

Theodore W. Jennings, Jr. *Jacob's Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel*. New York: Continuum, 2005. Summary and Review by Tom Hanks

Ted Jennings, professor of Biblical and Constructive Theology at the Chicago Theological Seminary, now provides us with a powerful companion volume to *The Man Jesus Loved: Homoerotic Narratives from the New Testament* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2003). His three major conclusions, supported both by careful exegesis of unfamiliar texts and creative readings of familiar texts, and are nothing short of revolutionary:

- That the Bible is not homophobic, but is a profoundly, positive, homoerotic book;
- That the Hebrew Bible (“Old Testament”) developed a positive view of homoeroticism centuries before the Greeks (whose admirable “tolerance” has been almost universally viewed as contrasting with the supposed “homophobia” of the Bible): “the evidence for significant same-sex eroticism in Israel actually precedes the evidence for Greece, in some cases by several centuries. Hence, it appears that ancient Israel may have more of a claim to be a cultural home to same-sex eroticism than does ancient Greece” (198);
- That in both Hebrew and Greek culture, literary texts positively portraying female homoeroticism (“lesbianism”) preceded those portraying male homoeroticism.

Jennings projects a third volume, “an analysis of Paul...and then demonstrating that Christian homophobia derives not from either Paul or Leviticus but from the tradition going back to Plato and carried forward by certain stoics and then into an Alexandrian tradition of reading derived from Philo, Barnabas, Clement and so on. All part of trying to disentangle the Christian tradition from the accretions of erotophobia. I am persuaded that this entanglement is one of the chief obstacles to a recovery of a commitment to true social justice as essential to the gospel (sin = sex; rather than sin= violation, exploitation, etc.)” [personal correspondence, July 31, 2005]

Part One. The Love of Heroes (1-2). The narrative framework is one of heroes and their boy-companions. “We also encounter the narrative character of YHWH and see that he too has younger male companions and that these seem to be selected to a significant degree on account of their notable beauty” (2)

1 Warrior Love (3-12). The saga concerning David “appears to be a saga written for men...for warriors and, especially, leaders of warriors....Women seldom appear [“women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition,” says David (1 Sam 21:5; see Deut 24:5; 2 Sam 11:11, Jennings 3, note 1)]....Instead, the...dominant war leaders, always appear with their youthful boy-companions....younger or lower-status males” (3).

1.1 Heroes and Their Youthful Companions. “Saul is presented to us initially as “a handsome young man” (1 Sam 9:2), and accompanied by a youth with whom he goes in search of his father’s donkeys (3-4). “Jonathan, like his father before him, has a young comrade with whom he undertakes the adventure that earns him praise....an armor-bearer”

(5). “David is chosen, at least in part for his beauty, to be Saul’s boy-companion and armor-bearer (1 Sam 16:21-22). However, “it is only of David that we never hear that he has taken such a young companion for himself” (5). “Nothing in the heroic saga material (Judges-2 Samuel)...precludes erotic or even sexual readings” (6).

1.2 YHWH as War Chief. “Within this context YHWH is the preeminent warrior-chieftain....How does this warrior-chieftain choose his youthful companions?...He chooses two. First is Saul, and then, when Saul displeases him, he chooses David. Insofar as we can discern the motive for the choices, it is the astonishing physical beauty of the young men. This is always the first characteristic mentioned in the text” (7, citing 1 Sam 9:1-2; see Joseph en Gen 39:6-7). “YHWH claims that he does not look on outward appearances but at the heart (will) of the person (1 Sam 16:7). However when the last of Jesse’s sons comes into the room, we are told: “Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said [to Samuel], ‘Rise and anoint him; for this is the one’” (16:12)....The choice is never made on the basis of prior prowess” (8; note 3 cites Isa 53:2 and the suffering servant’s lack of beauty). David’s sons Absalom (2 Sam 14:25) and Adonijah (1 Kgs 1:6) are also said to be handsome, but are not chosen as David’s successor (9). “YHWH, who had spurned his first companion in order to select David, has in the meantime himself learned [from David] the virtue of loyalty and remains loyal to David to the end” (10 [despite David’s adultery and murder, more serious than Saul’s sins!]).

The characteristics of the relationship between the hero and his armor-bearer are “First...the armor bearer is the constant companion of the hero or warrior....Further, the youth is distinguished by an absolute loyalty to the warrior....[a] loyalty to the death....This is, however, not necessarily true of the warrior’s relation to the youth” (10). Jennings then cites the analogy with patriarchal marriage with its double standard regarding polygamy (11). “The sort of homoerotic attachments we encounter in this text have some points of contact with what we find in other warrior cultures....not so much Athenian pederasty but...Sparta or the famous band of lovers at Thebes....samurai and their boy companions [in Japan]” (11) [see the original Batman and Robin; David M. Halperin, “Heroes and Their Pals” 1990:75-87]. “The depiction of YHWH in this narrative....at least presupposes some of the features of homoerotic desire” (12).

2 Love Triangle: David’s Human Lovers [Saul and Jonathan] (13-36), “perhaps the first great love triangle in Western literature” (13; see David M. Halperin, “Heroes and Their Pals,” *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*. New York: Routledge, 1990:75-87).

2.1 Saul and David. “We have two accounts of the way in which David comes to Saul’s attention. In the first Saul is said to have an evil spirit that torments him” [and so sends for David as a young musical prodigy to relieve him, 1 Sam 16:21-23]....In the second account...Saul is at war with a Philistine band whose secret weapon is a giant named Goliath....[17:33, 42; 18:2] (14). “Just as two accounts tell how David comes to be loved by Saul, so also two accounts tell how it was that the relationship sours, at least from Saul’s point of view, almost from the beginning....From 18:10 to 26:25] the story is driven by Saul’s attempts to murder David. What is the basis of this unrelenting enmity? Again we have two explanations. The first is that David comes to have great success as a warrior in Saul’s service. Thus the people all love David (18:16). Saul becomes jealous of his

popularity....There is another ground for Saul's jealous that is far more plausible...." (15). Jennings then cites 1 Sam 18:1-4 and 20:30-31, 34 and explains Saul's accusation that Jonathan has exposed the nakedness of his mother as follows: "in having an erotic/sexual relationship with David, Jonathan has had a relationship with someone who has had sexual relations with his father, and thus he has exposed his father's nakedness. In thus indirectly exposing his father's nakedness, Jonathan has exposed the nakedness of someone else with whom his father has had sexual relations: Saul's wife, Jonathan's mother" (17). "Saul's outburst does not make sense if only the relationship between David and Jonathan is sexually mediated. Rather the relationship between Saul and David must also have been sexual if the chain of exposing nakedness is to work" (18).

David Saves Saul [twice]. "The action of 1 Sam 18-30 is largely taken up by the accounts of Saul's murderous rage directed against David, his former boy-toy" (19). Just as two stories tell how David comes into Saul's court and there are two explanations for Saul's jealous rage against David, "Similarly,...two stories... have as their theme David's refusal to assassinate his tormentor" (19). "The two tales have a remarkably similar structure. They seem almost to be the same story" (26, citing 1 Sam 24:17 and 26:21). "Despite the similarity of these episodes, however, there are remarkable differences between them" (21). "In spite of the deterioration in the relationship...David remains doggedly loyal to the man who had first chosen him as his favorite....This steadfast loyalty of David to Saul will serve as a template for David's loyalty to Jonathan and later even to Adonai" (23).

2.2 Jonathan and David. "The attraction of Jonathan to David beings almost immediately....it appears to be love at first sight" (25; 1 Sam 17:58; 18:1, 4; Deut 13:6). "David's first advocate and protector [against Saul] is Michal, Jonathan's sister" (26; 18:20-27; 19:11-17). "There follows an entire chapter...devoted to Jonathan's love for David" (26-27; 20:1-42). "[In 1 Sam 23:16-18] it is unclear whether Jonathan is saying that he will be second in command or that he will be coruler with David" (28). Either Jonathan is prepared to completely surrender his own preeminence for the sake of the beloved, or "we are offered a glimpse of the abolition of male rivalry on the basis of love....The homoerotic bond thus appears to subvert the whole hierarchical order in which such relationships are otherwise inscribed. As in the Greek saga of Harmodius and Aristogiton, the homoerotic bond overthrows tyranny and does so in principle....In this love, Aelred of Rievault can see a pattern to be emulated not only for same-sex friends but also for a man and a woman who seek to love one another as equals" (28-29).

Aftermath: Grief and Loyalty. "David's lament for the militia, for Saul and Jonathan as heroes....clearly places the love of Jonathan and the love of women in the same register... And within this register, the love of Jonathan is greater" (30; 2 Sam 1:25-26). "By means of the relationship with Jonathan's son [the covenant with Mephibosheth], we are reminded throughout 2 Samuel of David's love for Jonathan (and Saul) (32; 2 Sam 4:4; 9:1, 7; 21:7).

Summary and Conclusion. "YHWH...is cast as the preeminent war-chief (king) of Israel's militia. YHWH...appears to regard physical beauty as a primary criterion for the selection of a boy-companion / armor-bearer. In biblical literature male beauty is regularly associated with erotic attachment....consistent with what we know of idealized cross-generational eroticism in warrior and other cultures....[In] the love triangle of Saul, David

and Jonathan....we are dealing with no platonic friendship but with all the elements of passionate romance....In the end David finds a way to maintain his loyalty to his first lover without relinquishing his growing attachment to Jonathan....Understanding these relationships as erotic in character makes the saga far more intelligible than readings that deny this dimension of the text....Thus, a gay-affirmative reading of the text does not do violence to the text and even enables us to gain a greater appreciation for the moral ambiguity and psychological complexity of the narrative” (33-34).

“If this [gay-affirmative] reading of the narrative is accepted, then a number of interesting conclusions follow....We first recognize that homoerotic relationships within the world of the text are by no means exclusive of heterosexual relationships....David himself is not said to take on younger lovers, younger boy-companions....Within this apparently pederastic structure, there is, as it were, another structure struggling to be born. It is the love of comrades or of putative equals....The equalizing force of love is anticipated in other barely glimpses relationships in the narrative....In this saga, the love of men for one another tends to subvert the very hierarchical conventions within which that love is first articulated....The structure of patriarchy remains firmly in place. But the story does provide a glimpse of relationships that some later readers, including Aelred, could develop into a paradigm of mutuality that would even undermine the patriarchal and hierarchical structuring of heterosexual relationships” (35-36).

[Excursus: Psalms “If we were to try to fill out the relation between David and YHWH, we would have to take into account the relationship depicted in the psalms attributed to David....At least in terms of the pathos that they express, of passion, of intimacy, of complaint, of near despair, of love lost and rekindled, the psalms give voice to the sort of love affair that the narrative portrays from the outside. That sons of this sort were composed either by David or by an Israel that believed itself beloved for the sake of YHWH’s steadfast love for David is an indication of the powerful passions unleashed between a male deity and his male beloved” (59, note 26; see esp Psalm 89, cited by Jennings 64-65). Note that, according to Jennings, the book of Psalms comes to resemble Song of Songs, but reflecting human-divine homoerotic love, not human-human love, which in Song of Songs may also be homoerotic, according to the original (consonantal) Hebrew text].

3 YHWH as Erastes [Lover]: of Saul and David (37-66). Building on the important earlier study of Howard Eilberg-Schwartz (*God’s Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism*. Boston: Beacon, 1994), Jennings here seeks to explore the way in which the three types of same-sex eroticism in the Hebrew Bible (warrior/heroes and their pals; shamanistic-prophetic; transgendered persons) implicate the character of Israel’s divinity in the same-sex relationships (xiii-xiv). “Some may be offended that YHWH’s love would be understood erotically. But biblical writers had no such compunction” (37). Jennings refers to YHWH’s special love for Saul and David, both described as exceptionally handsome. Moreover, “whether Israel (Ephraim) was figured as a maid or a youth, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel did not shrink from images of wooing, courtship, jealousy, and adultery in characterizing that relationship” (37).

First, Jennings refers to the episode in 2 Samuel where David “David danced before YHWH with all his might,” girded only with a linen ephod (6:14-16) and then was accused by Michal of vulgar and shameless nudity (6:20-23), an episode censored in the later retelling in 1 Chronicles 15, where David only “dances” liturgically, fully robed and accompanied by priests, but not “before YHWH.” “Now why does David have to uncover himself in order to dance before Adonai?...Why this shameless display of the nude body? We recall that the Lord has chosen his young male companions at least in significant part because of their physical beauty. It was this that seemed to motivate Adonai’s favor, to awaken his desire and confirm his selection first of Saul and then of David. And now in the physical presence of Adonai (the ark), David displays his body to the one who first desired him for his beauty” (42). After YHWH’s shocking outburst that killed Uzzah for touching the sacred ark (6:7-8), “David is furious with his ferocious lover and decides to leave the ark where it is. He returns to Jerusalem in a sulk and lets Adonai stew out on the farm [of Obed-Edom], presumably to recover from this testosterone tantrum....The cavorting of David, then, is not so much seductive entreaty to rekindle an old flame but a kind of reward for Adonai’s good behavior [on the farm, where things prospered remarkably]. Now that he is tamed, the love between them can be consummated. And indeed, in the ensuing narrative Adonai will basically wed himself to David (2 Sam 7 [the covenant])” (43).

Excursus: The Ark and the Ephod (2 Sam 6:14). David “was wearing a linen ephod, apparently a short linen apron that covers the genitals (while at the same time perhaps calling attention to them and so exposing them)” (45). Jennings explains that “there is considerable confusion about whether it is an undergarment or an overgarment, a covering of the chest or a covering of the groin....We seem to have a progression from ephod as an undergarment covering the loins (David’s dance) to an outer garment (Chronicles) to a garment that is worn over the chest or shoulders (Exodus) rather than below or at the waist” (45, note 10). Evangelical commentators commonly recognize that in earlier texts (1 Sam 2:18; 2 Sam 6:14) the linen ephod refers to a loin cloth, not to a robe or breastplate (A.A. Anderson 1989, *2 Samuel* WBC, 105; Robert P. Gordon 1986, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*, 18). Jennings next cites Jeremiah 13:1-11, where the confirmed bachelor prophet (16:1-2) is told “to take his own loin cloth and hide it in the cleft of a rock by the river” (46) and then proclaims: “For as a loin cloth clings (*dabaq*) around a man’s hips, so I clung (*dabaq*) to me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah” (13:11). Jennings emphasizes the marital image of clinging: “the intimacy between the loins (genitals) and the loin cloth. Thus Judah should cling to that which YHWH’s loin cloth clings—his phallus” (46).

“The Lord’s ephod is a potent fetish of the divine phallus” (47). In the David saga it is carried into battle (1 Sam 14:3), but then we are told that it is the ark of God that the Israelites carry into battle (14:18). This conflation of the ark and ephod suggests “that the ark and ephod have the same function. They make physically present the hypermasculine presence of the Lord” [on the side of the outnumbered Israelites].... The ark before which David dances is the sheathed phallus of his lover” (47). “That the ark functions as an ephod or phallic sheath is further illustrated in the earlier history of the ark” (47). When the Philistines capture the ark and place it in the house of Dagon, instead of YHWH’s submission to Dagon, the fertility god submits to YHWH and is dismembered (1 Sam 5:2-4): “It seems quite likely that the narrative represents Dagon as having been raped by the

ark,” just as the Levite’s concubine was raped and dismembered (48). As the ark is moved about in the five Philistine cities (1 Sam 5:6-12) the people in each place are afflicted with “tumors,” or more accurately “hemorrhoids,” the mark of anal rape (48-49).

2 Sam 7 “begins with a kind of attempted role reversal. David proposes to build his lover a house of cedar...the act of a husband for a wife” (51-52). However, “YHWH corrects Nathan, who had agreed to David’s impulse, and provides an alternative: YHWH is the one who will ‘make [David] a house,’ not the other way around (7:11, 16). This negotiation of roles is....affectionate....but it is also declaring just who is the top here and who the bottom, who is the lover and who the beloved” (52). YHWH then promises David “that he will not take his steadfast love (*khesed*) from David as he has earlier done with Saul (7:15). YHWH is promising lifetime faithfulness, binding himself to David always. It is something like a marriage vow, or at least as we now say, a holy union....It is significantly not the case that YHWH is or will be a father to David....The erotic character of the relationship to David is explained not in terms of a paternal relation between David and YHWH but in terms of a paternal relation between YHWH and David’s son....David’s son will have two fathers: David and YHWH....’Solomon has two daddies’” (53). In 2 Sam 7 “the relationship between David and YHWH is...consummated as a kind of ‘marriage’ that borrows its terms from the homoerotically charged relationship of David and Jonathan” (54).

Even more striking than the homoeroticism the narrative exhibits is “the transformation that it portrays in the character of YHWH. In the early stages...YHWH was characterized by an almost uncontrolled phallic aggression” (55). Remarkably, however, “the ascription of love to YHWH basically depends upon and so recalls YHWH’s great love affair with David....who has a special knack for taming the testosteroneic rage of his Great Lover [see God’s wrath in Rom 1:18 and Jesus’ expiatory-propitiatory death in Rom 3:25]Is it because of the great erotic passion that seems to bind this improbable couple that it will be possible for faith to rise to the conception that ‘God is love’? The paradigm of love for YHWH is his passion for David. And we have seen that this passion is inscribed within the register of homoeroticism. In this sense ‘homosexuality’ is not the contrary of biblical faith in a loving God but its very foundation” (65-66; see the Excursus on Psalms above).

4 Reflections (67-76). Concerning the texts and male same-sex relationships

YHWH and Zeus. “The relationship between YHWH and David may be understood in terms of a certain homoeroticism....Most of the male deities of the Greek world come to be outfitted with accounts of relationships to beautiful young human males...elaborated as a paradigm of pederasty” (67). Jennings notes “elements of similarity and...contrast between the legend of Zeus’s abduction of the beautiful Ganymede and the saga of the relationship between YHWH and the beautiful David” (68). Similarities include: “both relationships appear to be motivated by the extraordinary beauty of the young mortal....both are described as shepherds....they leave behind their paternal home....the male divinity initiates the relationship” resulting in a permanent relationship that is pederastic in structure (68). Important contrasts are that commonly “Zeus takes the form of a raptor (an eagle) that makes the relationship describable as rape rather than ‘love’” and “YHWH does not extricate his beloved from the world of mortals. David remains an earthling and...has other (human) lovers” (68). Moreover, “Zeus is a member ...of an aristocratic society of gods”

while YHWH “is something of a class traitor and decidedly a loner...[and] does not even have a female consort” (69). The relationship between Zeus and Ganymede “appears to have few consequences for other humans....In the case of YHWH and David, however, their relationship is deeply intertwined with the relationship of both to the people of Israel” (69; see the famine episode in 2 Sam 21 and the plague in 2 Sam 24).

The View from the Bottom. “David himself never has ...a younger male companion. He is permanently typecast as the *eromenos* (beloved one)”, but ever an active subject in the narratives (70-71). A Question of Gender. “Within the limits of the androcentric, phallogocentric, militaristic, and perhaps misogynistic and classist world of this narrative, we may also find a helpful clue for exceeding the ill effects of a binary opposition of male and female. Such a clue may provide a way to value the distinct masculinity of males in love, and thus the distinctive femininity of two women in love....The Erotics of Faith... Eilberg-Schwartz suggested a certain homoerotics in the relationship between God and Israel....The gods of Greece and Rome seem to live out their domestic, erotic, and social lives quite apart from humanity...like...[a] court to a distant peasantry....YHWH’s emotional and social life is directed entirely to human beings. Insofar as YHWH is represented as a person (and even a male), the erotic finds expression not in relation to a consort but in relation to the humans he has chosen as his companions, friends, and lovers” (73).

Intertwining Loves. “At the end of the narrative we hear of YHWH’s steadfast love....It appears that David has tamed the ferocious desert chief. And David has done this precisely in the way he has dealt with his other lovers. For in truth the exemplar of steadfast love in this story is not YHWH but David, and the way that has been practiced and demonstrated is through David’s behavior with his other lovers, Saul and Jonathan. Although it may seem strange to say it, it would seem that YHWH has learned love from David, has learned what it is to love all the way—precisely in relation to David—and has learned steadfast love in love from David. Through being the Lover of precisely this beloved one, YHWH has become a better lover, the one who can be trusted, one who can be relied upon, one in whom one can have faith. Apart from the narrative we have been reading, it would be hard to imagine Adonai as a god who could be loved. And apart from David’s relationships to Saul and Jonathan, it would be hard to imagine the love between David and YHWH. Homoeroticism therefore is the very fulcrum of biblical religion” (76). .

Part Two. YHWH’s Male Groupies (77-79). “The connecting link here is Saul, who has been portrayed as the discarded favorite of YHWH but who is also portrayed in an odd relationship to bands of prophets who roam the hills of premonarchic Israel....Samuel...plays a strange role in the selection of both Saul and David and ...also relates to the bands of ecstasies who seem to gravitate around him”(77).

5 Dancing Queens (81-95).

5.1 Ravishing Saul “Saul appears to have been chosen for his remarkable beauty (and height) as YHWH’s armor-bearer. He is introduced to the reader in this way (1 Sam 9:2), and subsequently Samuel will introduce him thus to the people of Israel (10:23-24), who immediately proclaim him their king” (82). Saul’s crimes “seem rather mild compared to those that will be committed by the one who will supplant him in YHWH’s affections....His

own son Jonathan has seduced [David] into becoming Jonathan's rather than Saul's armor-bearer. Saul has ample reason to be in a jealous rage with respect to David, his own former boy-toy" (83), so he sent three bands of messengers to capture David in Ramah, but in each case the spirit of God came upon them and they fell into a prophetic frenzy. Finally Saul himself went to Ramah "and the spirit of God came upon him. As he was going, he fell into a prophetic frenzy....He *too* stripped off his clothes and he *too* fell into a frenzy before Samuel. He lay naked all that day and all that night. Therefore it is said, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'" (1 Samuel 19:19-24). "What has nakedness to do with prophetic frenzy?" (83). From earlier episodes (10:5-6, 10-11) "we learn that the ecstatic behavior of the *nabi'im* is something with which Saul has been acquainted before....Saul is looking for what he gets, a return to the ecstasy with which YHWH had first signaled his being favored" (84). "Getting naked is not something that distinguishes Saul from the other cavorting *nabi'im* but rather his identification with them ["he *too*"]. Naked cavorting in ecstasy is something 'prophets' do" (85). "Being possessed by Adonai leads males to whirl and writhe in naked ecstasy. The possession by the spirit of the Lord is an overpoweringly erotic, indeed sexual, experience" (85). "The image of male nakedness is always one of sexual vulnerability. The exposure of Noah's nakedness to Ham's gaze suggests sexual vulnerability and perhaps even sexual violation (Gen 9:20-27)....Saul's naked swoon...for a day and a night is a rather extreme form of sexual vulnerability and violation. Like Dagon, he lies upon the ground, immobilized he the ferocious assault of YHWH's phallic potency. Has he been raped? Is he the victim of sexual assault? [like the Levite's concubine, Judg 19:25-27]" (86).

5.2 Naked Prophets. "The roving bands of ecstatic prophets are not the only prophets who get naked as an integral part of their prophetic identity....More than two centuries later, we encounter this element of prophetic vocation among prophets whom we scarcely would associate with roving bands of naked dancers: Micah and Isaiah" (87). For Samaria's punishment Micah says "For this I will lament and wail; I will go barefoot and naked...(Mic 1:8)." Similarly "the prophet Isaiah....shares with Micah this dramatic sign of prophetic nakedness" (88) and walks naked and barefoot for three years as a sign of coming judgment and exile (Isa 20:2-5). That Isaiah does not use "naked" to mean simply "scantily clad" is indicated by the explanatory phrase "with buttocks uncovered" (20:5). In this connection Jennings (89) also cites Jeremiah's complaint that YHWH had "seduced/raped" him (20:7).

5.3 Dionysus. Dionysus was a Greek vegetation deity (Roman Bacchus), worshipped primarily as god of wine. Jennings summarizes the remarkable similarities to Dionysian ecstasy and refers to "a rather telling difference" (89) as well. Like Saul and the ecstatic prophets, the bands of Dionysian worshippers are found capering on the mountainsides, accompanied by music. "One of the most remarkable features of the Dionysian ecstasy is that it appears to be irresistibly contagious" (90), a mass phenomenon that spreads almost infectiously (note 6), and "the phenomenon of group ecstasy is in both cases attributed to the spirit or breath of the divinity" (90). However, "by far the most striking difference between the followers of Dionysus and those of Adonai is that the former seem typically female, while the latter appear in 1 Samuel as male" (92). Since "the Dionysian orgies...are sites of female same-sex eroticism" (93), Jennings comments: "It seems likely that the bands of *nabi'im* are to be understood as enacting an erotic relationship to YHWH.

But to what extent does this mean a homoerotic relationship between members of this band?" (92). An adequate answer requires us to look at a related phenomenon: the "sons of the prophets."

5.4 Sons of the Prophets—*Bene-hanebi'im*. They appear only in the northern kingdom, primarily in the saga material concerning Elijah and Elisha contained in 1 and 2 Kings" (93), specifically 1 Kings 17 – 2 Kgs 13 (from the sudden appearance of Elijah until the death of his successor Elisha) In this material "we no longer hear of naked male dancing as part of the phenomenon" (94), and the later, more sanitized version of Israel's history in 1-2 Chronicles (around 400 BCE), "barely mentions Elijah and ignores Elisha altogether" (94). "The males who are called prophets engage in their ecstatic adoration of YHWH in same-sex companies [most often of fifty] but also are part of communities in which they live relatively normal lives as farmers" (95; 2 Kgs 4:1-7). "The *bene-hanebi'im* appear in the episode recounted in 1 Kgs 20 not only to be ecstatics but also to be armed, as if a military group, something that comports with the division of prophets into companies of fifties" (96; and indicating a dimension of masculinity, not feminization as occurred with the Galli, who sometimes castrated themselves).

"Some of the features of the *bene-hanebi'im* are reminiscent not only of Dionysian and Bacchic rites but also of the Galli, as reported by writers in the time of the Roman Empire. These men were dedicated to the goddess Cybele. They were known to whip themselves into ecstatic behavior through music and dance, and also to inflict wounds upon themselves in the midst of such ecstasy. This sometimes culminated in self-castration. Roman writers...regarded these male groupies...as also insatiable in their appetite for sexual access to young males....There is, of course, no evidence of self-castration among these prophetic bands. However, the practice of circumcision may be regarded as a form of genital mutilation that may have rendered castration symbolically redundant...." (97).

Jennings concludes: "Despite [the] similarities, we must also notice the most important difference: the *bene-hanebi'im* are devotees of a decidedly masculine divinity, not a mother goddess....The homoerotic features of northern prophetic traditions have some interesting and illuminating parallels in cross-cultural comparisons, but the distinctiveness of a religious tradition focused upon a single male deity is also quite evident" (98).

6 Boy Lovers (99-114). Examines three episodes that appear to involve Israel's early prophets, Samuel, Elijah and Elisha, "in tales of sexual awakening" (99).

6.1 (Res) Erection: Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24). Jennings points to "the odd action of Elijah" in stretching himself upon the child three times (100) and asks "why the emphasis on the utter privacy of the action" and use of his own bed (101).

6.2 (Res) Erection: Elisha (2 Kings 4:32-35). The boy gets "warm/hot" and "sneezed/yawned" seven times. The Hebrew verb (*zrr*) occurs only here (2 Kings 4:35) in the HB (Schökel 1994:228; the *poel* root is normally intensive). Jennings wonders how the translators decided on "sneezing" as the translation (104, note 5): "The liveliness of the boy is represented by a term that may well suggest ejaculation. That is why we get the otherwise inexplicable 'seven times.' Sneezing seven times is not a good sign of vitality. But ejaculation seven times is a sign of rather extraordinary vitality....The boy near death or already dead has become a sexually potent young male through being sexually awakened

by Elisha...Reading the story in this way...gives meaning to the otherwise inexplicable activity of Elisha and the otherwise odd response of the boy” (104). Moreover, “The detail of calling upon YHWH is ...significant since it does not normally accompany the miraculous deeds of these prophets....The modern reader knows only too well that sexual excitement leads one or both members of the act to call on the deity: ¡’O God!” (105).

When Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter he did so privately, with only her parents and three disciples present, and then took her by the hand, without further bodily contact (Mark 5). However, when Paul raised the young man (*pais, neanías*) Eutychus (Acts 20:7-12), he “fell on him” and “closely embraced him” (20:10 KJV; cf NIV; Jennings 105, note 7, referring also to Jesus’ resurrection of the youth in “Secret Mark”, discussed in Jennings 2003:114-125). [See also Jesus’ raising of Lazarus (“whom he loved”) publicly and at a distance. Paul is thus portrayed as acting in the tradition of Elijah and Elisha and the sons of the prophets].

[The LXX and other ancient Greek translations omit the verb commonly translated “sneezed”, which is based on the Aramaic Targum to Job 41:19 and often understood to be a sign of life and to reflect the expulsion of demons (Montgomery-Gehman, *Kings*, ICC 1951:372; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, AB17, 1988:58. Cogan and Tadmor think that due to the small frame of the child, Elisha could not stretch himself out, but had to “crouch” over him (*ghr*, stretch out, crouch, 4:34-35). Remarkably, Southern Baptist T.R. Hobbs in the evangelical Word series translates that Elisha “nestled down on top of him and warmed his flesh”! (2 *Kings*, WBC 13, 1985:42). Cohn (2 *Kings*, Berit Olam, 2000:33) and Brueggemann (1 & 2 *Kings*, SHBC, 2000:324) see Elisha’s “mouth to mouth” gesture as an effort at artificial resuscitation].

6.3 Samuel’s Night Visitor (1 Samuel 1-3). Ministering before the ark of YHWH, the young Samuel (probably around 12) wears the same kind of “linen ephod” or loincloth (2:18) that got David into trouble with his wife when he danced “naked” before the ark. “Samuel’s place is beside the ark of YHWH....the focalization of the phallic potency of YHWH” (109) and the loincloth “that both conceals and reveals the nakedness of the wearer...suggests...a certain erotic availability to YHWH” (108). The Hebrew word for “reveal” (*galah*) in these chapters might also be translated “uncovered” (110-111).

6.4 Reflections. “What can we learn from this consideration of the apparent ‘insemination’ of young males by the representatives of YHWH or by YHWH himself? [1]....The erotic intimacy of YHWH makes his favorites more potent rather than less so....Elijah and Elisha...are themselves the embodiment of a remarkable potency...channeled through them to become the energizing, life-giving principle for lads who have been dead....We seem to have a story of the sexual initiation of a male child into pubescent potency. It may remind us of the sort of rituals reported by Gilbert Herdt and others in Papua New Guinea....[2] There does not seem to be a sense that being the erotic object of male desire diminishes in any way the ‘masculinity’ of those who are thus favored” (113). [3] The cultic or prophetic homoeroticism seems both to precede and to endure longer than the homoeroticism of warrior-companions....[The] same-sex activity of this sort appears to originate in (Buddhist) monasteries and then becomes an ingredient for samurai warrior culture in Tokugawa Japan” (114).

7 Holy Hustlers (115-126).

Five Texts: *qedeshim*, “Sodomites / male cultic prostitutes.” To prepare ourselves for this section, we might well recall Jennings’ conclusion about Samuel, “the respected charismatic leader, judge, and prophet of Israel,” but also YHWH’s instrument in selecting young warriors as his armor-bearers and erotic favorites: “Thus, Samuel is reduced to pimping for YHWH, procuring beautiful young men (first Saul and then David) to be YHWH’s companions” (112; see the Jesus of Matthew’s Gospel regarding the prostitutes’ privileged entry into the Kingdom—Matt 19:12). Scholars now universally recognize grave the error of popular 17th century translations (KJV; RV) that translated the term *qedeshim* as “sodomites” when the original Hebrew has no reference to Sodom, nor to the attempted gang rape of angels that made the city infamous (see Genesis 19), but refers rather to “holy/sacred ones,” in this case male cultic prostitutes.

Taking this conclusion for granted (116, note 1), Jennings takes us a further step, inquiring whether, in addition to the male erotic ecstasy in the service of YHWH common in the northern kingdom, “groups of male devotees of YHWH also were ongoing in Judah, with a relation to YHWH expressed in homoerotic practices” (115). His initial reply is that “If so, then the principle candidate that offers itself for analysis is the group designated as the *qedeshim* (male cult prostitutes)” (116). He argues that “in the kingdom that most clearly understood itself as...the conservator of Davidic tradition, it seems unlikely that no ongoing homoerotic traditions would reflect the relation to YHWH so prominently displayed in the traditions concerning Samuel, Saul, and David” (116). The five texts referring to the *qedeshim* “may suggest that there was little popular recognition of any incompatibility between the worship of YHWH and cultic sexuality (possibly including cultic homosexuality) for virtually the entire period of the monarchy and thus for the period of the first temple” (116-117; Jennings dates Lev 18 and 20 after the Exile).

7.1 Deut 23:17-18 =MT 18-19. That the singular nouns, *qedeshah* (female holy one) and *qadesh* (male holy one), do not refer to the city of Sodom, but here designate cult prostitutes is made clear by the parallel references to the fee of a prostitute (*zonah*) and the wages of a dog (*keleb*), a pejorative euphemism for male prostitute. And that the cultic prostitution was in this case exercised in the Jerusalem temple is made clear from the reference to the “house of YHWH your God” (117).

7.2 1 Kg 14:22-24. This description of the reign of Solomon’s son Rehoboam also refers to *qadesh* (male cultic prostitutes, a collective singular) serving on “every high hill and under every green tree,” not surprising, since Solomon himself provided spaces in his temple for the worship of Baal and Astarte, the gods of his wives (118).

7.3 1 Kg 15:12-14. King Asa “put away the male cultic prostitutes (*qedeshim*) out of the land....But the high places were not taken away.”

7.4 1 Kgs 22:46=MT 47. Asa’s son Jehoshaphat exterminated “the remnant of male cultic prostitutes (*qadesh*, collective singular) who were still in the land,” but did not take away the high places (the infrastructure that made their services necessary and possible).

7.5 2 Kgs 23:4-7, 13. Finally, at the end of the monarchy, Josiah again attempted to purge the fertility cult from the temple: “He broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes (*qedeshim*) that were in the house of YHWH, where the women did weaving for Asherah”: “Here it becomes clear that the worship of Baal, Asherah, and Astarte has been completely integrated into temple worship in Jerusalem from the time of Solomon until the time of Josiah—for the entire period of the monarch and the temple in Jerusalem! Moreover, it appears that the ‘holy ones’ were also an integral part of the cultic practices that had been assimilated into the worship of YHWH during this period” (120).

Tamar (Genesis 38). “A more definite association between *zonah* (prostitute) and *qedesh* (holy one / cultic prostitute) comes from the story of Judah and Tamar....later evoked by Matthew in the genealogy of Jesus....Judah identifies Tamar not only as a prostitute (*zonah*, Gen 38:15), but also as a female “holy one” (*qedeshah*, 38:21), a cultic...prostitute....The Tamar story thus strongly supports the surmise that the [male] holy ones (*qedeshim*) provided services that were sexual in nature” (121).

Interpretation. Jennings concludes that “the *qedeshim* of the southern kingdom are parallel to the *bene-hanebi'im* [sons of the prophets] of the northern kingdom” (125). He argues that the search for parallels in Canaanite religion has been fruitless, because “the *qedeshim* are indigenous to the cult of YHWH. They make whatever religious sense they make not in the framework of a fertility cult but in the context of a phallus cult, in the context of the adoration of a male deity on the part of male (and possibly also female) devotees” (126). The following chapter will strengthen the argument by showing how the prophetic literature transgresses Israel/Judah, feminizing male adherents as the equivalent of YHWH’s wife (126).

In the rereading by the later authors/editors of 1-2 Chronicles (around 400 BCE) “the *qedeshim* entirely disappear from view....The Chronicler...is concerned to clean up the record of sexual deviation” (123). “Virtually nothing that lends itself to homoerotic interpretations of Samuel and Kings is left,” nothing of David’s particular relationship to Saul and Jonathan, the sons of the prophets, the odd adventures of Elijah and Elisha, etc. (123-124).

Part Three: Transgendering Israel (127-129). The two types of homoeroticism among males so far studied (individual warriors and their companions; groups like the sons of the prophets and male cult prostitutes) emphasize their masculinity. David, although the junior partner to Saul, Jonathan and YHWH “may be regarded as a paragon of male virtue....David’s very success as a male seems significantly to depend on how he negotiates his role as the youthful, beautiful, and faithful companion of more powerful males, culminating...in his relationship to YHWH. It is precisely as ‘boy-toy’ or as ‘bottom’ in contemporary parlance that David is also exemplary male” (127-128). In the prophetic texts transgendering Israel that we now turn to, “so successful has this transgendering operation been that commentators often simply attend to this material as if it depicted a heterosexual couple: YHWH as male, Israel as female. What is often lost sight of is that the prophets are dealing with a male Israel dressed in metaphorical drag” (128). Then in Chapter 9 we will see how Joseph (Genesis 37-50) is transgendered by Israel (Jacob) his father, making Israel not only the object but also the subject or agent of transgendering. Hence the title of this section (129).

8 Transgendered Israel in Five Prophets (131-176). Like the texts previously considered (on individuals in the David saga or groups like the sons of the prophets and the cult prostitutes), those now to be examined “continue to imagine the relationship between YHWH and his adherents as erotic in character, even as specifically sexual in express” (131). However, in the prophetic texts about Israel or Judah now to be studied YHWH “remains a male character...but his counterpart is now represented alternatively as male or as female. In some of these texts, the male counterpart to YHWH (Israel) is transgendered as female....The material...concerns the deliberate transgendering of a typically male subject” (131). “Highly gendered societies seem to find the blurring of gender distinctions or gender binaries especially difficult” (132 [Latin America?]). See the curse reflected in the family with one “who holds a spindle” [effeminate male?] (2 Sam 3:29). “What the oracles that we will examine have in common is that they describe a stereotypically male collective (Jacob, Israel, Ephraim, Judah, and so on) as female. It is the normally male collective that is the counterpart of YHWH” (132-133). Modern Christian readers have difficulty grasping the significance the prophetic texts transgendering Israel, because “the gendering of the church as female has become rather a cliché of theological literature dependent, perhaps, on the idea of the church as the bride of Christ” [Eph 5] (133). Before Vatican II the Catholic Church as institution was identified with the exclusively male clergy and hierarchy. “That the church as an exclusively male corporate entity should be cast as female is itself quite remarkable” (133). Yet in traditional commentaries on our prophetic transgendering texts, “the gender question is simply taken for granted” (133).

“The metaphors of YHWH’s abusive relation to his ‘spouse’ “may, for a certain class of readers, legitimize male abuse of women, especially of their wives [according to Renita Weems and other recent feminist interpretation]....The gendering of Israel as female...must have had quite a shocking impact on its male audience....Eilberg-Schwartz...has drawn attention to the implications of the male gender (and genitalia) of the biblical God for a ‘people’ that is typically understood as male....My interpretation differs from that of Eilberg-Schwartz in that I do not privilege the father-son relationship as the fundamental domain of homoeroticism” (134 and note 9).

8.1-2 From Amos to Hosea: Ephraim is a Slut. “The transgendering of Israel appears for the first time in prophetic literature in an oracle from **Amos** [8th century BCD]:

Fallen no more to rise is *maiden* Israel (Amos 5:12).

“In this lament there is, as yet no suggestion of an erotic relationship between the speaker and the figure of Israel....Here Israel is not only female but also ‘virgin’ or maiden. Israel is imagined as a female not (yet) betrothed or sexually bound to a male” (136).

Another eighth century prophet, **Hosea**, who commanded him to marry a prostitute (1-3), makes clear *why* “virgin Israel” had suffered such a lamentable fate:

For a spirit of *whoredom* has led them astray,
and they have played the *whore*, forsaking God....
men themselves go aside with *whores*
and sacrifice with [female] temple prostitutes (*qedeshot*) (Hosea 4:12b-14b).

“**Sex Toys...** Israel seems to be addicted to the phallus whether as bull or pillar, as teraphim or ephod, as sacrifice or king. The religious and political life of Israel seem to consist, in the prophet’s view, in a bewildering array of dildos” (144, with reference to Hos 3:3-4; 10:1-2, 5-6; 8:5-6; 12:11; 13:2). However, “the love of YHWH for Ephraim is the passion of a lover for a beloved....And we can only wonder What would it be like to be the object of such unbridled desire and yearning? What would it be like to be the male object of this male passion?...Who would Israel be if Israel, precisely as male (for the women of Israel are not addressed by these oracles), were to be awakened to a corresponding passion for this ‘husband’? Does the text not incite homoerotic passion?” (146; Hos 14:5-6).

8.3 Jeremiah: Judah is (a Wild Ass) in Heat (2:23-24). “One thing Jeremiah will not do is adopt the prophetic strategy of marrying a prostitute or adulteress, as Hosea seems to have done. Instead he adopts the almost equally remarkable behavior of remaining a bachelor at the behest of the Great Lover: ‘You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place’ (16:2). This has two consequences. First, Jeremiah’s own passionate expression is directed entirely to his relationship to YHWH and his people” (147). “It is Jeremiah who develops the astonishing image of YHWH’s loincloth as representing Israel/Judah’s appropriate clinging to YHWH (13:1-11)...’as the loincloth clings to one’s loins, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me’ (13:9-11). That Israel and Judah are made to cling to the divine phallus like a loincloth emphasizes the intimacy of the relationship even more graphically than does the suggestion of transgendering. The clinging or cleaving is what Gen 2:24 ascribes to male and female as they become ‘one flesh.’ But here we have not male and female but two male subject: YHWH and Israel/Judah” (150-151). “The prophet himself knows that YHWH’s love is a seductive and indeed a sexual love. He accuses the Great Lover of seducing and even of ravishing him: ‘O LORD, you have seduced me, and I was seduced; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed’ (20:7). The homoerotic character of YHWH’s love for Israel or for his people cannot be concealed....But will this not also provoke the desire precisely of the devotee of YHWH, to be possessed by another male? That is, does not the metaphor, precisely on account of its power, serve to awaken, if not to

express, homoerotic passion?” (154). Moreover, “Jeremiah develops a striking image of Israel/Judah’s promiscuity. He compares YHWH’s beloved to an animal in heat:

Look at your way in the valley...
a *wild ass* at home in the wilderness,
in her heat sniffing the wind!
Who can restrain her lust?
None who seek her need weary themselves,
in her month they will find her”. (148).

8.4 Ezekiel: *Jerusalem Is a Size Queen* (23:19-20). “Perhaps the most systematic use of the metaphor of Israel as transgendered is that developed by Ezekiel...chapters 16 and 23” (154). “Ezekiel’s oracles do not shrink from the attribution of a kind of incest to YHWH, whether in the taking of sisters or of sister/daughters as ‘wives.’ This should at least make clear that no reference to presumed legal codes of Israel can be used to preclude the homoerotic and transgendering elements of these oracles....The point is that the prophets do not shrink from the attribution of almost any kind of eroticism to the relation between YHWH and his people. Since the relationship is one between subjects that are typically cast as male, the eroticism involved is essentially homoerotic in character. Even where YHWH’s beloved is dressed as female, the result is not so much the depiction of a conventional heterosexual relationship but one between a male and his transvestite beloved” (165). Jennings cites Ezek 23:19-20):

[Jerusalem] increased her whorings, remembering the days of her youth, when she played the whore in the land of Egypt and lusted after her paramours there, *whose members were like those of donkeys, and whose emission was like that of stallions.*

“Once again, we ask ourselves, Just whose fantasies are being invoked here? Who is astonished at the sheer size of Egyptian penises or the awesome fountains of sperm they ejaculate upon Jerusalem....It is the male readers of Ezekiel. For this is a fantasy by men, for men, about men” (162-163).

8.5 Deutero-Isaiah: *Lover, Come Back to Me* (54:6-7). “That YHWH’s beloved is male is clearly recalled in some of the oracles (165-166 [Israel, my servant, Jacob, possibly Cyrus, 41:8; 42:1]). Elsewhere transgendering occurs when the prophet refers to Babylon or Jerusalem as sister/daughter (47:1-5; 51:3,18; 52:2; cf 50:1; Jennings 166-167), but sometimes “the bond of YHWH and his beloved is one of conjugal intimacy” (167). Yahweh may be Israel’s aggrieved divorcing husband (50:1) of an abandoned wife (54:6-7):

For Yahweh has called you
like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,
like the wife of a man’s youth when she is cast off, says your God.
For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you.

Thus, “one of the most remarkable features of the transgendering that occurs in these oracles is that YHWH also may be transgendered” (49:15, image of a mother).

Reflections. *“The Transgendered imagination* What does it mean for males to imagine themselves as part of a female collectivity in relation to a male divinity and to imagine that relationship as profoundly erotic?” (168). Jennings then cites, as an image of the collectivity of God’s people, Jeremiah’s reference to “Rachel” weeping for her children (31:15-17): “In this case we have what appears to be not a transgendering of Israel but a gendering of the people of God as female, under the name of Rachel. For the first and only time in the materials we have been considering do we have the image of the people of God not as an ersatz female but as an actual one” (169; that is, one who really lived). Regarding Jeremiah’s reference to Yahweh’s creating “a new thing on the earth: a woman encompasses a man” (31:22), Jennings cites William Holladay’s interpretation that “the female shall be the initiator in sexual relations” (*Jeremiah* 1:193), and suggests that “this image is a fitting depiction of...the metaphorical transgendering [since] a typically male subject has been enclosed within the depiction of a female subject” (169-170). “The male identifies here in a remarkable way with the sexual activity that is stereotypically female, the act of encompassing, not as a passive ‘being penetrated,’ but as an active taking in and enclosing and incorporating....The male who has been ‘transgendered’ now takes on the active sexual role of the female, while the male subject (YHWH here) renounces the male view of sexuality to become the encompassed, the enclosed rather than the penetrating invader of the ‘female’ body” (170).

“Social Context What the prophets do is “focus on what are imagined as fascinations with men in uniform, large penises, and dildos as if they were the preoccupation of a certain female subject, but a subject who is, in reality, a male subject in drag” (172), so apparently the Israelite males know “that they, or at least a significant number of other men, are similarly fascinated” (172). “The elaboration of these images does seem to me to be likely not merely to reflect homoerotic practices within the culture, but also...to incite both the feelings and the practices that express homoerotic relationships. For those who are invited to imagine themselves in the position of Israel, whether as promiscuous slut or as desiring wife, are precisely males (173).

“The Becoming of the Divine In the course of the saga of David, the character of YHWH as Lover seems to undergo incremental transformation. David’s steadfast love for his lovers, including his steadfastness in devotion (if not obedience) to YHWH, has a noticeable effect upon the character of YHWH. Thus, YHWH is tamed by David’s love, enters into covenant betrothal, and steadfastly stands by Israel for the sake of his love for David, even long after David himself has died. The transformation of YHWH has not been reversed in the adoption of this metaphor of the transgendering of Israel....At most YHWH has permitted Israel’s lovers to do with her/him as they will, according to *their* customs and statutes....This same god is later imagined to have repented even of passive complicity in Israel’s woes (e.g. Isa 54:7; Jer 31:19) and to swear that never again will he turn a blind eye to his beloved’s misfortunes, even those one supposes that Israel may bring upon himself....Israel comes to know a much different deity than the one it first imagined in such ferociously macho terms” (175). *“The Future of Gender Transformation* “In Second Isaiah...this process finally reaches out to include the destabilizing of God’s gender as well....So, then it seems by no means impossible to understand the relation between the divine and the human homoerotically, in terms of a relation between female and female, on the model of a lesbian relationship” (175-176; see Chapter 12 on Ruth and Naomi).

9 Joseph as Sissy Boy, Genesis 37-50 (177-196), a text marginalized, perhaps due to its queering of gender roles (177-178).

9.1 The “Long Robe with Sleeves” (3x, Gen 37:3, 23, 32). “Oscar Wintermute observes that the description of the robe corresponds to the description of the garbing of the king’s daughters in 2 Sam 13:18-19” (1962, 2:981-86, esp. 982 in “Joseph Son of Jacob,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, G. A. Buttrick, ed; 4 vols; Nashville: Abingdon) (Jennings, 179 and note 4). [The rare Hebrew term (*pas*, always in plural, *passim*) probably refers to a “long robe with sleeves” (NRSV; cf Schökel 617), which the LXX mistranslated as “multicolored” (whence the error in our older translations, “a coat of many colors,” KJV, RV etc). Since Joseph as a young man was exceptionally handsome (Gen 39:6), we may suppose that he was a beautiful child, and his father Jacob thus could not resist dressing up his youngest and favorite son in the kind of fancy robe that normally would be used by a princess (see David’s daughter Tamar in 2 Sam 13:18-19, the only occurrences besides the three references in Gen 37). In addition to long sleeves, it may well have been multicolored, as the LXX supposes.] Jennings concludes: “Jacob/Israel has produced the queer Joseph, transvested him, and thereby transgendered him as a sign of his own masculine desire. And the progeny of Israel have engaged in the first instance of queer bashing. This doubleness of attitude, which both creates the queer and bashes the queer, oddly anticipates what I believe to be the character of the relation of the biblical texts to queerness. For the texts, taken together, both incite homoeroticism and will become the license for homophobia” (182). This comment well describes the sick dynamic dominant in the Roman Catholic Church (Mark Jordan, *The Silence of Sodom*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000).

9.2 Joseph as (Wo)Man in a Man’s World. “What is remarkable about Joseph’s subsequent career is that he survives by being taken under the wing of a succession of more powerful males” (183): after his father Jacob, the eunuch Potiphar, captain of the guard (37:36), then the chief jailer (39:21), and finally Pharaoh himself (41:14, 42). “At every phase of his career, Joseph is carried upon a wave of masculine desire” (184). Jennings (183) emphasizes also Joseph’s sexual attractiveness (to Potiphar’s wife, 39:6) and parallels to the heterosexual eroticism in Esther [surrounded by eunuchs!] (184-185).

9.3 Is Joseph (like Potiphar) a “Eunuch” [—or rather paradigmatic “gay”]? Jennings recognizes that, according to Genesis, Pharaoh gives Joseph a wife, “Asenath, daughter of Potiphara a priest of On” and that “From this wife Joseph has two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh” (Gen 41:50-52). Since eunuchs may marry and be sexually active, but not sire children (188), “I am not suggesting that Joseph was a literal eunuch but rather that he fulfills something of the function of a eunuch” (192). Jennings argues, rather, that “Joseph is decidedly feminized” (188). [We might rather argue, however, that the Joseph Jennings portrays resembles more a gay man than a eunuch and recall that, lacking our modern scientific concept and terminology for sexual orientation, Jesus’ three kinds of “eunuchs” (Mat 19:12) may include what today we term gays, lesbians, homosexuals, queer, etc.]. Moreover, near the end of Jacob’s life, Joseph with his two sons (Ephraim and Manasseh) comes to his father for blessing, but experiences in effect the removal of his paternity: “It seems clear that Joseph’s paternity is being erased. Jacob functions as the father in the place of Joseph” (Gen 48:5, 8-12, 13-22; Jennings 189). “The erasure of Joseph’s paternity seems to characterize the perspective of the eighth and sixth-century prophets” (189-190).

9.4 The Joseph Saga in Contrast to the Law. Just as the exuberant homoeroticism characteristic of the David saga appears to stand in tension with the later restrictive laws of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, so the Joseph saga of Genesis 37-50 contrasts sharply with the deuteronomic laws against **Transvestism (Deut 22:5)** and **Eunuchs (Deut 23:1)**. The provision regarding transvestism “is intriguing for three reasons: it is not repeated in other legal codes of Israel, it starts with the woman [see Rom 1:27-27], and it has the oddity of invoking the idea of abomination” (191). “With respect to the exclusion of eunuchs, it is clear that the oracle of Isaiah near the end of the prophetic tradition undoes that provision without reference to it” (192, citing Isa 56:3-5, Jennings 2003, ch 8, study of Mat 19:12, and other recent literature on eunuchs). Jennings concludes that the tendency to privilege certain marginal legal texts over the basic narratives of the Hebrew Bible reflects the misunderstanding of Judaism as a religion of the law (193). [See the parallel privileging of late, textually dubious and marginal New Testament texts restricting women compared with earlier epistolary and narrative texts that are positive and liberating; Hanks 2000].

9.5 Joseph, In Between. In addition to being garbed as a youth in a princess’ robe, Joseph is “a slave who rules a household, a prisoner who rules a prison, an immigrant who rules an empire. His authority is always borrowed from another....Joseph’s masculinity is never his own” (193-194). “Joseph’s queerness with respect to gender anticipates and echoes his liminality in respect to the most basic dimensions of life: class, ethnicity, day/night, present/future” (194).

9.6 Social and Historical Location. “Scholars have been in some doubt about where to place this story in the development of Israel. Some have suggested that it arises in the time of Solomon [970-931 BCE]....Others have maintained that it may derive from a somewhat later time, the time of Jeroboam [931-910 BCE]....From our perspective, what is most important is that the story of Joseph does seem to reflect a subculture of petty officials associated with the court, who may find in Egypt a fitting analogy for the ideal of managerial ethos....The managerial class is transgendered relative to more traditional masculine roles” (195). “It is the felt risk of demasculinizing the men of Israel that...stands behind the emergence of legal proscriptions not only of transgendering but also of other forms of male same-sex eroticism” (196; see the following chapter on the Law). [Since Wellhausen’s analysis of the Pentateuch as stemming from four sources (JEDP) scholars commonly have assigned the Joseph novella (Gen 37-50, minus 38, 48-49) largely to the E (Elohistic) source, since it reflects the style and theology of that source, including the preference for “Elohim” instead of “Yahweh.” God’s goodness and love for Joseph, however, is mainly evident through providential guidance of events (45:5-7; 50:19-20).

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10 The Question of Law (199-220). Jennings rejects the interpretation that sees in the two anomalous Levitical texts a “prohibition of the role of phallic aggressor in same-sex sexual practices” and will argue that they rather reflect the bottom’s “desire to be penetrated” stemming from “a fear of cultural and colonial penetration” (199-200).

Law and Narrative. The interpretation of the prohibitions from the very late Levitical Holiness Code (Lev 17-26) as prohibiting anal rape reflects the Sodom narrative about the attempted gang rape of two visiting angels (Gen 19), which “is no more indicative of attitudes toward same-sex eroticism than the stories of the rape of Dinah or the rape of the concubine in Judg 19 are indicative of attitudes toward heterosexual eroticism” (200 [see also the condemnation of David’s adultery, which does not imply a condemnation of heterosexuality]). As we have seen, the narrative and prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible commonly either subvert the legal codes or appear ignorant of them [for example, the incestuous marriages preferred by most patriarchs and even Moses, but condemned in Lev 18 and 20]. “What the law prohibits is regularly flaunted in the narratives” (202).

The Prohibition[s] (Lev 18:22 and 20:13). The term “abomination” (*to’evah*) used in both texts “is highly suggestive of cultic concerns....[in] contexts that have idolatry or deviant cultic practices in view” (203). The use with reference to the *qedishim* in 1 Kings 14:24 condemns male cultic prostitution. “Thus it would serve as the Levitical equivalent of the prohibition of such activity in Deut 23:17-18” (2002). However, scholars often question this interpretation, because *to’evah* also sometimes occurs in non-cultic contexts “where it is simply a question of crossing boundaries or mixing categories” (204).

Unquestionably, in both Levitical texts the expression “lying with” refers to a sexual act and the prohibitions might have prohibited simply “lying with a male,” but they do not stop there. What is prohibited “is not just any ‘lying with a male’ but a lying with a male that is the sort of ‘lying with’ (sex) that a male has with a female, or is like the ‘lying down of a female’” (205). Thus, the blanket prohibition against bestiality simply says “Do not lie with a beast” (Lev 18:23) and does not add “as with a female.” Literally, of course, the text prohibits an impossibility, since a male cannot have sex with another male by vaginal penetration. Hence commentators now commonly follow Jewish scholar Saul Olyan and understand the text to prohibit anal intercourse between males. “Anal intercourse between male and female is about the only reliable means of birth control known to antiquity and remains the only readily available means in many societies today” (205). Jennings argues that the statutes of Leviticus are not concerned to prohibit all nonprocreative sex, since “many of the sexual relationships that are prohibited (incest) are procreative” (206).

[However, since Leviticus is a priestly text from the same exilic “P” source as the Genesis 1:28, and reflecting Israel’s decimated condition after the Exile, commentators commonly recognize that the prohibitions seek to maximize procreation. The incest prohibitions complement this with their concern for the stability of the patriarchal household and protection of the patriarch’s women. See Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus* III, AB for details]

Jennings also examines the interpretation that Leviticus aims to prohibit a phallic aggressor from “feminizing the male partner” (206). “What the Bible prohibits is simply the use of sex to do violence to another person” (207), not consensual loving relations.

However, Jennings argues that what Lev 18:22 seeks to prohibit with phrase “the lyings of a woman” is “Don’t lie with a male as if you were a female” (208), don’t offer yourself like a woman to be penetrated by a male. The concern, then, is not the phallic aggression of the penetrator, but the feminization of the male who is penetrated, which would explain why there is no parallel prohibition for women (as there is in the case of bestiality; cf. also Rom 1:26-27). The “abomination” then, is “the crossing of the boundaries of gender role expectation....We have to do not with the moral equivalent of rape but with the moral equivalent of, say, cross-dressing” (208-209; Deut 22:5). “The prohibition of Lev 20:13 includes the penetrator as the (secondary) collaborator in this subversion of boundaries” (209). Jennings cites Philo’s *On the Special Laws* (3:17) in confirmation of his understanding that Leviticus seeks to prohibit “the disease of effemination” (209-210).

The View from the Bottom. “The prohibition in Leviticus directs itself to males who desire to be penetrated by other males, and subsequently to the males who collaborate with this desire....There is, in the religion of Israel...a pronounced incitement for males to desire the dominant male” so “what Leviticus prohibits, the biblical tradition more generally also incites” (210). “In his landmark study, *God’s Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism*, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz notices that the development of a strong affective relation between a male deity and a male devotee is already homosocial and homoerotic. It is homosocial because it involves two male subjects; it is homoerotic because it involves a strong affective component. We may add that the specific eroticism involved is that of the erotic or sexual submission of the human partner to the divine (210). [Both for Moses and Jesus, the first and greatest commandment is: “You (Israelite males especially) shall *love Yahweh* your (male) God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut 6:5 → Mark 12:28-34 // Mat 22:36-40). And so, as a davidic psalm obediently responds: “I love you, O Yahweh, my strength....” (18:1; “love” = *rkhm*)]

The Fear of Colonial Penetration. “Mary Douglas has observed, ‘When rituals express anxiety about the body’s orifices, the sociological counterpart of this anxiety is a care to protect the political and cultural unity of a minority group’ [1966:124]. It is precisely this connection linking several concerns—for group boundaries (expressed everywhere in Leviticus), for gender role reversal (in the proscriptions [of Leviticus 18 and 20]), and about cultural and social threat—that leads us to the question of the way in which the laws of Leviticus came into being. There are, I believe, two related explanations; (1) the cultural influence of Persian (especially Zoroastrian) religious concerns on the priestly world-view, with its emphasis on purity; and (2) the need to mobilize a defense against the cultural imperialism of Hellenism following the conquests of Alexander the Great (326 BCE)” (213-214).

Conclusion. “The laws interdict what the tradition incites; the laws prohibit what the narratives provoke. This becomes especially clear when we recognize that the narratives we have considered in this study reflect and incite a particular kind of homoeroticism—the desire of the male to be sexually possessed by another male....the desire of the bottom. It is the representation and valorization of this subject position that distinguishes the homoeroticism of Israelite traditions from the styles of homoerotic desire more familiar to us from ancient Greece and Rome” (218-219).

11. Lesbian Priority: Jephthah's daughter; Ruth and Naomi; Sappho (221-234).

Judges 11 recounts Jephthah's horrendous vow and sacrifice of his daughter. "To his credit Jephthah is distraught at this turn of events (unlike...Abraham, of whom no such reaction is reported under similar circumstances" (225). The nameless daughter asks for and receives from her father a temporary reprieve to wander on the mountains for two months to "bewail my virginity, my companions and I" (11:37), which became an annual four-day custom (11:39-40), "a form of female homosociality far from the supervision of the patriarchal household," perhaps involving dance in a wild place, accompanied by timbrels and other instruments" (226; see Judges 11:34). Especially, given the ancient parallels to the Dionysian maenads, "the possibility of female homoeroticism as an expression of deep emotion and intimate bonding cannot be ruled out" as the women lamented "the costs of belonging to a world ruled by the strange customs of males and their implacable male deity" (226). Such female groups "may even precede and so influence the development of the all-male groups associated with YHWH [Samuel and Saul, Elijah and Elisha]" (227).

The book of Ruth, canonically placed as an interlude between the period of the Judges (1300-1000 BCE) and the story of David, may be dated sometime between that period and the Babylonian exile (586/7-539 BCE), and thus appears to be "the earliest testimony to female same-sex love so far identified in history" (233, note 17; Jennings prefers the exilic date; cf Sappho below). "The story of Ruth and Naomi serves not only as an ancestral prelude to the story of David but also as an essential, if surprising, counterpoint to that sage....The Ruth-Naomi and David-Jonathan stories are also linked together thematically; they both deal with persons of the same gender loving one another....These two stories have regularly served as models not only of same-sex but also of cross-sex friendship and lifelong loyalty" (227). The fact that Ruth "is the prelude to the story of David also means that the story of Ruth incites us to read the story of David in its light" (232).

When Ruth "clung" [*dabaq*] to Naomi (Ruth 1:14) the story intentionally employs the same verb used to describe Adam's one-flesh union with Eve (224, 230; see Genesis 2:24). Ruth's immortal pledge of unalterable commitment and permanent loyalty to Naomi in 1:16-17 is unparalleled in Biblical references to marriage and unsurpassed in human literature, "yet it is the declaration of one woman to another....the declaration of same-sex love that has become the model and expression of cross-sex marriage" (228). Ruth's later marriage to Boaz "is clearly not a relinquishing of the relationship to Naomi but a way of sheltering that relationship and of giving it security. Ruth and Naomi become coconspirators in snaring the wealthy Boaz" (229). We might question whether Boaz is as clueless as Jennings suggests (230). Given his early and consistent concern for the Moabite immigrant (Ruth 2:5-23; 3:14), Boaz may also be read as a paradigm of hospitality and solidarity with the weak and oppressed.

In 3:4 the reference to Ruth's entering his bed and uncovering of Boaz' "feet" likely is a euphemism for his genitalia (229). The book's emphasis on Ruth's Moabite origin (1:22; 2:2, 21; 4:5, 10) subverts Deuteronomy's curse on Moabite descendants "even to the tenth generation" (Dt 23:3-6, which would include David!; cf the reversal of Deuteronomy's curse on eunuchs (23:1-2) in Isa 56). Matthew's genealogy (1:5) then even makes Rahab, "the hospitable whore of Jerico" (231), Boaz' mother (cf Ruth 4:18-22)! Jennings (231-232) also points to the divine transformation in Naomi's original bitterness (1:20-21) and

eventual redemption and restoration of faith (2:19-23; 4:15-17): “This too God has done. But God has done this precisely through the love of one woman for another” (232). “The story of Ruth and Naomi serves to depict what it means to have steadfast love, what it means to ‘cleave to one another,’ what it means to be knit together as one soul” (233). “If God is in the story at all, God is there as their love for one another” (234). And since the love of YHWH for the people “is like the love of two women for one another,” as the story unfolds, YHWH also comes to be “transgendered” (234).

Sappho, the Greek lesbian poetess, flourished around 588 BCE, but “the earliest sure date for a representation of cross-generational same-sex erotic attachment between males [pederasty] in Greece is about 530 BCE,” a half-century later (221-223; see Brooten 1996:30-41). Moreover, Livy’s *History of Rome* recounts “the transformation of the followers of Dionysus (Bacchus) from an all-female groups to one that includes Roman males” (223). “Hence, for both ancient Greece and ancient Rome, there is some indication that lesbian relations precede and serve as a model for male same-sex relationships” (224).

12 The Question of Israel and Greece (235-243).

Jennings traces a parallel development in Israel and Greece between the tolerance reflected in earlier narratives and the prohibitions reflected in the later legal codes (Lev 18 and 20 in the Holiness Code; Plato’s *Laws*). “One of the commonplace assumptions and assertions that governs our perceptions of antiquity is that ancient Israel is the source of homophobia while classical Greece is the home of a more accepting attitude toward homosexuality. The rereading of Hebrew Bible narrative texts that we have undertaken...casts considerable doubt on this assumption....Reading these narratives from the standpoint of a gay-affirmative hermeneutic or interpretive strategy actually serves to make these narratives more rather than less intelligible, more rather than less accessible” (235). “It is difficult to imagine a more firmly entrenched view of the difference between ancient Greece and ancient Israel than one that ascribes an open tolerance for homoerotic relations to Greece and an abhorrence of them to Israel” (236). [See, for instance the citations from Louis Crompton 2003 below].

“The difference between Greece and Israel appears not to lie in something so simple as the prohomosexuality of Greece and the antihomosexuality of Israel. Rather the difference appears to be more that between a relatively restricted form of acceptable same-sex practice (classic pederasty) and a rather more diverse proliferation of kinds of same-sex practice and relationship reflected in the literature of ancient Israel” (237).

“The primary materials—telling of the warrior love of the Davidic saga and of YHWH’s male groupies—all come from a time between one and three centuries of any literary evidence of same-sex erotic relationships in ancient Greece. Thus the Greek-style pederasty appears to be significantly later than the same-sex eroticism that we have encountered in the Hebrew Bible” (239). “The most important difference is that the gods of the Greeks constitute an entire society largely independent of the society of humans; they are as distinct from people as the life of a royal court is from a peasant village” (239). “But YHWH is different from this society of Greek gods. He generally appears as a warrior-bachelor whose basic interest is in mortals, especially the people of Israel....What may give

homoeroticism a certain importance in Israelite literature is precisely the male-male relationship highlighted in the relationship between the people and their deity” (240). “It would appear that same-sex eroticism in Israel is inseparable connected to Israel’s Yahwism. It is no extraneous import but something deeply and inextricably embedded in the religion of Israel” (241).

“While I must reserve an exploration of the emergence of homophobia to a subsequent study, it is worthwhile to recognize that the Leviticus proscriptions [of some kind of homosexual practice] are likely no earlier than the fourth century BCE. Hence, they do not predate the homophobic program of Plato’s *Laws*! [proposing to legally abolish the custom of pederasty]...Homophobia is at least as old (and perhaps more influential) in Greece as in Israel” (242). Jennings then suggests as possible influences that prompted Israel’s “openness to same-sex eroticism” the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic celebrating the love of Gilgamesh for Enkidu, the seafaring peoples of Crete, and Egypt’s brief flirtation with monotheism under the heretic pharaoh Akhenaton (1379-1362 BCE) (242-243; Lev 18:3).

Epilogue. Jacob’s Wound (245-261). Jennings summarizes the episodes previously studied that depict “the divine relating to the human not only in sexual or erotic terms but also in terms that suggest something like rape” (245; see above Dagon, Saul, etc).

The Attack on Moses (Exodus 4:24-26). “Much of Eilberg-Schwartz’s groundbreaking book *God’s Phallus* focused on the relationship between Moses and YHWH and especially on the question of the sighting or not of the divine genitalia” (246). Jennings then focuses on the puzzling episode of the divine attack on Moses in Exodus 4:24-26, where YHWH met Moses “and tried to kill him”. Both the attack and Zipporah’s way of averting it are astonishing. Twice she calls Moses a “bridegroom of blood,” evidently signifying that Moses belongs to her and that YHWH therefore has no right to the person of her bridegroom (247). That a question of sexual possession is involved is suggested both by her words and by the application of the blood. The blood comes from their son Gershom’s circumcised penis and “is applied to Moses’ penis; ‘feet’ sometimes substitutes for ‘penis’ in Hebrew narrative (cf. Ruth 3:4; Isa 6:2; 7:20). Hence, Moses’ penis is touched by the bloody foreskin of Gershom’s penis, and this somehow signifies that Moses belongs to Zipporah and that YHWH has no right to his body” (248). “Thus the assault on Moses appears to have been a kind of attempted rape, a violent sexual assault” (249). Nevertheless, later texts attest a transformed intimate and even erotic relationship between Moses and YHWH. As a result of his intimacy with YHWH (face to face, Exod 33:11; Deut 34:10; and mouth to mouth, Num 12:8) Moses must go about veiled like a woman (Exod 34:29-35; cf 2 Cor 3:12-18). Other traditions indicate that Moses “is given to see, not the divine front/face, but the divine buttocks (Exod 33:20-33; Jennings 249). “An erotic relationship seeming to begin as a kind of attempted rape ends instead with something far more consensual and as something that comes to be marked by faithfulness...(Exod 34:6-7)”; Jennings 249-250).

The Assault on Jacob (Genesis 32:22-32). Jacob’s encounter with God “has lent itself to all sorts of edifying reflections on ‘wresting with God’ as a metaphor for intense spiritual experience” [prayer] (250), thus suppressing the erotic dimension. First we read that “a man wrestled with him until daybreak” (Gen 32:24). “When the man saw that he did not

prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket (32:25). Even this 'low blow' and the (permanent?) injury that results does not succeed in overcoming Jacob" (251). "As the night begins to give way to day, the mysterious attacker pleads to be released from Jacob's grip" (251). Jacob demands a blessing as the price for releasing his grip and is given a new name, Israel, "one who strives with God" and Jacob concludes "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved" (32:30)...The tradition that Jacob's assailant was an angel derives not from Genesis from Hosea" (12:2-4; p 251-252). Jennings explains the injury thus: "In wrestling, a particularly violent grip at the base of the buttocks could strain or damage this [sciatic] nerve, resulting in serious injury. The same would be true of a violent sexual assault" (253).

Jacob's Wound "We may characterize our entire study of 'homoerotic narrative in the literature of ancient Israel' as a tracing of Jacob's wound" (254). Patriarchy is wounded, "subverted from within" (256). "The homoeroticism of Israel's relation to his 'Lord' is one that not only makes Israel vulnerable to the wound of homoerotic passion but also makes Israel the bearer of the divine blessing" (258).

Plato, *Laws* (835E-842A), 348 BCE

(Thomas K. Hubbard, ed. *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California, 2003: 252-259)

And let us suppose he [someone] were to bring forth as evidence the nature of wild animals and show that male does not touch male with such an end in mind because it is not given in nature....

I have a method for establishing this law, and the law will prescribe that men use sexual intercourse for procreation, as in nature, that they refrain from the male, if they are to avoid intentionally killing the human race and sowing their seed, as it were, on rocks and stones where a man's fertile seed will never take root....

The first regulation states that no man should dare to touch any of the noble and freeborn women except his own wife, and that none should sow illegitimate and bastard seed with concubines or non-procreative seed with males beyond nature....

For commentary on Plato, see **Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University, 2003:60-62.**

Crompton grapples continually, sympathetically and profoundly with that great mystery for Jewish and Christian believers:

"It is an irony of history that the two cultures which have done most to shape Western civilization should have adopted antithetical views on homosexuality at almost the same time. In the sixth century before Christ, Greece produced the homoerotic poetry of Solon....But in the same century a few hundred miles away in ancient Palestine, a law was incorporated into the Hebrew scriptures which was ultimately to have a far greater influence and indeed, to affect the fate of

homosexuals in half the world down to our own day....the so-called Holiness Code in Leviticus...about 550 BCE” (2003:32; see also pp. 48, 130).

Concluding his study when executions for “sodomy” finally cease in Europe (1803), Crompton seeks to analyze the data in his leitmotif:

Looking back over twenty-four centuries, what pattern can we see in the dozen societies we have examined? Most striking, certainly, is the divide between those that called themselves Christian and those that flourished before or independently of Christianity. In the first we find laws and preaching that promoted hatred, contempt, and death; in the second, varying attitudes, all of them (barring Islam, which like Christianity, inherited the lethal tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures) to a radical degree more tolerant...Executions in England, which reached their peak in the early nineteenth century, were the result of centuries of campaigning by clergy who called up the nation to ‘exterminate the monster?’” (2003:536, 538).

Evaluation. Jennings’ three principle conclusions listed above (p. 1) and the hypothesis to be developed in his projected volume on Paul are valid, extremely important and do not require accepting his reading of every text treated. However, they do require that we take into account all his evidence and see it as a whole, not just piecemeal. The fundamentalist mentality always encourages us to scrutinize an isolated piece of evidence or two, offers alternative explanations, and then assumes that the argument is refuted, without taking the time to see the whole picture (classically, this has been done with the massive stylistic evidence for four pentateuchal sources). The following comments touch on only a few details in each chapter and are generally intended to clarify and strengthen Jennings’ case.

1-2 The strength of the material on Warrior Love and Saul, Jonathan and David may be underestimated by readers not familiar with such works as David Halperin’s (1990) and the ancient near eastern background. Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli have argued similarly for a gay reading that includes Saul in the triangle with Jonathan and David (“Saul, David and Jonathan—The Story of a Triangle? A Contribution to the Issue of Homosexuality in the First Testament.” *Samuel and Kings*. FCB (Second Series), Athalya Brenner, ed. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000:22-36; see my 1-2 Samuel for a summary).

3-4 Readers not familiar with the evidence presented in Howard Eilberg-Schwartz’s 1994 work may find Jennings’ material on Yahweh as Lover (*Erastes*) more shocking than convincing. Those already shocked in 1994, and hopefully now in recovery, may be able to appreciate more the readings Jennings offers of a deity commonly imaged as a bachelor male deity who loves human males for their physical beauty. Here especially it is essential to take an honest, careful look at all the texts, both biblical and from other sources (Zeus).

5 Traditional commentaries commonly ignore the more embarrassing details in the texts about Saul’s swoon and nudity, naked prophets and the institution of the sons of the prophets, while Jennings forces us to examine each text closely and see the relations.

6 The treatment of Elijah and Elisha as “boy-lovers” undoubtedly will prove most controversial. While Jennings does well to point out the dubious character of the traditional

translation indicating that Elisha's resurrected boy "sneezed" seven times, few will find convincing his alternative suggestion that it refers rather to sexual ejaculation. For such a euphemistic reference to sexual erection/ejaculation, a more telling example would be the reference in 1 Sam 20:41 to David, who "exceeded himself" (KJV), grew large" while embracing Jonathan ('*ad higdil*, from *gadol*, large; Warren Johansson 1990:298). On the other hand, lawyers and fundamentalist preachers who argue that Michael Jackson obviously must have had sex with any male youth who shared his bed seem to have forgotten about Elijah and Elisha! If their argument against the pop singer holds, so would much of Jennings' homoerotic readings of 1-2 Kings, where the evidence for general homoeroticism is more convincing than any reference to specific overt sexual acts.

7 Jennings treatment of the "Holy Hustlers" based on the five texts referring to cult prostitutes, which the KJV mistranslated "sodomites," is one of the most original and perceptive. While most everyone else has been content to correct the homophobic prejudice of the KJV, Jennings typically goes "pro-active" and points out how the texts clearly indicate the institutionalized presence of "homosexual practice" in the Temple itself throughout the history of the monarchy. So much for crediting "Moses" (Leviticus 18 and 20) for making homosexuality a pagan vice virtually unheard of in Israel!

8 Jennings' treatment of Transgendered Israel in five prophetic books is perhaps the most complex and difficult to summarize adequately. However, the multitude of relevant texts with perspectives on sexuality traditionally overlooked adds significant weight to the overall argument of the book (see my chapter on Ezekiel for additional evidence and feminist studies not cited by Jennings, but which support his approach).

9 Source criticism is out of fashion in scholarly circles, but Jennings might have strengthened his excellent treatment of Joseph by reminding readers that the Joseph novella (most of Gen 37-50) mainly stems from the North Israelite E (Elohists) source, which refers to the deity as *Elohim*. This suggests the conclusion that, although in Judah *Yahweh* may have loved Saul and David, in the Northern tribes *Elohim* became famous for favoring Joseph, also distinguished for his beauty. As indicated above, I think Joseph is better read as a prototypical "gay" rather than a "eunuch" (unless we use "eunuchs" figuratively to include males who love males, as in Matt 19:12). Such a Joseph, flamboyantly clad in his princess' long-sleeve rainbow robe, might also have been introduced earlier in the book, even before Ruth.

10 Jennings' treatment of the only surviving candidates for "lobber texts" in the Hebrew Bible (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13) seeks to transcend earlier efforts at defanging by arguing that the texts refer, not to sexually aggressive males who violate other males, but to passive "bottoms" who offer themselves to be penetrated like women. He makes a good case for *including* this possibility, but does not really succeed in refuting the more common view, as expounded at length by Jewish scholar Jacob Milgrom in the Anchor Bible (see my Leviticus for a summary). Specialists in the biblical legal materials point out that laws tend to last, while the motives for them often change over the centuries and such probably was the case with Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. This suggests that valid answers to the basic question "why?" may be multiple and not exclusive (which Calvin recognized as fundamental for sound interpretation of biblical prohibitions like that against "usury").

11 Although Jennings has good reasons for treating Ruth and Naomi near the end, I would have preferred it be placed first, since in the biblical story they precede Saul, David and Jonathan, and women readers and feminists probably would be far more receptive to the ideas presented had the question of lesbianism not been tagged on at the end.

12 The final chapter treats Yahweh's mysterious attack on Moses' life (Ex 4:24-26) and Jacob's all night wrestling bout with a man/angel/God (depending on the text; Gen 32:22-32), which suggests to Jennings that patriarchy is permanently wounded, "subverted from within" (256). Women readers and feminist allies will be relieved, but perhaps not totally convinced. If the Hebrew Bible mainly images God as a male deity, a confirmed bachelor who is most commonly attracted to handsome young human males, undoubtedly patriarchy is unhinged and traditional heterosexist ideologies of masculinity skidding fast down the slippery slope. But does this tell us more about God or about the human (male) authors who wrote about their encounters with the divine?

Beauty in Biblical Theology: male, female, and divine. Evangelical/Protestant theologies have tended to focus rather exclusively on writing (Scripture) and questions regarding truth, to the neglect of Biblical teaching regarding beauty. Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologies, with their concern for liturgy and visual symbols, have been more balanced in this area, but too often have allowed powerful experiences of attraction to beauty to lead into syncretism and idolatry. Protestants frequently have cited Paul's warning about Satan himself masquerading as "an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14) to express their concern that fascination with beauty may lead to departures from the truth. The Catholic penchant for the religious display of beauty recently was epitomized when Pope Benedict XVI (alias Cardinal Ratzinger) made his first public appearance before Italian journalists with the hemline of his robe cut high and thus displaying the famous ruby red papal slippers—like Dorothy all ready for another scene in the Wizard of Oz! (TIME, August 15, 2005, p. 32).

Frederick Faber (1848) reflects the traditional Roman Catholic love for God prompted by the perception of divine beauty in one of his hymns:

My God, how wonderful thou art,	Yet I may love thee too, O Lord,
Thy majesty how bright!	Almighty as thou art;
How beautiful thy mercy seat,	For thou hast stooped to ask of me
In depth of burning light!....	The love of my poor heart.

Gay Catholic theologian Donald Boisvert provides countless contemporary illustrations of his homoerotic attraction to paintings and images of saints and the love for God and neighbor inspired by such experiences (*Sanctity and Male Desire: A Gay Reading of Saints*, Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2004). Protestant Bible reference works commonly have no entry on "beauty," as if it were a subject alien to Biblical theology, but Catholic works commonly include it (see the excellent article by John R. Sachs, SJ, "Beauty" in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1987:83-85) and above all Hans Urs von Balthasar's classic work, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*. 6 vols. San Francisco, 1982).

Jennings' book, with its focus on the role of human beauty (Saul, David, Joseph, Ruth) in God's project of human liberation, requires that we look closely at Biblical teaching regarding beauty and its relation to love (both human and divine). Jennings' citations of key texts in translation is sufficient for his purposes, but David Clines has provided a helpful analysis of key Biblical texts on "The beautiful male" that includes references to the original Hebrew (*Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995:221-223). He comments perceptively:

Samuel is obviously impressed by male beauty. When he 'sees' Jesse's eldest son Eliab, he thinks, 'Surely here, before the LORD, is his anointed king' (1 Sam. 16:6 REB). The word 'beauty' is not there, but the word 'sees' is; what the male gaze sees attracts it, though its super-ego may feel uncomfortable about feeling attracted. Says Yahweh to Samuel, 'Pay no attention to his outward appearance and stature... The LORD does not see as a mortal sees; mortals see only appearances but the LORD sees into the heart' (v. 7 REB). But then Samuel catches sight of Saul, 'handsome, with ruddy cheeks and bright eyes' (v. 12 REB), and, with wondrous irony, as Walter Brueggemann puts it, 'Samuel and the narrator are dazzled', and Yahweh, who of course does not see as a mortal sees, seizes the moment: 'This is the man; rise and anoint him' (v. 12), he commands (1995:222).

Among other Hebrew terms for beauty that Clines details, most common is *tob*, more often translated "good," but clearly indicating beautiful/handsome male or female appearance in many texts: Moses, as a child (Ex 2:2); Adonijah (1 Kgs 1:6); Saul (1 Sam 9:2, 2x); David (1 Sam 16:2); Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:2) and Esther (Est 2:7). Thus, commentators commonly point out that all the references to God's creation as being "good/very good" (*tob*) in the priestly account of creation (Genesis 1:1-2:4a) might just as well be translated "beautiful/very beautiful" (Schökel 1994:291-293). This is especially evident when we recall the fascination in the priestly strata of the Pentateuch and other related writings with ornate (male) priestly vestments (Lev 8-10), elaborate tabernacle and temple architecture and furnishings (Ex 25-40; 1 Kgs 1-11) and the Holy City itself (Ps 46; 48; 84; 87; 122).

Hence, in addition to the long list of beautiful people Jennings and Cline supply, undoubtedly we should also describe the first humans as "very beautiful/handsome" (Gen 1:31). And since they are created in the image of God, we may infer also the beauty of God (1:26-27) and thus understand the psalmists yearning to "dwell in the house of Yahweh all the days of my life, to gaze upon *the beauty [no'am] of Yahweh* and to inquire in his temple" (27:4), a truly ecumenical sentiment that combines Catholic and Orthodox aesthetic aspirations with a determined Protestant search for truth and a Pentecostal openness to prophetic oracles.

Clines (1995:222) also reminds us of another strand of Biblical teaching epitomized by Deutero-Isaiah's description of the "Servant of Yahweh" as "having "no form or splendor that we should gaze upon him, and no appearance that we should desire him" (52:2). Here common concepts of physical beauty are totally subverted by a beautiful story of sacrificial love with redemptive significance (see also the Gospels and Jesus' parables). Similarly, Jesus commends the woman who anointed him for his burial, saying "She has *done a beautiful thing to me*" (Mk 14:6). Physical appearance has become aesthetically irrelevant.

In yet another way 1 Peter subverts common worldly values by reminding wives:

Your beauty should not come from *outward* adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead it should be that of your *inner* self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past used to make themselves beautiful (1 Pet 3:3-5).

Paul similarly describes both divine and human beauty in terms of God's "glory," reflecting a linguistic use common in the Hebrew Bible:

We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18).

Obviously, for Paul, the elderly need not recur to cosmetic surgery! John also picks up on the aesthetic significance of the divine glory when he says of the eternal Word become flesh: "we have beheld his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, full of grace and truth" (1:14), echoing Isaiah's promise that "The glory of Yahweh will be revealed and all flesh shall see it together" (40:5). For John, surely, Jesus' glory was manifest not so much in physical appearance (cf. the transfiguration in the Synoptics), but in his seven signs, unique teaching (especially the seven "I am's"), the cross and resurrection (John 12:23-24).

Awareness of this richness, diversity and profundity of Biblical teaching on beauty is essential if we are properly to relate beauty with love in Biblical theology. Humans, like Samuel and the author of 1 Samuel, may be "dazzled" by outward physical appearance, but even in such early texts we are already reminded, albeit with prescientific terminology, that above all Yahweh "looks on the heart" (1 Sam 16:7).

God's love undoubtedly is reflected in Jonathan's overwhelming "love at first sight" for David, in Ruth's homoerotic love for Naomi, in Jesus' intimate relationship with the beloved disciple, and Paul's tender concern for his "son" Timothy, but even more in the loving kindness (*hesed*) and sacrificial love manifest over years of faithful friendship. Traditional theologies, Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Pentecostal, have had no problem in seeing "God's own love poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 5:5) and then expressing itself in Christian husbands' sacrificial love for submissive wives, or even Christ's love for his transgendered church (Eph 5).

Jennings, however, forces us to peer deeply into those other texts, where homoerotic love is manifest paradigmatically between Yahweh and Israelite males, as well as in homoerotic human relations. We come to see that the fundamental question is not whether Ruth and Naomi or David and Jonathan "had sex," but whether they loved each other with a love "surpassing" common heterosexual love. When we recognize the frequency and depth of the homoerotic love attested in the Bible, the question of whether or how often it was expressed in sexual acts becomes theologically irrelevant. And the only "ethical" question (to lapse our popular Greek philosophical category) is not the gender of the persons involved, but the authenticity of the love, the freedom with which it is expressed, the justice of the relationship and the wisdom and appropriateness of the act. Consensual, non-violent,

loving expressions that do not harm the neighbor are to be commended when they edify the individuals involved and the church. Neoplatonic body-negative, sex-fearing tradition that seeks to minimize the experience of God's love in sexual pleasure through rationalizations based on race (miscegenation), past marital history (divorce), gender and procreation (heterosexism) reflects human folly, not divine wisdom.

By pro-actively changing the questions, Jennings also enables us to understand why the deity in the incarnational mode preferred to be called—not “son of Solomon” (with his 700 wives and 300 concubines)—but “son of David,” and with his beloved disciple in a homoerotic relationship (Jennings 2003) thus reflect that scandalous love (“surpassing women”) of his great ancestor. After reading Jennings trilogy, modern queers may actually begin to feel that we are not just “tolerated” by the God portrayed in Scripture, but actually preferred—and so have to stop worrying incessantly about our sense of self-worth and start praying for humility.