

**Excursus 1 Gaca, Kathy L. (2003), *The Making of Fornication: Eros, Ethics and Political Reform in Greek Philosophy and Early Christianity*. Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press (“staggering erudition”, Chris Frilingos, Review JBL 123/4 2004:756-599); cf. the Greek *porneia*, “prostitution, unchastity, fornication” (BDAG 2000: 354)**

Kathy Gaca shows that the Church Fathers did not draw their conclusions about sexual norms basically from the Hebrew Bible nor the New Testament: “From the beginning of the second century C.E., patristic writers actively began to adapt ideas about regulating human sexual conduct from Plato, the Stoics, and the Pythagoreans as they developed their own teachings about permissible and impermissible sexual activity....[1] Tatian was an ardent Christian advocate of complete sexual renunciation, also known as the ‘enocratic’ position, and [2] Epiphaneus was a Christian Platonist and a Gnostic supporter of more libertine sexual principles. Both Tatian and Epiphaneus drew on the Stoics for some of their teachings and Epiphaneus borrowed from Plato as well. [3] Clement, also a Christian Platonist, censured both Tatian and Epiphaneus for going to opposite extremes. He used Plato, the Stoics, and the Pythagoreans to develop putatively more moderate sexual guidelines....somewhere between the encratite and libertine positions” (2003:1-2), advocating “reproduction within marriage” (15). “Tatian, drawing mainly on Paul [1 Cor 7:1,7], the Septuagint, and the [later] Stoics, advocates that Christians must renounce sexual activity in order to be saved” (2003:15). “Epiphaneus....argues that the communal sexual principles of Plato and the early Stoics are the right model for Christians to follow (2003:15). “Clement counters the encratic position by maintaining that reproduction within marriage is a worthy Christian practice....Clement’s polemic against Epiphaneus indicates that it was a matter of some real debate which pattern of sexual conduct Christians should follow, Clement’s or Epiphaneus’ (2003:15).

“By the second century, prominent sectors of the Christian populace started to put highly restrictive sexual principles into practice. Christian monks took to the desert to battle sexual fantasies and nocturnal emissions. Female virgins renounced marriage in order to adore Christ as their spiritual Bridegroom Married couples opted for the sanctity of a marriage liberated from sexual relations altogether, or at least once their pious duty of reproduction was finished” (2003:9). Gaca seeks to understand why Tatian’s encratic position became so popular (2003:9) and concludes that the anti-sexual strain in Christian tradition was basically the result of the Church Fathers who, with their classical Greco-Roman formations, depended on Hellenistic moral philosophy, especially the *later* Stoics (4-11). In contrast with the *early* Stoics (Zeno and Chrysippus), who formulated an original theory of communal eros, rejecting marriage in favor of cultivating friendships, the *later* Stoics, followed by the Fathers, replaced the communal aspect with established Greek customs of marriage and family coupled with a preference for total abstinence (2003:7; see the similar replacement of Jesus’ and Paul’s praxis and teaching with the *Haustafeln*, the tables of household duties in → Colossians, Ephesians, 1 Timothy and 1 Peter). Like the Fathers, Michel Foucault ignored the early Stoics (2003:6-8), but one reviewer of Gaca’s work (Chris Filingos) argues that her critique of Foucault ignores the diversity evident in his writings (2004:759). With their philosophical convictions firmly in place, most Fathers (in typical Fundamentalist fashion) proceeded to make a highly selective literalistic interpretation of a few biblical texts, ignoring or allegorizing any text that did not square with their sexual ideology that permitted monogamous, heterosexual procreative sex but preferred total sexual abstinence.

Gaca concludes that **for Paul**, based not on Greek philosophy or popular culture but on his reading of the LXX, **fornication [*porneia*] implies heterosexual relations in a context of idolatrous religion and worship**: “Polytheistic religion in antiquity was intimately connect with sexual and procreative conduct, for people worshipped gods embodying sexual power, such as Aphrodite, Dionysus, Her, and Zeus” (2003:3). Since Hellenistic culture accepted prostitution/*porneia*, the term was not included in its vice lists; Jesus, addressing fellow-Jews in Palestine had little occasion to refer to *porneia*; but for Paul, addressing non-Jews elsewhere, made it become a major concern: “Paul’s cardinal dictate [is] that God’s people must avoid sexual fornication in worship of other gods” (2003:14). “The vice of *porneia* is entirely absent from the [vice] lists in Hellenistic philosophy, but occurs frequently and near the beginning of the Pauline lists, Gal 5:18-21 Col 3:5; 1 Cor 12:20-21, Eph 5:3-5” (2003:14, note 38); rare (twice) in Jesus’ teaching (2003:13 note 36, 139 note 52; see Matt 5:32 // 19:9; 15:19 // Mk 7:21). However, fornication/*porneia* in Paul, following the LXX, is “a heterosexual deviance” and does not refer to homoerotic acts (2003:143, 158). “Biblical *porneia* refers to acts of sexual intercourse and reproduction that deviate from the norm of worshipping God alone....In the *non-biblical* Greek sense, however, *porneia* means ‘prostitution’ and has nothing to do with worshipping God alone” (2003:20).

To sustain her argument that *porneia* in Paul refers to *heterosexual acts in a context of polytheism and idolatry*, (2003:119-159) Gaca refers to various texts from the LXX version of the Hebrew Bible and to Paul, who “considers sexual intercourse in honor of other gods to be worse than nonsexual aspects of other-theistic worship” (2003:137): “Certain kinds of sexual activity are marked as apostasy, and these fit into two groups. First, sexual activity constitutes rebellion against God if it occurs while worshipping gods other than or in addition to the Lord....Male Israelites...fornicate with Moabite women at he festival for Baal-peor” [Num 25:1-18 → 1 Cor 10:7-8]....Similarly, Jacob’s daughter Dinah is subject to fornication when Shechem rapes her at a festival” [Gen 34:2, 31; see also Jer 2:19-22; Mic 1:6-8] (2003:122-124). Paul “tells the Corinthian Christians that God killed twenty-three thousand Israelites because of their sexual fornicating worship of alien gods and other acts of disobedience....(1 Cor 10:8, 11-12 [regarding the numerical discrepancy see NVIBE note])....Paul issues the same message to the Thessalonian Christian community. They must abstain from sexual intercourse in worship of other gods in order to avoid ‘the avenging Lord’ (*ekdikos kurios*) (1 Thess 4:16). The community in Rome receives notice as well. Paul states that God’s wrath is emerging against some or all Gentiles for sexual worship that they devote to their gods (Rom 1:18-27)” (2003:138; see also Matthew Kuefler 2001:255-60; Hanks 2006:594).

Regarding Paul’s teaching in Romans 1:24-27, Gacy concludes:

- the reference to “uncleanness/impurity” expressed in covetous desires (*epithumia*) in **Rom 1:24** continues the theme of idolatry in 1:19-23 and reemphasized again in **1:25** (cf. Dale Martin, 1995:332-55; 2006:22; Countryman, 2007:97-99).
- the theme of idolatry continues in Romans **1:26-27**, where Paul describes the Gentiles as “burning with desire to comply with their devotion to alien gods such as Aphrodite, Dionysus, Hera, and Zeus” (2003:185, with reference to gods and goddesses of erotic love).

Moreover, Gacy points out, “There is no transparent connection...between **Paul and the [later] rabbis**, for the Pharisaic background that Paul claims in Philippians 3:5 differs in numerous major ways from the Pharisaism presuppose in the Hebrew-based rabbinic tradition....[Thus it is not illuminating to assume that rabbinic sources are the manifest background for Paul’s sexual principles] It is questionable to use rabbinic evidence to control and fill in what Paul ‘must mean’ on topics where he is terse or convoluted, as he frequently is, while the rabbis carefully explain their positions, as they tend to do]” (2003:14-15; see similarly the differences between Philo’s Pythagorean-based procreationism and Paul, who did not exemplify nor advocate procreationism, 2003:206-08). Gaca thus undermines one of Robert Gagnon’s favorite fallback positions when his exegetical arguments falter: Paul (or Jesus) must have condemned male homoeroticism because he was Jewish (2001:159-83; for Jesus see 2001:185-228). However, Gaca fails to apply her own principle when she rejects Saul Olyan’s interpretation of Lev 18:22 and 20:13 as only prohibiting male homoerotic anal intercourse (2003:126, note 23) on the grounds of rabbinic discussion. The assumption that ancient Judaism must be seen as universally and essentially homophobic (as if the two verses in Leviticus, Philo and Josephus were the only relevant evidence to be considered) has now been roundly refuted by Ted Jennings’ work, which demonstrates that the Hebrew Bible includes a positive emphasis on homoeroticism that was unique in antiquity (2005; Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Jacob’s Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel*. New York: Continuum; see Hanks’ summary and review, [www.fundotrasoverjas.org.ar](http://www.fundotrasoverjas.org.ar)).

**Conclusion** For interpreting **Romans 1:18-32** Gaca thus brings strong support to the interpretation that what is condemned are only expressions of sexual “uncleanness” (1:24, 26-27) in a *context of polytheism and idolatry* (1:19-23, 25, 28a), which would thus not apply to contemporary adult Christian believers in a consensual loving relationship. In addition, both for Paul and Jesus, Gaca concludes that **the texts condemning *porneia*** not only are limited to sexual acts in *idolatrous religious* contexts but are also limited to *heterosexual* acts, while the three Pauline references to male-male anal sex employ other terms and categories. Thus, Robert Gagnon’s desperate attempt (2001:191-92) to find a basis for attributing to Jesus a condemnation of male homoeroticism in his two references to *porneia* is also shown to be groundless.

**Chapter 4, “The Reproductive Technology of the Pythagoreans” (2003:94-116).** Pythagoras was a pre-Platonic Greek philosopher and mathematician (6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E) known only from later citations, whose emphasis on reproduction technique was transmuted via Plato, neoplatonism and the Stoics into later patristic and modern Christian teaching on procreation. Thus Plato (ca. 429-347) in *Republic* 546b4-d3 refers to a Pythagorean theorem regarding a “nuptial number”, “an abstruse eugenic principle that designates the most

auspicious timing for producing human offspring” (2003:95). According to **Aristoxenus (born ca. 375-360 B.C.E.,** writing about Pythagoreans he knew): “Followers of Pythagoras ideally should refrain from sexual activity in their early youth, marry, and maintain marital fidelity thereafter, and in general they ought to make sparing use of sexual activity throughout their lives” (2003:101). “The reproductive technology...presumes at its core the earliest known Pythagorean tenet—that human nature is a dualistic composite of an immortal soul in a mortal body” (2003:103). “The Pythagoreans interpret conception and birth to be an act of guiding a soul into embodiment....” (2003:101).

**Ocellus, ca. 150 B.C.E.** (2003:109-111) reflects typical Pythagorean principles but emphasizes “the older Pythagorean argument that procreationism chiefly serves the interest of the children. Offspring who are produced in anything other than a strictly purposeful way [procreation within marriage] are ‘abject, ill-omened, and abominable...born under a bad sign...afflicted with the life-long curse of having been embodied in a sexually abominable way’” (2003:110)

“**Charondas**” (2003:107-09), pseudonymous author of a Pythagorean treatise, **ca. 50 B.C.E.** for whom “Only deliberately procreative sex acts in marriage remain permissible” (2003:108). “Charondas thinks in a Pythagorean manner by the exclusive disjunction he makes between ejaculating for procreation...or for licentiousness....Unless a man ejaculates into his wife to reproduce, then he does so for licentious reasons [pleasure, friendship], and such license is absolutely forbidden....Charondas thus goes by the strict letter of his procreationist law, and he would enforce this rule on a lifelong basis” (108; unlike Plato who limited the Pythagorean restriction to about a 10-year period when the couple would produce children).

The treatises of Ocellus and Charondas show that “the older Pythagorean doctrine of procreationism gains a favorable reception during the Neopythagorean revival of the later Hellenistic and early Roman period” (2003: 110). Thus, **Seneca (4 B.C.E.–65 A.D.),** commonly classified as a Stoic, “advocates procreationism in its Neopythagorean version....Only purposeful reproduction is justifiable, and marriage is the only institution in which it may occur....Seneca advocates unconditional procreationism out of concern more for the sexual agents themselves than for the offspring,” considering that sexual pleasure is like “a fire ready to rage out of control” (2003:111). **Musonius (ca 20-30 A.D.–79-101 A.D.)** “though primarily Stoic, like Seneca, similarly promotes Neopythagorean procreationism....[Sexually deviant men] besmirch themselves ‘just like pigs and they are happy rolling in the mud....Musonius and Seneca are the only known Stoics who advocate the procreationist dictate. They are completely anomalous as Stoics in so doing, for this Pythagorean rule conflicts fundamentally with the basic principles of stoic eros....Both Seneca and Musonius are ascetic Pythagoreans in Stoic clothing, at least with regard to their sexual ethics” (2003:113-15). The Stoics generally argued that friendship is the primary goal of sexual activity, quite apart from its reproductive function: “In Stoic sexual ethics...sexual activity is justified if practiced for the purpose of cultivating mutual friendship” (2003:97-98, note 10).

In its more extreme version “procreationism forbids all other sexual activity as reckless and morally reprehensible, be it homoerotic, autoerotic, or heterosexual deviance from strictly temperate reproduction within marriage....Though it began as a distinctively Pythagorean doctrine, in its more extreme form it later came to be understood as God’s law in ecclesiastical Christianity” (2003:96). “Procreationism in [this]... aphoristic Neopythagorean form gains wider currency by the time of the early Roman empire....and it was well positioned to spread further into the Jewish Platonism of Philo and into ecclesiastical Christianity via Christian Platonism” (2003:116). Our modern Christian emphasis on procreationism thus stems from this extreme aphoristic form Pythagorean teaching, imbibed by the Fathers from Greco-Roman philosophy, not from Genesis 1-2, which (were they taken literally) would require all to dedicate themselves to the *maximization* of procreation, necessary for the world of Adam and Eve, but disastrous for our modern world with its population explosion. Obviously major voices in the Biblical tradition (Jeremiah, Jesus, Paul, all unmarried) were singularly uninterested in maximizing procreation, while → Song of Songs, the only biblical book wholly dedicated to the theme of human sexuality, consists of erotic poetry that extols joyful eroticism outside any framework of marriage and with no concern to procreate. Moreover, most Church Fathers strongly preferred total sexual abstinence and only permitted procreative sex within marriage as the inferior option. Gaca thus unmask modern Christian emphasis on family values and procreationism as reflecting roots that are Pythagorean rather than biblical.

"The genius of [Pauline] Christianity is its concern for all peoples of the world; the genius of rabbinic Judaism is its ability to leave other people alone." Daniel Boyarin's aphorism, which Gaca cites, may serve as a soft introduction to this article. (D. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 232-6, cited in Gaca 2003:184, note 56). The traditional Hellenistic Jewish argument against polytheism is classically explicated in the Deuterocanonical Wisdom [of Solomon] 13:1-14:31, which maintains that those who affirm a plurality of gods in the physical world are *unenlightened* about biblical monotheism and have "ignorance" to blame for thinking that there are many gods: "For all people who are *ignorant* of God were *foolish* by nature" (13:1; 1999:167-68). The Jewish philosopher Philo (ca. 30 BCE-45CE), the historian Josephus (37-100 CE) and the *Sibylline Oracles* (3:8-9; 2d century BCE) all support and develop this simple explanation (1999:170-71)

1 With the exception of Romans 1:18-32, other relevant NT texts, as well as the apostolic and church fathers until ca. 160 CE echoed this standard Jewish explanation, which encourages tolerance and patient education. Thus Acts portrays Paul as proclaiming to the Athenians, with their altar to an "unknown God" that God had "overlooked the times of [their] *ignorance*" in allowing Paul to proclaim his Gospel (Acts 17:23, 30; similarly Eph 4:17-18; also *Didache* 5:2; and the *Epistle to Diognetus* 7:2; 8:1-11). "The belief that religiously alien ignorance motivates polytheism remains in force among the early [2d century] Christian apologists: Aristides [writing ca. 177], Justin [ca. 100-175] Athenagoras [writing ca. 176-180], and Theophilus [fl. Ca 169-185]" (1999:177-180). "Socrates and Plato, however, are heroic exceptions to this rule according to Justin and Athenagoras, just as they are for Philo and Josephus as well" (1999:179-80).

2 Paul, however, in Rom 1:18-32 had offered "a completely distinct explanation of why some or all polytheistic people in the ancient Mediterranean region worshipped numerous gods. The people in question are not theologically blind outsiders but...knowledgeable about God...yet they have become rebels who worship the created world rather than its creator....they are blameworthy 'suppressors of the truth' about God and as such they 'have no defense' for worshipping their ancestral gods" (1999:171). Thus, NT commentators who assume that in Romans 1:18-32 Paul basically echoes the earlier tolerant Jewish reflected in Wisdom 13-14 are seriously mistaken. Given the nature of Paul's accusation, the precise identity of the alleged truth suppressors becomes a pressing question....This problem however, remains an enigma in the text of Romans itself" (1000:173; the three alternatives discussed are: all humanity, or the Gentiles as a whole, or a sector of the Gentiles—the Greeks or their Hellenic culture of philosophy). Paul maintains in Rom 11:25-27 that "Israel encompasses all humanity, Jew, Gentiles, and Christian alike [so] the truth-suppressing polytheists are apostate Israel even though they assume this new cultural identity unawares" (1999:172). Paul's strong polemic in Rom 1:18-32 was misunderstood or ignored for more than a century until the rigorist Christian Apologist Tatian (c. 160), later founder of the ascetic sexually abstinent sect of the Encratites, began to make vigorous use of it in a violent attack on Greek civilization, even denouncing Socrates, Plato and Aristotle as leaders of a rebellion against God and initiating a strong trend toward intolerance of Greek philosophy and other religions (1999:181-183). Similar use of Rom 1:18-32 was then made by Clement of Alexandria (150-215), who later wavered back to earlier more tolerant attitude (1999:183-185). Origen (ca. 185-253), however, consistently endorsed Paul's idea that there are Gentile/Greek truth suppressors, including Plato and Socrates (1999:186-188), as did Athanasius (295-373; 1999:188-92) and, above all John Chrysostom (b ca 349-54, d 407; 1999:192-195), who also channeled ecclesiastical intolerance to target Jews and homeroticism.

However, while Gaca builds an irrefutable case demonstrating the two conflicting interpretations of Rom 1:18-32 in the Church Fathers and subsequent history, shortly before her article a third interpretation of Paul's ambiguous reference appeared that has convinced many: the "men/persons" (*anthropon*) in Rom 1:18ff. constitutes part of a Decline of Civilization narrative and refers to ancient humanity as a whole, who at some unspecified past time abandoned its ideal state (a "golden age") and initiated a decline into the present condition of sin and suffering (Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1994; Dale Martin 2006:53, 207 notes 9, 17; Douglas Campbell 2009, Excursus, 460-66; Hanks 2006:600; "A Review of Robert Jewett, *Romans* [2007], and other recent scholarship on Romans 1:16-2:16," 2008, [www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar](http://www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar)).