

VIOLENCE TO THE BIBLE? OR INSPIRED BY THE BIBLE?
Homophobia as Murder

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Other Sheep – Multicultural Ministries with Sexual Minorities

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Woe to the city of oppressors, rebellious and defiled!....
Her officials are roaring lions,
her rulers are evening wolves that leave nothing for the morning....
Her priests...do violence to the law.
The Liberator within is just and does no wrong.
Every morning this Sovereign dispenses justice,
each dawn without fail....(Zephaniah 3:1-5).

Zephaniah describes Jerusalem as a place where official interpreters so tortured the ancient Hebrew Scriptures that they actually suffered "violence"! Bringing the tradition of the Spanish Inquisition to the New World, when Balboa came to Panama and found 40 transvestites amongst the indigenous population, he promptly had them killed by feeding them to his dogs. Early in the Nazi reign of terror (1934) Hitler first executed military leaders accused of homosexuality. Later he had tens of thousands of civilian homosexuals imprisoned (along with Jews and other scapegoated minority groups), forced to wear a pink triangle, and finally killed. **Were these examples of violence inspired by the Bible--or rather a result of the kind of violence done to the Bible by homophobic official interpreters?**

Seven Case Studies in the Torture of Texts

1 Genesis 19:1-25. Sodom and Gomorrah. Historically, the Bible text most often cited to justify gay-bashing has been the Genesis narrative about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Especially since the 12th century (which witnessed a veritable explosion of anti-semitism and homophobia in Europe; Boswell 1980), clerics commonly have resorted to harangues in which "sodomy" has been defined as anal sex between males, denounced as the sin most abominable to God, and set forth as the explanation for the destruction of the two pagan cities. Late medieval burning of "faggots," and the death penalty prescribed for "sodomy" in Europe and the Americas were easily justified by the appeal to Genesis 19. Still today, "evangelists" plea (for funds) to save the nation from the "sodomites/homosexuals."

1.1 Here's how the story actually begins: "The two *angels* arrived at Sodom in the evening...." (Gen. 19:1). Not a word is said about sexual relations between human beings. Rather we read how certain men attempted to rape angels (anal sex)! If that is what all our "anti-sodomy" laws had sought to kill and imprison people for, no one would ever have been convicted (unless they actually had managed to rape an angel!).

1.2 Second, the story proceeds to tell how *all* the men of Sodom (not just 1 or 10%) made a determined attempt to rape the angel visitors (Genesis 19:4-11). This was not a proposal for a loving consensual relationship, but the violence of a mob intent on *gang rape* and humiliation of unwelcome foreigners. That in this narrative God harshly judges the attempt of gang rape against angelic messengers hardly provides any rational basis for condemning consensual same-sex relations between loving adults. We might compare the case of King David, whom the prophet Nathan rebuked for his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband (2 Samuel 12). To read into that text the notion that God condemns all "*heterosexuality*" would do violence to the Scriptures. Yet that is precisely the kind of text-torturing that official interpreters have perpetrated for centuries in the case of the Sodom story.

1.3 What is obvious from a careful reading of Genesis 19 is easily confirmed by looking up the 58 Bible references to Sodom: Sodom is condemned for violence and "oppression" (which included what we could call "rape"), refusal of hospitality, and failure to show solidarity with the weak and poor (Ezekiel 16:46-49)--never for "homosexuality" nor any ancient linguistic approximation. The Bible never speaks of "sodomy" (a linguistic invention of the monk, Peter Damian, 1007-72 AD), since in the Bible Sodom is only a place name, never a sin (Mark Jordan, 1997). Only in the inter-testamental apocryphal literature did Jewish writers begin to use the Sodom story to condemn certain kinds of same-sex genital behavior common in the Greco-Roman culture of their overlords. Significantly, Jesus rejected these "homophobic and xenophobic" interpretations so popular with his fellow Jews, and returned to the original meaning of the story as a warning against cruel refusal of hospitality (Mt. 10:15; Lk. 10:12).

2 Sodom in Jesus' Teaching (Mt. 10:14-15; Lk. 10:11-12) So long as everyone "knew" that the sin of Sodom was "sodomy," it was obvious that Jesus declared God's judgment against homosexuals. However, when biblical scholars recognized that the story about Sodom had been grossly misinterpreted and that the KJV had mistranslated five Old Testament texts, a theological crisis surfaced: Jesus not only had avoided the homophobic mistakes of centuries of Christian scholarship--he had even anticipated the "modern" perception that the real sin of Sodom was the refusal of hospitality and the resort to violence against strangers. When Jesus commanded his disciples to undertake a mission to nearby towns, taking no provisions for their journey, he concluded:

If anyone *will not welcome you* or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of *Sodom and Gomorrah* on the day of judgment than for that town (Mt. 10:14-15; cf Lk. 10:11-12).

In Genesis 18 Abraham had provided a classic example of Ancient Near Eastern hospitality for God's angel visitors--which Genesis 19 then contrasted with the refusal of hospitality, mob violence and attempted gang rape on the part of the men of Sodom. Clearly Jesus rejected the homophobic use of the Sodom story that had become popular in certain Jewish circles of his time and called his disciples back to the original contextual intent of Genesis 19: a condemnation of refusing hospitality and resorting to violence against strangers..

However, once Jesus' intent is understood, all traditional homophobic theologies are thrown into crisis: Jesus promised eternal life to all who believed in him and obeyed *his* commands; however—contrast homophobic fellow-Jews of his day—he spoke not one word against same-gender sexual acts. Jesus' words, like the scores of other Bible texts on Sodom, had become part of the arsenal used to promote violence against sexual minorities. But when Biblical scholars began to rediscover the original meaning of the Sodom story, the main bastion of purported Biblical support for homophobia was gone. Jesus had not promoted violence against sexual minorities--his words had been tortured and suffered from the violence of homophobic official interpreters. And to the great embarrassment of modern evangelical missionary societies (which commonly require males to get married), it was noted that Jesus sent out his disciples in same-gender male couples (see Paul and Timothy, etc).

3 Jude 7 (by Jesus' brother): Sodom again. Of the 58 biblical references to Sodom, only Jude 7 focuses on what we would call the "sexual" dimension of Genesis 19. At first glance, this emphasis might appear to contradict Jesus' own focus on Sodom's refusal to be hospitable to homeless travelers:

Similarly, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality (Greek: *ekpornesasai*), and going after flesh different (Greek: *sarx heteras* "strange flesh," KJV).

Remarkably, Jude here employs the very Greek word (*heteras*) from which we get the word "heterosexual"--one whose sexual orientation results in a preference for the "other" sex, the "different" gender. Scholars now recognize that Jude's reference to "flesh" that is "different" signifies precisely the flesh of the (non-human) angels in Genesis 19, interpreted in relation to Genesis 6:1-4, where angels ("Sons of God") are said to have had sexual relations with women (see Jude 6). Thus the HarperCollins Study Bible note explains: "The Sodomites attempted sexual relations with angels" and the footnote to Jude 7 indicates that the Greek literally reads "went after other flesh. Similar linguistic data and interpretation are given in the Roman Catholic Jerusalem Bible (for details see recent commentaries). From the Greek or any adequate translation, no one would dream that Jude 7 intended a condemnation of "homosexuality"--although one might misinterpret the Greek in a comic literalistic fashion and suppose that a condemnation of "heterosexuality is implied. But have our official interpreters fairly translated the text--or tortured it and done violence to it? Shockingly, the most recent scholarly translation represents the worst kind of violence to the text. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) renders the Greek "went after other flesh" (its own note!) as "pursued unnatural lust"! And the New International Version translates the key phrase: "perversion."

Despite its accurate note, the NRSV imposed upon Jude's language its understanding of Romans 1, where Paul speaks about gentile sexual uncleanness that is "unnatural" or "against nature" (see below on Romans 1). The NIV may be influenced by antiquated Freudian notions of homosexuality as a kind of "perversion" of original heterosexual desires (assumed to be universal). Surprisingly, the old King James version, without the help of modern Greek scholarship and Freudian psychology, did much better, rendering the key phrase in Jude by "strange flesh"! Obviously, in Jude 7, as in Genesis 19, the reference to Sodom and the males' attempted gang rape of angels provides no basis for promoting prison sentences or mob violence against homosexuals. Here we have another clear case of official interpreters torturing the text and doing violence *to* the Bible.

4 Deuteronomy 23:17-18: "Sodomites" in Five Hebrew Scriptures? While the 16th century King James Version managed to outshine modern translations by its more literal rendering of Jude 7, the same cannot be said of five Old Testament texts where in the KJV the word "sodomite" was used to translate the Hebrew word kadesh (which had nothing to do with Sodom). Best known and most helpful for understanding the meaning of the original Hebrew is the text in Deuteronomy 23:17-18 (KJV):

There shall be no whore (*kedeshah*) of the daughters of Israel,
nor a sodomite (*kadesh*) of the sons of Israel.
Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore (*zonah*),
not the price (earnings) of a dog,
Into the house of the LORD thy God for any vow:
For even both these are abominations unto the LORD thy God.

The Hebrew text employs two words for female prostitute: first "*kedeshah*," literally a "holy/consecrated" person (feminine), and then "*zonah*," here perhaps synonymous, but generally any kind of female prostitute. The Hebrew word the KJV mistakenly translated "sodomite," really has nothing to do with the city Sodom, but is simply the masculine form (*kadesh*) for the corresponding male cult prostitute (literally, "holy/consecrated" person). Most often cultic prostitutes served members of the opposite sex (in pagan rites believed to promote fertility); certainly nothing in the text would indicate the author is thinking exclusively or even primarily of same-sex genital activity. However, the KJV's utterly unwarranted introduction of "sodomite" to translate the Hebrew reference to a "temple prostitute" prompted four centuries of English-speaking Christians to think that Deuteronomy was condemning not just cult prostitutes but all same-gender male sexual activity.

The same kind of translation error was repeated in four other Old Testament texts in the KJV (1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7). Modern translations correct this error and render the Hebrew *kadesh* as "temple

prostitute" (see NIV; NRSV). However, for four centuries many readers of the KJV believed that Deuteronomy's Law gave them grounds for persecuting, torturing and killing those they labeled "sodomites." In the 19th century kindlier forces from the Enlightenment struggled to reduce the punishment to lengthy prison sentences. But had Deuteronomy itself inspired all this violence? Or had the texts been tortured by translators and official interpreters who imposed their own hatred and homophobia on the Bible?

5 Leviticus 18:22; 20:13. Bring back the Death Penalty? If any biblical text could be accused of promoting violence against homosexuals, Leviticus 20:13 might appear to be guilty:

If a man lies with a man, as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them (Lev. 20:13; cf Lev 18:22, "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable").

Especially so, since Leviticus does not simply reflect a ferocity common in the Ancient Near East, but goes far beyond any hostile, homophobic attitudes reflected in other ancient cultures. Christian interpreters commonly dismiss such texts in Leviticus as one of the barbaric portions of the Old Testament that are simply best ignored. Even orthodox Jews must read through 10 chapters of Leviticus (detailed instructions for Temple sacrifices and priestly vestments) before they find a single verse considered normative today. And Christians will find not a single provision they consider normative before they reach chapter 18. Many would even wait until Chapter 19, where the command to love our neighbor occurs--a norm both Jesus and Paul set forth as of permanent validity (Mk. 12:31; Rom. 13:8-10). Jesus also made the radical Jubilee Year provisions of Leviticus 25 central to his own sense of mission and purpose (Lk. 4:18-19).

But precisely what kind of male-male sex act demands the death penalty? The language is euphemistic, but recent investigations have demonstrated that it refers to (unprotected!) male-male anal penetration (Saul Olyan 1994; Daniel Boyarin 1995). In the Ancient Near East, to sexually penetrate another male "like a woman" was a common way to violently humiliate prisoners of war and strangers (see Sodom). However, it also became a common practice of prostitutes serving in idolatrous pagan cults (see Dt. 23:17-18 above). Probably the word "abomination" in each of the Levitical texts points to unsafe, abusive sex acts in the context of idol worship. However, although associated with fertility rites in idol worship, male-male anal sex was a recipe for sterility, not fertility, and priestly sexual instructions in Leviticus commonly seek to fulfil the command to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28, from the same priestly source "P"). As the modern tragedy of AIDS has made clear, unprotected male-male anal sex is also medically dangerous. Priestly authors, writing centuries before condoms, strongly opposed a male practice they knew to be commonly violent, unjust, humiliating, idolatrous and always infertile; unknowingly they also protected Israel from the scourge of many diseases that can be transmitted by unprotected anal sex.

Is it possible to hold that even in the cases of Leviticus 20:13 and 18:22 official interpreters have tortured and violated the texts? Yes! The most common technique has been to strap the texts into a kind of time machine, transport them to the 20th century, and force them to try to answer modern questions about "homosexuality." With this technique interpreters ignore what the texts sought to say in their original context and try to make them say whatever our culture dictates: *prison* sentences for "practicing *lesbians*," for instance. However these patriarchal texts speak only about males and say not a word against lesbians or other women engaging in any same-gender sexual practice. Glibly reading into the texts the modern scientific concept of sexual orientation and "homosexuality" fails to respect their prescientific character, including patriarchal assumptions about male superiority and need to maintain male honor and maximize population growth.

Leviticus knew nothing about modern gay males in loving relationships who engage in oral sex, mutual masturbation, (as well as anal sex with condoms). To grab two verses by the throat, ignore their purpose and the immediate context and book in which they occur, and force them to provide simplistic answers to complex modern questions is to violate both the texts and the ancient Holiness Code in which they occur. Anyone who cites a text demanding death penalty for idolatrous Israelite males engaged in anal sex without condoms as support for prison sentences for modern lesbians is either hypocritical or terribly self-deceived.

6 "Bed-male(s)" in two pauline vice lists (1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10) With the sudden disappearance from the homophobic arsenal of the 58 biblical texts dealing with Sodom, including the only text from Jesus himself, only a handful of potential weapons remained. Clearly, creativity was desperately called for, and in 1946 the translators of the original Revised Standard Version of the New Testament made their modest contribution. In two pauline vice lists we encounter a rare, obscure term, probably coined by Paul himself from two common words (male + bed; Greek: *arsenokoitai*; cf. the English "chair + man = chairman). The Greek, however, uses the specific term for males and is plural, so "chair(s)-males" would be a better analogy. With such a term the etymology alone could not tell us whether such males would prefer sitting to walking or standing (lazy), prefer to command others (bossy) rather than be "facilitators", like to lounge around in chairs with a woman or another male--or plural "women" or "males"--(sex addicts or promiscuous), or get paid to do so (prostitutes, with either or both genders).

Similarly, the etymology of Paul's analogous term "bed(s)-males" tells us very little: bed(s) is a common euphemism for some sort of sexual activity, either approved (Heb 13:4) or condemned (Rom 13:13). Here with males as the condemned protagonists; females/lesbians are not condemned, but might be the partners of the condemned males. For further specification we must rely on relevant usage, which is quite limited. Had Paul preferred clarity and explicitness, common terms were available to him in Greek, so his creativity and ambiguity may be quite purposeful in the rhetoric of his vice list.

In 1 Cor. 6:9 "bed(s) males" is preceded by a common word meaning "soft," which the KJV here translated "effeminate." "Bed(s)-males" the KJV translated "abusers of themselves with mankind," and even into the 20th century theologians (especially Catholic) cited the text to condemn masturbation (which came to be called "self-abuse"). However, the original Revised Standard Version (1946) of the New Testament rendered both "soft" and "bed(s)-males" with the single new scientific term "homosexuals." Of course, by 1946 most doctors and psychologists had come to recognize masturbation as normal and healthful, while homosexuality (no longer simply the sin or vice of "sodomy") had come to be viewed as an illness. Thus suddenly the Apostle Paul sounded more up-to-date than the Kinsey reports (1948). A hitherto obscure, ignored Cinderella of a text, with the touch of the translators' magic wand, was suddenly transformed into a prophetic oracle: for countless pious Bible readers it became obvious that God had inspired Paul with insight into the scientific matters about sexual orientation that were not clarified to the world in general for 1900 years. Lesbians commonly came to be condemned on the basis of the mistranslation "homosexuals" even though anyone who knew anything about the Greek original knew that the pauline term specified males and excluded females.

Scholars soon pointed out, however, that whatever "bed(s)-males" might refer to, Paul's term describes some kind of sexual act(s), not "orientations." As a Jew, Paul probably had in mind the prohibition in Leviticus of (unprotected) male-male anal sex. In later translations, homophobic creativity responded with a host of alternatives: "practicing homosexuals" (NAB; but in Paul's context, most engaging in same-sex acts were probably bisexuals and heterosexuals); "homosexual offenders" (NIV; lesbians had to remind sexist male translators that women also exist and could be homosexuals, but were not the "bed(s)-males" Paul referred to). In desperation the New RSV in 1989 backtracked to the point of repeating the old mistake of the King James mistranslation of Deuteronomy and translated "bed(s)-males" as "sodomites" (which even the King James translators were wise enough to avoid at this point). And thus, alas, Paul found himself plucked from the exhilarating peaks of Freudian-Kinseyan scientific chic ("homosexuals") and plunged back into the netherworld of prescientific, medieval ignorance ("sodomites")!

All the while, scholars who investigated the matter thoroughly tended to conclude that Paul probably coined the term "bed(s)-males" to refer to older males who took advantage of young adolescents (paedophiles), or to young male prostitutes (possibly cultic) serving either males or females. The use of "bed(s)-males" in 1 Tim. 1:10 without the accompanying term "soft," made problematic any precise distinction between penetrator and the one penetrated in anal sex. What both texts make clear, however, is that the sexual vices in the lists are examples of sexual activities that are "unjust" or "oppressive," reflecting an abuse of authority or power: some kind of sexual exploitation, not a consensual relationship of love between equals (Dale Martin 1996).

Southern Baptist commentator David Garland (2003:211-218) well represents the consensus of most today when he translates the two terms in 1 Cor 6:9 thus:

malakoi [softies] = “males penetrated by other males”
 + *arsenokoitai* [males + bed/s] = “males who penetrate other males”

Garland’s translation in effect recognizes that “homosexuals” is not a correct translation, because (1) *arsenokoitai* does not refer to women/lesbians, but only and explicitly to males; (2) the Greek term does not refer sexual orientations, but to an act (anal penetration) that persons of any sexual orientation might suffer or permit; (3) the term does not refer to just any manner of sexual relations between males, but only to anal penetration; (4) Garland recognizes that the use of *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* derives from the LXX of Lev 18:22 and 20:13 (2003:212-213). Saul Olyan has demonstrated that Lev 18:22 and 20:13 refer only to male-male anal penetration and hence does not condemn such acts as mutual masturbation, oral or intercrual sex; (5) if *arsenokoitai* en 1 Cor 6:9 refers only to the penetrator, we cannot insist that this term alone also condemns the one penetrated (kidnapped slave) in 1 Tim 1:10, where the term “bed-males” is used alone, without the addition of term “softie.”

The only question remaining, then, is whether Paul’s intention is to condemn *all* acts of male-male anal penetration (Garland, Thistleton, Gagnon, etc), or whether the context suggests further limitation (Boswell, Scroggs, Martin). That the condemnation is not universal but limited to certain acts (involving exploitation, sexual abuse, etc.) is indicated by (1) the reference to the *ádikoi*, the unjust/oppressors at the beginning of the list, indicating that what follows does not refer to consensual relations of love between equals, but are examples of the injustice, the abuse of authority or power to oppress the weak (similarly Rom 1:18, 24-31); (2) the reference to idolatry (6:9), which also constitutes the context of sexual acts condemned in Lev 18 and 20 and Rom 1:18-23, 25; (3) the only other use of *arsenokoitai* in the NT (in the vice list in 1 Tim 1:10), the term is preceded by a reference to males who exploit prostitutes and is followed by a reference to the “slave-dealers,” which suggests that the *arsenokoitai* are the *clients* of the male prostitutes who have been kidnapped and maintained as slaves; see also *adikía*, injustice/oppression in Rom 1:18; (4) in the historical-cultural patriarchal context, sexual acts were understood to involve relations between an active, superior penetrator (free male) and a passive, inferior penetrated (woman, youth, or slave), not as expressions of mutual love and commitment between equals (as Garland recognizes, 2003:214, 217-218, citing Halperin, Dover and others). Some conclude that Paul employed the term “bed-males” to refer to anal sex by older male penetrators who thus exploited youths (paidophilia). Others suggest that Paul referred to young male prostitutes (probably associated with pagan cults), who served males as well women.

Garland recognizes that churches traditionally misunderstood *malakoi* (softies) to be a condemnation of masturbation (2003:212, citing Boswell and Lapide), although he does not reveal how universal this interpretation was for almost 1500 years. The approval of masturbation and the invention of a new “illness,” homosexuality, by modern psychology, together with the disappearance of “sodomy” as a sin (58 Biblical texts) prompted a frantic search for new texts to condemn homosexuality. Thus, beginning with the RSV in 1946 and fortified by the standard Greek lexicon (BAG, 1957), Biblicists everywhere began to introduce the new term “homosexuals” as the translation of *malakoi* + *arsenokoita* in 1 Cor 6:9 and of *arsenokoita* [without *malakoi*] in 1 Tim 1:10. Finally, after half a century of grievous error, in the new edition of the lexicon (BDAG 2000), editor Frederick Danker recognized the error of the previous edition and of the RSV in offering “homosexuals” as the translation of *arsenokoita* and *malakoi* (2000:135 y 613). English translation thus increasingly abandoned the error (which continues to be promulgated in Spanish versions; see RVR 1995).

Writers like Garland presuppose that Paul shared and reflected the homophobic prejudices commonly expressed in the writings of helenistic Judaism (2003:213, citing Gagnon 2001). Undoubtedly the vocabulary of Paul, as a Jew of the dispersion, often reflects that influence of his peculiar culture. Nevertheless, contemporary Pauline studies, although emphasizing the influence of this culture (in contrast to the emphasis on *classical* Greek culture in earlier studies), also make clear that Paul frequently transcended, contradicted and subverted the

culture of his youthful formation (Rom 12:1-2), provoking persecution from his fellow-Jews throughout the years of his apostolic labor. As a follower of Jesus, the messiah crucified as subversive, Paul demonstrates the same solidarity with all the oppressed (poor, women, sexual minorities, immigrants). Neither Jesus and his apostles, nor Paul and his co-workers conformed to the sexual ideology of “family values” with its patriarchal emphasis on the procreation of heirs. Therefore, Pauline theology in general and the relevant concrete literary contexts are the best guides for interpreting the terms and theology in question. To reduce the great Apostle to the Gentiles to a mere reflection of the ignorance and prejudice of his contemporaries is neither wise nor just.

In this connection we do well to recall that for centuries texts supposedly written by Paul (1 Cor 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:9-15; Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:18) were cited **(1)** to require that women be silent in the churches and submit to the authority of (supposedly superior) males; **(2)** to maintain a barbaric system of racial slavery (Col 3:22-4:1; Eph 6:5-9; cf. Philemon); and **(3)** to support absolutist monarchies (1 Tim 2:1-2) and to oppose the rise of modern democracies. In recent decades, however, Biblicists increasingly recognize Paul to be the Apostle of freedom, pioneer in the liberation of women, of slaves and of all the oppressed and marginalized. Many would see him also as a pioneer in the liberation of sexual minorities, although some still defend traditional ideological postures, citing three texts of questionable interpretation. In his treatment of marriage in 1 Cor 7 Garland himself provides abundant examples of the way Paul transcended the dominant patriarchal sexual ideologies of his time (both Greco-Roman and Jewish)—although the author continually forgets that many non-heterosexual persons also may lack the gift of continence and require regular sexual expression for their emotional and spiritual health (2003:250, 258-260).

Another example of ideological distortion in Garland occurs when he affirms that the interpretation of 1 Cor 6:9 as a universal condemnation of every “homosexual act” would be “good news to any slaves who were subject to unwanted sexual advances by his owner” (2003:213, note 32). To the contrary, although Garland does us the favour of reminding us that the majority of the recipients of 1 Corinthians may have been slaves, they did not have the luxury of being able to reject the sexual *demand*s (not “advances”!) of their owners—they had to obey or face punishment and torture, even death. For such slaves, interpretations like those of Garland and Gagnon, that they would be forever excluded from the Kingdom of God and life eternal for having submitted to sexual demands which they could in no way reject, would be the worst possible news imaginable (cf. Bernadette Brooten on the death penalty prescribed in Lev 20:13 for the one penetrated, even when he were a child or sexually violated youth; 1996:290). Although Garland shows no awareness of the literature demonstrating that Rom 1:26 refers to women involved in heterosexual acts “against nature” (2003:213), he does not repeat Gagnon’s error of continually misinterpreting texts by the importation of the modern concept of the supposed “complementarity” of the sexes. Neither does he recommend the fraudulent “ExGay” therapies that pretend to “cure” homosexuality (cf Gagnon; see also Garland 2003:214 on Rom 1:26 and 11:24 with Romans below).

7 Romans 1:26-27. A Pretext out of Context? Despite the disappearance of the 58 texts referring to Sodom as a basis for homophobia and the resulting silence of Jesus on homoeroticism, for many Romans 1:26-27 remains sufficient artillery to continue attacking sexual minorities. Nevertheless, more careful exegesis of the text *in its context* increasingly unmasked the prejudice of such interpretation (for details and bibliography see “Romans”, www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar).

7.1 Rom 1:18 The wrath of God manifest “against all **injustice/opresión** (*adikía*).” As throughout the Bible, God’s wrath is directed against the oppressors, not the weak and oppressed. The sexual acts referred to in Rom 1:24-27 thus represent abuses of power and violence that harm the neighbour, not of committed love between consenting adults (Hanks 1982/83; 2000).

7.2 Rom 1:18-23, 25 The wrath of God “against all **impiety/idolatry**.” Both the previous context (1:19-23) and the insertion of 1:25 in the nucleus of the texts that refer to sexual acts (1:24, 26-27), as well as the historical and cultural context, make clear that Paul refers to idolatrous practices, such as cultic prostitution in pagan fertility rites (Kuefler 2001).

7.3 Rom 1:26 refers to the **women** of Gentile males who abandoned “natural” (procreational) sexual relations for others “against nature,” probably *heterosexual anal* intercourse (thus avoiding procreation). Early church fathers until around 400 A.D. (Clement of Alexandria, 150-215; Anastasios, c. 200; and even Augustine, 354-430) agreed in interpreting Rom 1:26 that way. The first to suggest a reference to female homoeroticism (lesbian practices) was John Chrysostom (344-408)! Since Chrysostom, Rom 1:26 commonly has been seized upon as the only Biblical condemnation of lesbianism (with very few attempting to explain such a strange phenomenon) Recently, however, many have begun to advocate returning to the patristic understanding of Rom 1:26 as referring to *heterosexual anal* intercourse. In the following verse (Rom 1:27), Paul then speaks of *males* who engage in the same *practice* (unprotected *anal* intercourse) with one another (cf. Lev. above; James E. Miller 1995; 1998). The word “similarly” (*homoios*) that links 1:27 to 1:26 thus refers not to our *modern* construct of “homosexuality,” but to the similar *practice* of anal intercourse, avoiding procreation (and thus categorized by the ancients as “unnatural”). Consequently, when Robin Scroggs (1983) cites abundant evidence that Rom 1:27 refers only to paedophilia, we may not argue that a supposed reference to lesbians in 1:26 refutes his case (lesbians in antiquity were not associated with paedophilic practices).

7.4 Rom 2:1-16 The rhetorical trap As Diane Swancutt has shown (2003), the creation of the chapter division separating Rom 1:18-31 from 2:1-16 reflects the homophobia of editors, since Paul himself carefully laid a rhetorical trap in 1:18-31, which he then springs on the unsuspecting homophobic reader/listener in 2:1-16. When we misinterpret 1:24-27 in isolation from the Apostle’s rhetorical trap sprung in 2:1-16 we gravely err, since we use 1:24-27 to condemn sexual minorities instead of continuing through 2:1-16, which denounces the arrogant listener/reader who uses 1:18-31 to judge others.

7.5 Rom 1:24 “Unclean” The gentile sexual desires and practices Paul refers to are described from the Jewish perspective only as “unclean” (making unfit for Temple worship), not as sinful. Nevertheless, as he deconstructs the rhetoric of 1:24-27, the Apostle shows that from the Christian perspective, *nothing* is unclean in itself....all *things* are clean” (14:14,20; Greek literally, followed by KJV and NRSV). The NIV does violence to the text three times: by inserting the word “sinful” in Romans 1:24 and then twice inserting the word “food” in Romans 14:14, 20, thus eliminating the sexual implications (see also “pure” in Titus 1:15). Paul thus adds an additional element to the rhetorical trap of 2:1-16.

7.6 Rom 1:26-27 “Against Nature” The rhetoric of Paul’s sermon illustration in Romans 1:24-27 undergoes a similar deconstruction as the argument of the book advances in the evaluation of practices that are “against nature.” Reading Romans 1:26-27 out of context, one easily leaps to the conclusion that anything “against nature” must be sinful (a notion common in Jewish and pagan philosophical thought when Paul wrote). However, in Romans 11 Paul deconstructs this interpretation, using exactly the same Greek phrase (*para phusin*, against nature) to insist that it is God who continually so acts when converting Gentiles and inserting them “against nature” into the olive tree (symbol for Israel). Obviously any miracle extolled in Scripture is also “against nature”! The linguistic link between Romans 1:16 and 11:24 is commonly ignored by interpreters; and even when noted, they often fail to point out that it is *God* who acts against nature in Romans 11:24.

7.7 Rom 1:24, 26-27 “Shameful” Appealing to common Jewish attitudes in Romans 1:24-27, Paul speaks of the gentile sexual acts as involving social stigma, and loss of honor. However in Romans 3:21-26 Paul *glories* in the cross (Gal 6:14), demonstrating that it is precisely in Jesus’ crucifixion—the most shameful experience imaginable!—that God accomplished our redemption. Hence Christians can even “boast” (3x: Romans 5:2-3,11) in their salvation accomplished through that shameful act and maintain a hope that “does *not* put to *shame*” (5:5; cf. Hebrews 12:2 which describes Jesus as “despising the shame” or social stigma of the cross).

7.8 Rom 1:24-27 → 13:8-10. Continuity In contrast with the rhetorical trap (2:1-16) and the three related elements of *discontinuity* whereby Paul deconstructs three of the four key terms in the rhetoric of 1:24-27 (uncleanness, shame, against/nature), the Apostle maintains one single element of *continuity*: the Tenth Commandment that prohibits a “coveting” that motivates acts that harm the neighbor and contradicts the command to love the neighbor (see “coveting,” *epithumia*, in Rom 1:24; “passions,” *pathe*, 1:26; “burn with

lust,” 1:27; cf. 13:13, “Let us walk decently...not in banquets and drunkenness, nor in beds [sexual relations] and excesses”). The basic norm for the church thus is not to be heterosexual, establish nuclear families, or propagate children, but simply to love, and not harm, our neighbor (13:8-10).

7.9 Rom 14:1-15:13 Hospitality Paul's lengthy, profound and subtle argument (appealing alternately to Jewish and gentile readers) only reaches its conclusion in the call for mutual hospitality and the setting aside of traditional prejudices: “Welcome one another, then, as Christ has *welcomed you*, in order to bring praise to God” (15:7; “welcome/accept” thus becomes the synonym for God’s “justification”). Sodom-like refusal of hospitality (9:29) is not to characterize the Roman house churches. Jews were free to maintain their traditional distinctions about “unclean” gentile practices, but they were not to impose such distinctions on gentile converts

7.10 Rom 16 Greetings Paul's warm greetings to households involving all types of “sexual minority” living arrangements (only three married couples!) and confirms this understanding (Hanks 2000; 2006).

Summary. Genesis 19 describes an attempt to *rape* two angel visitors and the other 58 biblical texts referring to Sodom denounce other sins, never homosexuality. Jesus referred to Sodom as an example of a refusal to offer hospitality (Mat 10:14-15; Lk 10:11-12) but never spoke a single word condemning homoerotic relations. Of the other six “clobber texts” traditionally used as attack homosexuals, Jude 7 has almost always been mistranslated to cover up the reference in the original Greek to the rape of angels. For centuries the term for male prostitute in Deuteronomy 17:8-9 was mistranslated “sodomites” (KJV). In the case of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, homophobic interpreters have ignored the context (entire chapters of divine commands ignored today) and the purpose (maximize procreation in a decimated population). Two obscure terms in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and one in 1 Timothy 1:10 were grossly mistranslated as “homosexuals” in the second half of the Twentieth Century, an error finally recognized and corrected in the new edition of the standard Greek lexicon (BDAG 2000). The intention of these two texts, as well as that of Romans 1:26-27, to condemn sexual *abuses* (injustice, oppression) in *idolatrous contexts* (pagan fertility cults) has been ignored. The traditional homophobic interpretation of Rom 1:26-27 constitutes gross violence against Paul’s liberating Gospel (1:16-17), lifting 1:24-27 out of context, anachronistically imposing the modern concept of homosexual orientation, mistranslating key verses to mask intertextual relationships, development of thought and dialectic, and failing to follow the argument to the conclusion of the letter. Commentators almost universally have ignored the significance of the rhetorical trap the Apostle springs in 2:1-16 and the related process of deconstruction evident in the development of the teaching in the entire letter.

CONCLUSIONS All of the 64 texts traditionally used to foment violence against sexual minorities have *suffered* violence at the hands of homophobic translators and interpreters. Not a single text, when correctly translated and interpreted, provides any coherent basis for the homophobic and violence traditionally manifest against sexual minorities. Nothing in the entire Bible condemns committed, loving same-sex relations between consenting adults of homosexual orientation. To the contrary, a growing number of books have demonstrated that the Bible is a profoundly homoerotic text. (see Nancy Wilson 1995; Jeff Miner y John Connoley 2002; Theodore Jennings 2005; Diana Swancutt 2004; Hanks 2000; 2006).

Although the number of homosexuals killed in the Nazi Holocaust was small compared to the millions of Jews killed (probably because Jews were more easily identified), recent historical studies contain abundant evidence indicating that sexual minority representatives killed in the last 1000 years may well exceed the six million Jews estimated to have been killed in the Holocaust. If we could indeed draw a straight line of historical causality from Leviticus and Romans to Hitler (as some claim), few would want to consider the Bible a helpful guide for modern life -- much less divinely inspired. Above we have outlined an alternative hypothesis: that a few biblical texts have been arbitrarily selected, violently misinterpreted, and then used as a pretext to rationalize common human fears and hatreds. A more thorough study of the texts and the history of their interpretation amply supports the conclusion that the Bible has suffered repeated violence from official translators and interpreters. Properly interpreted it provides no rational basis whatsoever for promoting prejudice and violence against sexual minorities.

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