behaviour as it was of Jewish rhetoric. It is unlikely, therefore, that Paul's Gentile readers would have understood Paul's statements about same-gender sexuality not to represent a position he expected them to hold.

It can be concluded, therefore, that Countryman fails to demonstrate that Paul's words in Rom. 1:26-27 do not reflect a condemnation of homosexual behaviour as wrong for all people, Jews and Gentiles. His analysis fails to consider sufficiently either the immediate context of Paul's words, or the cultural context in which they were written.

Robin Scroggs claims that Paul, like other Jewish writers, was thinking specifically of pederasty, even when using more general language based on Lev. 18. From this fact, he draws the conclusion that Paul's words may only apply to pederasty, rather than homosexual behaviour in general. Paul's use of the designation "against nature", however, significantly undercuts Scroggs' claims. Even his own analysis of the use of this term by Jewish and Graeco-Roman writers shows that it was never used to criticize pederasty because it involved participants of different ages, or because it often led to abuse and exploitation.²⁴ When these writers describe homosexual behaviour as *παρὰ φύσιν* they are condemning it primarily because it is non-procreative, but also because the participants were seen as violating gender norms understood to be fundamental to human existence. Both of these criticisms could be, and certainly were, applied to relationships between adults.

Scroggs emphasizes the non-mutual and exploitative aspects of homosexual practices in the Graeco-Roman world and the ways in which they differed from modern practices, but there is little in Paul's statements in Rom. 1:26-27 that suggests that he objected to homosexual behaviour specifically when it involved abuse and exploitation. Rather, Paul's language suggests that he opposed homosexual behaviour precisely because of the most important characteristic ancient and modern practices have in common, the fact that the participants share the same gender. That this is the case is indicated, as well, by Paul's words in 1 Cor. 6:9. Paul designates the passive participant

²⁴Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 59-60, 89.

with a term that points to his violation of standards for proper male behaviour. When Greeks and Romans called someone *μαλακός* (*molles*) or *κιναιδός* (*cinaedus*) they were not concerned about the nonmutuality of the homosexual relationships in which he participated, or his exploitation by another male; their concern, rather, was with his violation of gender norms. Paul's concern with gender is even more clear in his use of the term *ἀρσενοκοῦται* ("males who have sexual intercourse with males") to designate the active participants (or perhaps both participants). Like other Hellenistic Jews, Paul believed that it was wrong for males to engage in sexual activity with other males.

Furthermore, Scroggs' exegesis of Romans 1:26-27 is incomplete because he fails to offer any explanation as to why Paul would have opposed female homosexuality. As Brooten notes, "one would be hard pressed to say that the [Graeco-Roman] authors discussed disapproved of women giving sexual expression to their affection for one another because it was dehumanizing by being, for example, nonmutual."²⁵ Rather, as Brooten demonstrates, these authors were concerned about gender role violations, women becoming like men and taking their place in sexual intercourse. Thus, even if Paul did oppose male homosexual behaviour as it existed in his society because it was exploitive and dehumanizing, he could not have applied this critique to female homosexuality, and "there is no good reason for Scroggs not to have asked why the sources on women do not support his thesis on men."²⁶

The conclusions reached so far may be summarized as follows: Paul did condemn homosexual behaviour itself; his words in Rom. 1:26-27 reflect a negative evaluation of all homosexual activity, regardless of the ages of the participants, whether the relationship was mutual or not, or whether it was permanent and based on love or based

²⁵Brooten, "Paul's Views," 79.

²⁶Ibid.

on sexual passion only; he believed, like many of his contemporaries, that homosexual acts were "against nature," that is, contrary to the rational order of the universe, an order which Paul as a Jew believed had been established by God; it seems unlikely, however, that Paul shared his contemporaries' concern about the fact that homosexual behaviour was non-procreative; rather he seems to have been concerned primarily with the gender of the participants; as Hays suggests, Paul objected to homosexual behaviour because, in his opinion, it blurred the distinctions between male and female, distinctions rooted in God's creative design.

The Nature of Paul's Objections to Homosexual Behaviour

According to Bernadette Brooten it is necessary not simply to recognize that Paul objected to homosexual behaviour, but also to attempt to understand as accurately as possible the basis of his objection. As I noted in Chapter 2, she agrees with Richard Hays' claim that Paul's objection to homosexual behaviour was gender-based, but criticizes him for failing to consider how Paul's beliefs about gender operated. She looks to 1 Cor. 11:2-16 as a source of information on how Paul conceived of male-female relations and suggests that his beliefs about the nature of women lie behind his objection to homosexual behaviour. To the extent that her exegesis of 1 Cor. 11:2-16 is accepted, Brooten can be said to present convincing evidence that Paul objected to female homosexual behaviour for the same reasons as his Jewish and Gentile contemporaries who condemned it.

Paul, as Brooten demonstrates, objected to males behaving like females and females behaving like males. In this he differed little from his Jewish and Gentile contemporaries. His adoption of the term *μαλακός* to designate the passive participant in a homosexual relationship indicates that he probably understood male sexual passivity to involve assimilation with women. All of these conclusions, however, are based on the

reading of Paul's words in the light of the historical context in which they were written. His own statements about homosexual behaviour are neither as detailed nor as explicit as Philo's. Thus, rather than claim that his words provide positive evidence for his views, it seems more accurate to say that there is nothing in what Paul says to challenge the assumption that he conceptualized homosexual behaviour as his contemporaries did.

Paul's Description of Homosexual Behaviour

Far more obvious than Paul's agreement with the notions of gender which were the basis for his contemporaries' objections to homosexual behaviour is Paul's agreement with the idea voiced by Plato, Dio Chrysostom and Philo that homosexual behaviour is motivated by lust and passion. Despite the fact that Paul stresses that desire precedes action, very little scholarly attention has been given to this particular aspect of his characterization of homosexual behaviour. This is especially surprising considering the importance in modern debates of the distinction between sexual orientation and sexual acts. As I noted in Chapters 1 and 2, Christians on both sides in recent debates have argued that people should be held responsible for their behaviour but not for their feelings and desires.

Paul describes homosexual behaviour as motivated by "passions of dishonour." As Schlier notes, not only the acts, but the desires that motivate them are dishonourable. Unlike many modern Christians, Paul seems not to have regarded homosexual desire as morally neutral. While it would be accurate to say that Paul treats the situation of the Gentiles as tragic, it would be wrong to ignore the fact that he understands them to be responsible for the situation in which they find themselves. They are not the victims of biology or poor relations with their parents but are being punished for their rebellion against God. Their deliberate exchange of the truth of God for a lie leads to the exchange of natural for unnatural sexual relations.

Paul believes that those who engage in homosexual behaviour do so because they experience sexual desire for persons of their own gender. With some caution, therefore, it can be said that Paul does have a notion of sexual orientation. It is not, however, the same as modern notions. Paul does not categorize people as homosexual or heterosexual. According to Paul, all people who are alienated from God are predisposed to engage in homosexual behaviour. All are subject to God's wrath. He probably believed, as most modern interpreters stress, that everyone had heterosexual desires. They could also have homosexual desires, given the right conditions. Those who engaged in homosexual behaviour, Paul assumed, desired and enjoyed sexual relations with persons of their own gender. He, thus, held a view of those who engaged in homosexual behaviour which corresponded to that of Philo and differed from that of those Gentile critics who insisted that boys were exploited by adult males and did not enjoy homosexual relationships.

It is difficult to explain why most modern interpreters have not stressed the fact that Paul condemns not only behaviour but the desires that motivate this behaviour except to say that such an interpretation of Paul's words poses problems for the modern application of his words. Potentially, if Paul's words were taken seriously, Christian ethicists could condemn homosexual persons for having dishonourable passions, declare that they were manifesting their alienation from God, and demand that they return to the heterosexual desires which they potentially had.²⁷ Such a harsh approach is generally rejected by "ex-gay" groups, which stress the sinfulness of homosexual acts but treat homosexual desires as the manifestation of poor emotional development, not the punishment for rejection of God. It is not surprising that they have taken this approach, since many of their clients are committed Christians, often raised in religious homes, people who can hardly be said to have rejected God and turned to idols.

²⁷That this condemning approach is a very real option is evident from Greg Bahnsen's comments about homosexuality. See Bahnsen, *Homosexuality*.

In order to better understand Paul's characterization of homosexual behaviour as motivated by desire and passion, it seems useful to consider what he had to say more generally about desire and passion. A fundamental distinction characteristic of Paul's thought is that between "flesh (σάρξ) and spirit (πνεῦμα). Flesh "is frequently used in Paul's writings of all that resists what is Spirit (i.e., God and his activity), that is, of what is characteristic of a humanity which has turned from God."²⁸ Flesh and spirit stand in opposition to each other (Gal. 5:17). Paul describes non-Christians as "in the flesh" (Rom. 7:5). The realm of the flesh is also the realm of the Law (Rom. 7:5-6; Gal. 5:18). Christian believers, in contrast, are not "in the flesh" but "in the Spirit," because God's Spirit dwells in them (Rom. 8:9). Those who are "in the Spirit" can act in such a way as not to "gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16); they manifest "the fruit of the spirit," good attitudes and behaviour (Gal. 5:22-23). The "works of the flesh," in contrast, are all morally reprehensible attitudes and behaviours; those who perform the works of the flesh "will not inherit the Reign of God" (Gal. 5:19-21).

Paul's list of the "works of the flesh" in his letter to the Galatians bears a striking resemblance to his list of the "unrighteous" in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 who, Paul declares, "will not inherit the Reign of God." For Paul, to be "in the flesh" is to be "unrighteous," cut off from God. In the flesh, people are controlled by passions and desires (Gal. 5:16; Rom. 7:5). Specifically, the Gentiles, "who do not know God" behave sexually "with lustful passion" (ἐν πάθει ἐπιθυμίας) (1 Thess. 4:5). Christians, in contrast, "have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal. 5:24). They engage in sexual activity only "in holiness and honour" (1 Thess. 4:4). If, as seems virtually certain, Paul includes males who engage in homosexual behaviour in the list of those who will not

²⁸Westerholm, *Israel's Law*, 56. Cf. BAGD, s.v. "σάρξ," 744: flesh "is the willing instrument of sin, and is subject to sin to such a degree that wherever flesh is, all forms of sin are likewise present, and no good thing can live in the σάρξ...."

inherit the Reign of God (1 Cor. 6:9), then it is clear that in Rom. 1:26-27, Paul is describing the behaviour of those who are "in the flesh." His characterization of them as controlled by passion and desire makes this even more obvious. It would be impossible, therefore, to argue that Paul would have considered it appropriate for someone to continue to engage in homosexual activity after becoming a Christian. The behaviour is not simply unclean by Jewish standards in Paul's view, analogous to eating non-Kosher meat, but is a manifestation of being in a state of alienation from God, "in the flesh," "unrighteous," and therefore unable to inherit the Reign of God. For Paul to have accepted the legitimacy of homosexual behaviour, he would have had to understand it to be a behaviour motivated by the presence of the Spirit. Since he speaks, rather, of homosexual behaviour as motivated by passions and desire, things which arise from the flesh, it is simply impossible that he could have affirmed homosexual behaviour. Had William Countryman considered Paul's more general statements about desire and passion, and the situation of those alienated from God, it seems unlikely that he could have argued that Paul held homosexual behaviour to be morally neutral. It would be absurd to suggest that Paul believed that Christians could engage in one kind of behaviour which he held to be motivated by passion and desire, while urging them not to indulge the flesh (Gal. 5:13, 16).

It seems useful, as well, to consider how Paul's views about homosexuality relate to his more general views about sexuality. It is, however, beyond the scope of a study of this sort to undertake a detailed treatment of this question. Nevertheless, some brief comments can serve to indicate possible areas for more extensive work. In 1 Cor. 6:12-20, Paul urges Christians not to engage in πορνεία (wrong sexual intercourse, unchastity).²⁹ In the course of his argument, Paul indicates his acceptance of the

²⁹See *BAGD*, s.v. "πορνεία," 693. The literal meaning of the word is "prostitution," but in early Christian literature it refers generally to any kind of prohibited sexual activity.

statement in Gen. 2:24 that sexual relations between a man and woman make them "one flesh." Interestingly, Paul treats *all* heterosexual intercourse as making the couple one flesh, not just marital intercourse: "Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, 'The two shall become one flesh'" (1 Cor. 6:16). He insists that a Christian, whose body is united with Christ's body, should not join with a prostitute.³⁰ Paul asserts that unlike every other sin, which is outside the body, πορνεία is a sin against the body (ὁ δὲ πορνεύων εἰς τὸ ἴδιον σῶμα ἀμαρτάνει) (1 Cor. 6:18). In this passage Paul clearly links corruption of the body with sin. A similar approach to sexual wrong-doing is evident in Rom. 1:24, 26-27. Sexual behaviour motivated by desires (ἐπιθυμίαι) leads to uncleanness and the dishonouring of the body (Rom. 1:24). The passions which motivate people to indulge in homosexual activity are "dishonourable passions" (1:26) and homosexual acts between men are "shameful" (1:27).

Nowhere in his writings does Paul show any willingness to compromise on Jewish sexual standards, in contrast to his willingness to compromise on dietary and cultic matters. He describes pagans as "Gentiles (τὰ ἔθνη) who do not know God," and insists that Christians must live by different sexual standards than such people (1 Thess. 4:5). In effect, Paul classes Christians with Jews, over against pagan Gentiles. It is not surprising, therefore, that he seems to accept, in Rom. 1:18-32, the traditional Hellenistic Jewish presentation of sexual misconduct as typical of Gentiles. Despite obvious allusions to Genesis, clearly the most significant influence on Paul's words in Rom. 1:18-32 is the sort of tradition contained in, for example, the Wisdom of Solomon. Furnish

³⁰Of note here is Paul's denigration of prostitutes, implicit in his concern about the believer making Christ's flesh one with that of the prostitute. The offense envisaged by Paul seems to have more to do with contact with an "unclean" and "sinful" woman than it does with exploitation, self-indulgence, lack of commitment or lack of love.

seems right to stress the fact that Paul adopts with approval the traditional Jewish denunciation of the Gentiles.

While a case can be made that Paul wishes to implicate the Jews in the guilt he describes in Rom. 1:18-32, there is no evidence that he wanted to suggest that Jews were prone to indulging in homosexual behaviour. This would have been an outrageous claim to most Jews, and if Paul had believed it he might be expected to have argued his point. It seems likely, rather, that he accepted the belief that homosexual behaviour was not a temptation for Jews.

According to Paul, the desire for homosexual intercourse is a compulsion that afflicts those who are alienated from God because of their willful refusal to acknowledge God as God. It is not simply a normal accompaniment of the human condition with which Jews, Christians and pagans all must struggle. Rather, it is a characteristic feature of pagan life. Recognition of this fact is necessary, not only for an adequate historical understanding of how Paul conceptualized homosexuality, but also for the questions it raises about the application of Paul's words by Christians attempting to develop an ethical position towards homosexual acts and homosexual persons. It is very unlikely that Paul could have conceived of Christians as being dominated by an overwhelming desire for homosexual intercourse, since he would have assumed that their conversion to Christ had freed them from the delusion over to which they had been given when they were pagans. If Paul believed that Jews were not predisposed to indulge in homosexual behaviour, he would hardly have believed that Christians might be so disposed. I would suggest that Paul would have rejected the idea that a person could be a Christian and continue to experience homosexual drives. Such drives necessarily reflected alienation from God. Had Paul been confronted by a sincere believer who struggled with ongoing homosexual desire it is difficult to say whether or how he might have modified his attitude towards homosexual acts or those who were drawn to them. In making this claim, I believe it is

important to distinguish between constant desire and occasional temptation. Paul clearly treats constant homosexual desire as the result of the false view of the created world that results when people turn from God and are given over to their lusts. Since Paul held Christians to be filled with the Spirit, and to experience the renewal of their minds, it is difficult to imagine that he would have accepted the idea that a Christian believer might never experience heterosexual desire, but rather continue to be "homosexual" all his or her life. Many modern Christian critics of homosexual behaviour insist that all who turn to Christ will be freed from homosexual desire and develop heterosexual attractions. Bitter experience has led others, however, to claim much more modestly that God will simply give someone the ability to resist homosexual desire, but that heterosexual orientation may never develop. This approach, while more realistic, clearly contradicts Paul's opinions on the nature of homosexual desire.

Closely related to his ideas about what motivated homosexual behaviour is an idea which distinguishes Paul from Philo and from most Graeco-Roman critics of homosexual behaviour. Paul nowhere shows any concern to distinguish the active from the passive partner. He describes both participants in male homosexual activity as "burning in their lust for *each other*" and describes as "against nature" all female homosexual conduct, not simply the behaviour of the *tribas*.³¹ Similarly, in 1 Cor. 6:9 Paul says that the "soft" (μαλακοί) and "those who lie with males" (άρσενοκοίται) will not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. That is, both the passive and the active participant are condemned, and Paul shows no sign of having considered the behaviour of one as more reprehensible than that of the other. If, as Scroggs maintains, it is important to know to what sort of homosexual behaviour Paul was objecting, then it must be asserted that Paul's words really apply in their entirety only to one type of relationship practiced in

³¹This Greek term refers to the active partner in a female homosexual relationship.

the Graeco-Roman world, that between an adult male passive and an active male. Only these relationships involved two men who shared mutual desires. In effect, if not explicitly, Paul's approach places all who participate in homosexual activity into one category. Paul's approach, evolving out of but moving beyond Jewish condemnations of homosexual behaviour, lays the basis for and, no doubt, was the source of the development of the categories "sodomy" and "sodomite" by Christians in the late Empire and the Middle Ages.

What remains uncertain is the extent to which Paul's understanding of the motivation for homosexual conduct anticipates the modern category of "the homosexual." He certainly believed that persons who participate in homosexual activity are under the sway of perverse desires, over to which they have been given, and that these perverse desires are present in both the active and passive participants. Nevertheless, it seems that he regarded these desires as substantially similar to those which motivated a person to indulge in sinful heterosexual conduct. It is also unlikely that he would have regarded them as necessarily exclusive in character. He would have been confronted with too much evidence to the contrary. Significantly, Paul does not posit any sort of psychological or organic cause for the desires, but links them directly to the idolatrous behaviour of those subject to them. Unlike modern negative evaluations of homosexuality, which often treat persons with a homosexual orientation as victims of their abnormal desires, Paul's understanding of homosexual desire as a punishment for idolatry places the blame for their condition on those subject to homosexual drives. Any interpreter of Rom. 1:26-27 who wishes to do justice to the historical character of Paul's words must take note of this fact. At the same time, this reading of Paul is relevant for contemporary ethical decision-making. As David Bartlett notes:

Those who really want to be "pauline" in their understanding of homosexual practices today would have to argue that people who engage in homosexual acts are being punished by God for their idolatry. One

wonders whether people who engage in homosexual practices have been more idolatrous than heterosexual people. Turning it around, one wonders why, given the pervasive idolatry in which most of us live, more of us have not been "punished" by burning with homosexual lust.³²

Conclusions

Paul clearly condemned homosexual behaviour. His condemnation was based on the conviction that homosexual acts violated the order established by God at the creation, an order which bound all people, Jews and Gentiles. Violation of this order reflects alienation from God. The inability to determine proper sexual behaviour, results from a fundamental failure to recognize and honour the creator of sexuality and gender. Paul may have understood homosexual behaviour to blur hierarchically conceived distinctions between male and female. At the very least, he believed that sexual relations between people of the same gender were contrary to God's intentions for sexual behaviour.

Gentiles are given over to the predisposition to indulge in homosexual behaviour, and to the impurity which is the result of indulgence in it, as punishment for their failure to recognize God as God. It follows from this, and from the fact that Paul does not question the Jewish assertion that homosexual behaviour is not a problem for Jews, that he would have regarded it as nearly impossible for a person who came to know the true God to experience homosexual desire. Acknowledging the true God, Paul probably believed, would free a person from the desires over to which God had given those who denied God. Furthermore, homosexual desire is not presented by Paul as a normal part of the lot of fallen humanity, but a distinctive feature of the lives of Gentile idolaters. Unlike heterosexual desire, which can find a legitimate expression, homosexual desire is inevitably directed towards offensive behaviour. It should not, therefore, be assumed that Paul equated it with ordinary sexual lust.

³²David L. Bartlett, "A Biblical Perspective on Homosexuality," *Foundations* 20 (1977): 140.

Paul's understanding of homosexual behaviour can be summarized as follows: it is "against nature", that is, it violates God's intention for human life, as understood by Paul; it is motivated by passions and desires which are fundamentally dishonourable and abnormal; persons who experience these passions have been given over to them by God as punishment for their failure to acknowledge and worship the true God; both participants in homosexual activity are motivated by mutual desire; the characteristic of homosexual behaviour which marks it as unacceptable for Paul is that it involves sexual behaviour between persons of the same gender; according to Paul's understanding, God did not intend for persons of the same gender to have sexual relations; he appears to have found support for this understanding of God's intentions in Genesis 1-3, although he is inconsistent in his appeal to this text; it is likely, although by no means certain, that Paul understood homosexual passions to be a problem of unbelieving Gentiles, from which Christians were completely free; he appears to have accepted the Jewish viewpoint reflected in texts like the Sybilline Oracles, Aristeas and some Rabbinic documents, that homosexual behaviour was not a real temptation for Jews; Pauls' negative evaluation of homosexual behaviour appears to have been related to his views about the importance of the distinction between male and female and his defense of female subordination as grounded in God's will. However, because of the obvious ambivalence of Paul's position on male-female relations, this remains a debatable point; unlike many of his contemporaries, Paul may not have objected to homosexual behaviour because it involved males assuming the "female role" or females assuming the "male role," but simply because it involved sexual activity between persons of the same gender, behaviour which he could not see as fulfilling any appropriate function.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study I have read Rom. 1:26-27 in the light both of its original historical context and of the modern debates that have stimulated interest in the text. My primary goal has been to understand Paul's words from a historical perspective. At the same time, because modern debates have inspired most of the interest in the text, including my own, I have considered what impact modern concerns have had on how the text is interpreted. To conclude this study, I will first summarize my major conclusions about the historical significance of Paul's words. I will then comment briefly on the relevance of my reading for modern discussions about the morality of homosexual behaviour.

Rom. 1:26-27 in Historical Perspective

My study of Rom. 1:26-27 has led me to the conclusion that Paul did hold a negative view of homosexual behaviour, in and of itself. He did not, as Boswell suggests, object simply to heterosexual people engaging in homosexual behaviour; nor was his criticism directed only against pederasty and its particular abuses, as Scroggs asserts; nor, as Countryman claims, did Paul describe homosexual behaviour simply as unclean by Jewish cultic standards, but treat it as morally neutral. Richard Hays is thus substantially correct in his interpretation of the text in his critique of Boswell's reading.

Hays does not, however, deal carefully enough with the question of why Paul objected to homosexual behaviour. Paul probably did not, I have suggested, object to the nonprocreative character of homosexual behaviour as many of his contemporaries did. Rather his concern was primarily with gender. Paul looked to Genesis 1-3 for a description of the creation order, which he designated "nature," but his reading of the text was selective.

Bernadette Brooten offers convincing evidence that Paul viewed gender distinctions hierarchically and that his objection to homosexual behaviour were rooted in a belief that woman should be subordinate to men. Evidence for Paul's views on gender is ambiguous, however, and her position needs to be adopted with caution.

Paul, like many of his contemporaries, characterizes homosexual behaviour as motivated by unrestrained lust. He condemns both homosexual desire and homosexual behaviour.

According to Paul, homosexual desire arises in those who have been cut off from God by their willful refusal to recognize God as God. Such people have a distorted view of reality and are unable to determine what is proper and improper sexual behaviour.

Like other Jews, Paul treats homosexual behaviour as a Gentile vice. Unlike heterosexual desire which can find an appropriate outlet, homosexual desire, in Paul's view, is fundamentally misdirected. It should not be concluded, therefore, that he would have seen it simply as a normal part of the lives of sinful, fallen humankind. Rather, it is a specific feature of the lives of Gentile idolaters.

Paul extends Jewish convictions about freedom from certain vices to Christians. It is unlikely, therefore, that he would have accepted the idea that a Christian could experience life-long homosexual desire. Such desire, he probably believed, would go away when a person acquired a correct knowledge of and entered into a relationship with God.

Rom. 1:26-27 and Modern Debates

It is not, of course, necessary that the scholar of the Bible reflect on the contemporary ethical relevance of what a biblical text asserts. The scholar can adopt a position analogous to that adopted by E.P. Sanders with respect to the theological significance of research on the "historical Jesus." Describing his *Jesus and Judaism*,

Sanders writes, "I am interested in the debate about the significance of the historical Jesus for theology in the way one is interested in something that he once found fascinating. The present work is written without that question in mind, however, and those who wish an essay on that topic may put this book down and proceed farther along the shelf."¹ Similarly, one can focus on understanding biblical teaching on homosexuality without a specific concern with how it might be applied to modern life. A basic question must be asked, however, about why someone would be interested in the Bible's teachings about homosexuality. Very little biblical scholarship indeed is fueled by mere idle curiosity. Generally, questions raised by contemporary problems send biblical scholars to the texts in search of understanding. It is, nevertheless, commonplace to claim no interest in the political or moral relevance of one's scholarship.

This approach has patently not been the one adopted by most scholars who have taken up the subject, even those who explicitly claim no interest in modern debates. John Boswell and Richard Hays, for example, both take a demonstrable position in ongoing ecclesiastical debates and their scholarly work has been eagerly drawn upon by others involved in the debate. It seems appropriate, in consequence of the uses being made of biblical scholarship in contemporary ethical debates, to conclude this study with some reflections on the possible relevance of my reading of Rom. 1:26-27 for modern ethical decision-making about homosexuality.

The interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27 offered in this study admittedly provides little comfort for those Christians who identify as homosexual and want to be reassured that Paul did not condemn homosexual behaviour. It must be recognized that Paul did hold a negative view of homosexual behaviour and, from an exegetical point of view, the assertion made by some gay Christian apologists and their supporters, that the Bible does not condemn homosexual behaviour, must be challenged.

¹E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 2.

Thus, a conservative hermeneutic, which holds that biblical teaching is never in error, cannot be reconciled with openness to homosexual behaviour. The meaning of Paul's words, if they are accorded unchallengable authority, is too clear for there to be any doubt about their relevance for modern Christian ethics. It must be conceded, therefore, that Paul's words support the traditional Christian approach to homosexual behaviour.

A liberal hermeneutic, on the other hand, which starts with the assumption that not everything in the Bible is correct and true, can facilitate the acceptance of homosexual identity and behaviour as a legitimate option for Christians. One who adopted such an approach might simply assert that Paul was wrong about homosexual behaviour, that the Genesis account of the creation of sexuality and gender is not definitive, and that other biblical values take precedence.

A critique of Paul's words can begin with the recognition that Boswell's insistence on distinguishing between people who are "naturally" homosexual and those heterosexuals who engage in occasional homosexual behaviour is entirely invalid only when applied to Rom. 1:26-27 in the manner that he applies it. If one adopts Boswell's essentialist approach to homosexuality, Paul certainly can be faulted for not recognizing that people do not consciously choose to experience homosexual attractions, if the case can be made that he regarded homosexual behaviour as motivated by deliberate choice. As I have suggested, this conclusion is not entirely certain. Paul appears to treat the Gentiles as deluded by their own foolish refusal to recognize God as God to such an extent that they lost their capacity to determine what was appropriate morally. At the same time, he declares that they did know that what they did was wrong. The language of "abandoning" and "exchanging" may imply deliberate choice. If this is true, then Paul's words can hardly be applied to persons who did not deliberately choose to engage

in homosexual behaviour in defiance of both the desire for and possibility of heterosexual intercourse. Many homosexual people have never experienced desire for the other sex.

If, on the other hand, homosexual desire is understood to be a manifestation of delusion about the true nature of reality, an affliction involuntarily experienced by those who are alienated from God, then the claim that homosexual persons did not consciously choose to experience homosexual desire poses no problem for the acceptance of Paul's words as valid. With Richard Hays, I believe that this is the more convincing approach to Paul's statements in Rom. 1:26-27.

Problems arise, however, when attention is turned to the differences between Paul's explanation of the etiology of homosexual desire and modern theories about homosexuality. According to Paul homosexual desire arises because God has judicially "given over" people to a state of delusion and moral chaos as a result of their deliberate and conscious rejection of the truth about God and the created world. Those who are liberated from this state of delusion, who are no longer subject to the wrath of God, should be freed from homosexual desire. If they are not, one could claim that they have not truly turned from idols. One might then insist, as some conservative Christians do, that there is no such thing as a "homosexual Christian," or one might adopt a "Lutheran" approach and declare that all people remain sinners, idolaters, and under the wrath of God, even when justified by faith. This is clearly Richard Hays' position.

However, to the extent that this approach includes the adoption of modern psychoanalytic theory about homosexuality, it negates Paul's statements about homosexuality. There seems little room in what Paul says to accommodate the belief that homosexual people are simply attempting to meet the need for same-gender affection which they failed to satisfy as children. The notion of homosexuality as punishment from God is entirely absent.

To conclude, I believe that the approach to homosexual behaviour that most fully treats Paul's statements as authoritative is that which treats homosexual desire as a manifestation of the individual's alienation from God, without attempting to explain it psychologically. According to Paul, homosexual desire and action are spiritual problems. In this approach, conversion to Christ would be expected to lead to the development of heterosexual drives, as the individual's delusions about God and the creation were overcome. To the extent that people are regarded as "both justified and sinners," one might accept the fact that homosexual desire does not always go away. As long as Christians remain under the wrath of God, they can suffer the consequences of their rebellion. The "homosexual Christian" would, however, be expected to characterize the continuing presence of homosexual desire as a manifestation of his or her status as a sinner, rather than as the expression of psychological maladjustment.

To the extent that gay or lesbian persons and their supporters reject the idea that homosexual orientation is "unnatural" and homosexual behaviour is shameful and sinful, this approach to homosexuality must be rejected. Since it is based on Paul's words, Paul's authority to determine how homosexual persons live must also be rejected. It might be possible, like some Christian women, who remain committed Christians while rejecting the authority of those biblical texts that denigrate women, to continue to identify as a Christian while rejecting biblical teaching about homosexual behaviour; or, like other women, gay and lesbian people might need to abandon Christianity entirely and turn to a spiritual tradition which did not denigrate homosexuality. In my opinion, this latter course will ultimately serve gay and lesbian persons better than remaining with Christian churches in which they are still largely unwelcome.

This, of course, is my opinion as a thinking individual, rather than as a New Testament interpreter. It is my hope, whatever my opinions about homosexual behaviour and the authority of the Bible, that I have offered a careful and accurate analysis of Rom.

1:26-27, employing properly the methods of historical-critical scholarship, in the light of the contextual nature of interpretation, an analysis that advances historical understanding of Paul's views about homosexual behaviour.

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