

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5-9 *full of envy*,

of murder,

of strife,

of guile,

of malignity,

10 gossipers,

11 **[30]** slanderers,

12 haters of God,

13 insolent/bullies,

14 arrogant,

15 boasters/braggarts,

16 inventors of evil projects,

17 disobeyers of parents,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(1) behavior traditionally categorized as "**unclean**" (Rom 1:24) has now been cleansed (14:14, 20); (2) before echoing society's condemnation of "shameful" behavior (1:24, 26-27), recall the queer Jesus' **shameful** crucifixion, God's decisive instrument of liberating justice (3:21-26; cf "boasting," 5:2-3, 11); (3) behavior "**against nature**" (1:26-27) was precisely what God himself engaged in when engrafting

believing Gentiles into the Olive tree of Israel (Rom 11:24); by referring to Gentiles as *uncircumcised* “by nature” Paul recognized that circumcision itself a human cultural imposition, and thus an act “against nature”; 2:27; see also the Gentiles not having the Law by birth, 2:14);

(4) even “**ex/change**” (1:23, 25, 26-27—from what to what?), far from always constituting negative apostasy, may actually constitute the essence of the sanctification process as we “present our bodies as a living sacrifice” and are “*transformed*” into Christ’s likeness (12:1-2), with love replacing lust (5:5; 13:8-14).

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

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

Pregeant cites with approval Willi Marxsen, who argues that “the more concrete the imperative is, the more situational it is and the less suitable it is for presenting and understanding the character of the Pauline ethic [universal behaviour norms]. Hence the imperatives in the letters are useless for resolving concrete ethical problems” (2008:31). Classic examples would be the various isolated Pauline imperatives that widows should remarry (1 Tim 5:14) or not remarry (1 Cor 7:8), that women should have their heads covered when praying or prophesying in the church (1 Cor 11:2-16), but keep silence in the church (1 Cor 14:34-35), that women should not teach or have authority over men (1 Tim 2:11-15) or indulge in “unnatural/nonprocreative” sexual relations (Rom 1:26, probably with reference to avoiding procreation by practicing anal sex with males).

Pregeant cites with approval Brian K. Blount’s African American perspective that “because of their unique social and political circumstance, African American slaves were uniquely outfitted to interact with that part of the meaning picture that other communities, because of their space implications (limitations), could not....It could well be that one community has seen something that has eluded another (2001:20). Pregeant then comments: “Although meaning arises in the interaction between text and readers, the text itself defines and limits the parameters of meaning. The meaning potential, in other words, is not infinite. The reader’s ‘space’ provides an angle of vision from which aspects of that meaning potential can come to light, but it does not simply *impose* a meaning that has no textual warrant” (2008:43). Pregeant, however, shows no evidence of applying this principle to sexual minority readers when treating the “clobber” texts traditionally used to condemn them but passes over the extensive literature available from gay/lesbian/queer perspectives.

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

Certainly Paul was aware of the imprecise character of key terms he employs in his rhetoric in Romans 1, where the ambiguity of the language continues to perplex commentators and give them a field day for lengthy explanations of diverse interpretations: desires/lusts, uncleanness (cultic and/or moral?), passions/desires, natural/customary, against nature/custom, desire/lust, unseemliness/shameful member. As we shall see below, it is precisely Paul's skilful use of ambiguity and imprecision that makes his construction of the rhetorical trap so astute and yet which also opens the door for his own later deconstructions of key terms that gave a negative impression in 1:24-26 but which later he redeems for positive use: God does what is against nature (11:24) and all *things* are declared clean (14:14, 20), emphasizing "the central notion of the goodness of God's creation (Gen 1:3)" (Pregeant 2008:85), which stands in tension with priestly notions of uncleanness..

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

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

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

1. the **literary genre** of Rom 1:18-32 is a highly rhetorical "Decline of Civilization" narrative (with its tendency to the hyperbole of prophetic denunciation), not a sober positive exposition of behaviour norms for the new communities, such as Paul later gives us in Romans (13:8-14).
2. Paul's **purpose** in the four-fold repetition of vocabulary for change/leaving in the rhetoric of 1:23-27 is not to establish ethical absolutes, but rather **to entrap** the reader who boasts of his moral superiority and condemns others (2:1). Thus the reader who leaps to the conclusion that 1:26-27 implies a universal absolute condemnation of all homoerotic activity only lands the more quickly in the rhetorical trap Paul prepared for arrogant judges who condemn others (2:1-16).

3. the change from monotheistic worship to idolatry (23, 25) was a human decision, whereas the change to unclean sexual desires/lusts resulted from **God's abandonment** of idolaters (God "gave them over," 1:24, 26, 28), so unclean sexual desires/lusts were not the cause of God's wrath (1:18), but its consequence.
4. Paul refers first to females (1:26), there specifying only a change from natural/procreative sex to **unnatural/non-procreative** sex, but does *not* indicate any exchange of male partners for female.
5. Paul emphasizes (**three times**) the shameful unclean **desire/lust** in 24, 26-27, but only in 1:26-27 does he specify the females' recourse to "unnatural" (non-procreative) sex and only once (in 1:27) does he specify homoeroticism, the males leaving of female for male sex partners.
6. Even in **1:27**, the verse where Paul describes the idolatrous males in antiquity (generally? all?) as "leaving" the "natural" (procreative) use of females he again *first* emphasizes **strong desire** ("burned with desire/lust"), not the "males among males" element."
7. In Paul's rhetorical trap, the "change" vocabulary (1:23, 25, 26-27) is another element that undergoes **deconstruction** later in the letter, where Paul declares that "transformation" (radical change) is the essence of individual sanctification (12:1-2) and the ultimate goal of God's cosmic purpose (8:18-25).

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

The changes denounced in Romans 1:23-27, however, were changes that dishonor God (1:23, 25) and harm the neighbour (13:8-10). Paul later indicates the *desired* transformation and renewal, affecting both mind and body, in terms of the corporate life of the tenement and house churches (12:3-16), their relations with oppressors and government authorities (12:14-13:7), and including sexual relations that reflect love, not lust (13:8-14). In the latter case, Paul does not require establishment of universal heterosexuality, but commands avoiding adultery (13:9), and other "excesses" (*aselgeia*) and assorted lusts ("beds" *koitais*... "covetings" *epithumias*) that harm the neighbour (13:13-14). Far from an "anything goes" postmodern relativism, Paul's norms for Christian sexual behaviour are quite demanding: "make *no provision* for the flesh to fulfil its covetous lusts" (13:14). However, unlike traditional heterosexist Christian ethics, Paul's norms are just and do not require more of persons with a homosexual orientation than they do of heterosexuals (for additional positive Pauline and Biblical perspectives on ex/change and transformation see Jewett 2006:160 and notes 114, 116; Frederick Büchsel, "*allásson*," TDNT 1, 1964: 251; EDNT I, 62; BDAG 2000:45-46; Mk 9:2-13; 2 Cor 3:18; 5:17; Phlp 3:21; 1 Cor 15:51-52). In light of the later affirmation of *positive* change, we can see that Paul's four *negative* references to change (in Rom 1:23, 25, 26-27) involved exchanging the true God for idols (1:23, 25) and changing natural (procreative) sexual relations for anal sex (non-procreative), expressions of desire and lust (1:26-27)—destructive behaviors that would damage Christian communities (13:8-13).

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

The story/myth of humanity's fall into idolatry and sexual uncleanness (1:19-32) is first qualified as the setting of a rhetorical trap that is immediately sprung in 2:1-16 and then followed by the deconstruction of four elements in the negative rhetoric (uncleanness, unnatural, dishonorable/shameful, change), leaving only the

prohibition against coveting/lust/excess passion (the last of the 10 Commandments) as a continual norm for Christian behavior (13:8-10, where the only sexual expression condemned is heterosexual adultery, not “homosexuality”). Efforts to interpret Romans 1:24-27 in the context of the entire letter and use it to provide norms for church praxis today thus require that we recognize the following factors, giving full weight to

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

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

Of course, when Paul refers to this prehistoric (mythological/legendary?) “fall” of human ancestors into idolatry and consequent sexual uncleanness, he says nothing about modern youths who recognize their homosexual orientation from adolescence onward without ever having had any sexual relations with women (cf. 1:27). If an “exchange” in and of itself were sinful, then an informed and coherent Paul should encourage such youths to be faithful to their same-sex partner! Therefore, as Paul later insists, to evaluate different changes requires *discernment*: a woman who *changes* husbands while the first one is still alive is “adulterous,” but if she remarries after the death of the first husband, she is not adulterous (7:1-6). Thus when Paul denounces “changes” (Rom 1:23-27) this provides no basis for condemning a Christian homosexual man who, never having had sexual relations with a woman, forms a permanent and exclusive relationship with another man to live faithfully in love. In such cases the exchange that harms would be that proposed by the pseudo-scientific ministers of the “Ex-Gay” movement, who—in an era devastated by AIDS—seek to destroy such stable relationships in order to impose heterosexual “marriages”—cruel pseudo-scientific experiments that commonly end in divorce, depression, addictions and suicides. Paul, however, says nothing about any sexual acts “against nature” (non-procreative) in contexts of relationships of committed love. Perhaps such relations were unknown to Paul, but we cannot twist his words to condemn something that he either refrained from mentioning or didn’t even know existed.

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

Humanity in general?

Only or mainly Gentiles?

Only or mainly Jews?

Rom 1:18-2:16 does not criticize Gentiles alone, since 1:16-18 insists that God’s just anger threatens *all* impiety/idolatry and oppression and that God’s liberating justice and salvation is revealed in the Gospel to everyone who has faith (Jewett 152; Cranfield 106). Hence Paul in Rom 1:23 alludes to the Golden Calf episode (Ex 32) and Jer 2:11 in Israel’s history, as well as to the Genesis creation (and fall?) narratives. See

the address to “all” who are in the Roman tenement and house churches (1:7) and the thanks for “all” of them (1:8). Therefore we should not assume that Paul thought that unclean sexual desires (1:24) including non-procreative anal sex (1:26-27) never occurred among Jews. The “men” and the “them” refer to persons who in the ancient past invented and practiced idolatry, not to “Gentiles” (distinguished from Israel only after Abraham’s call in Gen 12). The present tenses (1:18-20) indicate the on-going effects of a process that may have begun soon after creation (1:20).

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

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

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

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

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

Moo (1996:96-98) takes 1:18-19 as an introduction indicting **all humanity** (see 3:23); 1:20-32 as referring mainly to Gentiles; 2:1-16 especially to Jews; and 2:17-3:8 specifically to Jews (see his chart 2002:58). Wright (2002:429) suggests that a pagan moralist is especially targeted in 2:1-17; Swancutt specifies Stoic judges (2003:215-33; 2004, details below); most recently Neil Elliott (2008:78-83) and Ted Jennings (2009:138-52) have argued persuasively that sexually immoral emperors like Tiberius, Caligula and Nero are in view.

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

In **1:16** Jewett does not translate *sotería* as “integral liberation” nor *dikaiosyne* in **1:17** as referring to God’s “liberating justice” revealed in the Gospel, and hence fails to make clear that in 1:18 Paul refers not just to “wrongdoing” in some general or moralistic (sexual) sense, but to “**oppression (*adikía*, twice)**” thus missing the allusion to Hebrew Bible emphasis on oppression as provoking God’s wrath (Ex 22:21-24; Hanks 1972:16). This oversight then prejudices Jewett’s interpretation of the later treatment of sexual uncleanness (1:24-27), which refers not to homoerotic relations universally, but to expressions of sexual desire, exploitation, abuse and violence. Later Jewett includes “injustice” as one definition of *adikía* (152) and the crucifixion of Jesus as a prime example (151, “violence”?), but such data are not permitted to illuminate his translation of 1:18. Tom Wright makes the point clearer: “The word rendered ‘wickedness’ in the NRSV and the NIV is *adikía*, not just general evil but injustice, the crucial symptom of the world’s out-of-jointness. This human injustice contrasts sharply with God’s [liberating] justice (v. 17)” (2002:432).

Commentators show no consensus regarding the implications of the **threefold duplication of *parédoken*** (“**God gave them up/delivered them**”) in 1:24, 26 and 28. Jewett understands the verb as “a forceful refrain of deliverance to human distortion, first on the mental and religious level in the worship of the creature rather than the Creator (vv. 24-25), then on the sexual level in the form of perverted relationships (vv. 26-27), and finally on the public level in the form of criminal and sociopathic behaviour (vv. 28-32)” (2006:165). This analysis appears to exclude sexuality from 1:24, which he then later includes (“perverse sexual relations...sexual irregularities...slaves used for prostitution...promiscuity”, 169, notes 41, 43). At the other extreme, Gagnon argues that “The three ‘giving overs’ (1:24, 26, 28) do not represent temporal sequences but

rather are speaking of the same fundamental act,” (2001:252). Some see the three-fold abandonment as the expression of God’s wrath in the present referred to in 1:18 (Brooten 1996:221), but if Paul is presenting a Decline of Civilization narrative, he describes something in the remote past, although the pattern may be repeated—whenever humans opt for idolatry they are abandoned to their lusts (Wright 2002, cited above).

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

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

Dale Martin astutely critiques the heterosexist ideologies affecting such interpretations:

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

Another interpretation, however, is perhaps even more likely than the three cited above. Scholars have long called attention to the close parallels between Paul’s rhetoric in Romans 1:18-32 and the **Wisdom of Solomon** 11-15 (Gagnon 2001:247-51; Brooten 1996:294-98; cf Stowers 1994:85). Basically in Romans 1 Paul simply spins out in detail what his readers would assumed to have taken place, according to the Wisdom of Solomon, and which they would have known from the LXX: “For the intention to make idols is the beginning of sexual immorality (*porneias*), and their invention is the corruption of life” (Wis. 14:12; similarly T. Naph. 3:3-4). However, although Wisdom specifically targeted Gentile idolatry, Paul subverts the Jewish propaganda by insisting that God’s just wrath targets *all* impiety/idolatry and oppression (whether Gentile or Jewish). Wisdom’s broad reference to *porneia* supports the understanding of Rom 1:24 as referring to sexual immorality generally, and not simply anticipating 1:26-27 (*pace* Gagnon). The reference in Wisdom 14:24-26

to idolatry as the source of “every evil” may have inspired Paul’s vice list in Rom 1:28-32. Some scholars even detect in Wisdom the notion that idolatry produces “sexual perversion” (Wisdom 14:26 NRSV; David Winston, *Wisdom*, Anchor Bible 43 1979:280; Bernadette Brooten 1996:296 and note 112; Gagnon 2001:241, note 10). However, Countryman points out that the Greek term is best translated “alteration of generation,” or “alteration of procreation,” and would thus designate “the whole range of nonprocreative sexual activities rather than specifying same-gender sexual acts.” (2007:62). The reference to enemies who are idol worshippers and “oppress Israel” (Wis 15:14) may also form part of the background to the two references to oppression in Rom 1:18 and the reference to God’s liberating justice revealed in the Gospel (1:17).

Regarding **1:25** Jewett emphasizes the use of the article “*the* lie” to refer to the human exchange of the truth of God for idolatry, “which involves the fundamental thrust of humans to replace God with themselves....to define evil and good for themselves” (170, citing Gen 3:5), with an oblique reference to veneration of the emperor in Roman religion. Jewett’s effort to interpret Paul’s references to idolatry (Rom 1:18-23, 25) as echoing basically the Fall of Adam, however, is undermined by the specific mention of four types of images in 1:23 (of man, birds, quadrupeds and reptiles), which he recognizes as an allusion to the golden calf episode as recalled in Ps 106:20 (2006:160).

Most conservative evangelical scholars agree with Jewett when he says “the popular application of the modern concept of individual sexual orientation based on biological differences is **anachronistic**. Such exegesis misreads Paul’s argument as dealing with individual sins rather than the corporate distortion of the human race....” (2006:177; similarly Schreiner; Wright; cf Moo above). Paul appears to assume that some expression of male homoeroticism became common to the human race as a direct result of the option for idolatry, since the grammatical antecedent of the entire passage is *anthropon* (men, humans, males, 1:18) who suppress the truth about God revealed in creation and decide to fabricate and worship idols (1:19-23). Brooten adds that the reference to “*their* females” in 1:26 “points to the group nature of the transgression” (1996:240) and also would appear to limit the “men” in 1:18 to males; cf simply “the males” in 1:27. For the springing of his rhetorical trap on the hypocrite in chapter 2 Paul shifts to a diatribe style and addresses a singular “O *anthropos*” (2:1, 3; “O man/woman” Jewett 192); then, for his treatment of Torah and circumcision in 2:17-29, even more specifically the Apostle addresses “you” (singular) “who call yourself a Jew”.

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

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

Similarly, Robert Gagnon recognizes that Paul “is speaking in terms of collective entities, not individuals, and in terms of widespread effect, not origin” (2001:286). He elaborates: “Homosexual practice entails the conscious suppression of the visible and self-evident truth that the Creator shaped male and female as *complementary* counterparts of sexual pairing and not ‘males with male’ (Rom 1:27) or females with females (1:26) [note: Gagnon adds the term “complementary,” which is not in 1:26; see below]. It is a rebellion

against the Creator on the horizontal level, as idolatry is on the vertical level” [www.robagnon.net](http://www.robagnon.net), review of Myers and Scanzoni, p. 69). We should ask whether such literalist/fundamentalist readings of Paul also require us to believe that the repeatedly observed homosexual behaviour in 450 animal species similarly is to be attributed to their idolatry or that of their ancestors! (Bagemihl 1999). In the nineteenth century many physicians and scientists still made similar pronouncements about the “perversion” of left handedness, which they deemed a conscious rebellion against the obvious intent of the Creator, a perversion to be corrected by various forms of torture they devised and lucratively sold to “cure” (torture) left handed children.

In **1:24**, as Jewett observes, Paul moves beyond the vague passives of 1:22-23 and portrays God as “directly involved in the process of moral retribution” (167): “Therefore God gave them [men, humans, 1:18] up to the *epithumiais* (covetous? desires) of their hearts to *akatharsian* (uncleanness, impurity).” Jewett points out that Paul’s use of the plural form of *epithumia* “and the link with the “heart” make clear that Paul does not share the Stoic assessment that desire is in and of itself a root cause of the human predicament” (168 and note 27 on Frederickson 2000; see also Buddhism). Instead Paul may reflect LXX usage where *epithumia* is the “coveting” of the male neighbor’s possessions (including wife) prohibited in the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment (Ex 20:17; cf Dt 5:21). This kind of excessive desire that harms the neighbour and destroys community may be Paul’s concern in 1:24-27, as later in the epistle (Rom 7:7-8; 13:8-10, 13; 12:3-21; Fredrickson 2000:207-15; Martin 2006:55-60; Hanks 2000:26; 2006:585-86). As Jewett’s emphasizes, in Paul’s perplexing “decline of civilization narrative” human males (generally, universally?), having abandoned their (egotistical) “use” of females, were all “inflamed with sexual desire/lust” for one another (universal male promiscuity?)—hardly a description of the kind of loving committed gay relationship characterized by sacrificial care that many Christians today have experienced and witnessed. Of the wording “inflamed with desire/lust” Jewett holds that it implies “an irrational bondage to an egoistic, empty and unsatisfying expression of animalistic sexuality” (178-179) and Robert Gagnon even thinks Paul here describes accurately all modern gays and their sexual relationships (2001:469-86). Might we not at least grant that the Apostle seasoned his “decline of civilization narrative” with a dash of hyperbole (cf Jesus’ “woes” on his contemporary Pharisees, Mat 23)? Jewett suspects that Paul’s gentile audience in Rome (“the strong,” the vast majority in the house and tenement churches) would not have found the diatribe convincing (180). Perhaps the Jewish minority (“the weak”) would applaud, if they all were as patriarchal, sexist and homophobic as Philo and Josephus, but the Apostle’s “rhetorical trap” for hypocrites looms for them in the following chapter (2:1-16).

Gagnon objects: “The sequence of thought for Paul was not: Same-sex intercourse is excess passion; therefore it is wrong. It was: Same-sex intercourse is wrong; therefore it is excess passion. The concept of ‘disoriented desire’ logically precedes the concept of ‘inordinate desire’” ([www.robagnon.net](http://www.robagnon.net), review of Myers and Scanzoni, p. 71). However, Gagnon here fails to note that strong or *inordinate desire is emphasized first and in each verse on sexuality* (1:24, 26-27), while what he labels as “disoriented desire” only becomes explicit in 1:27, and even there the emphasis is first on the excessive? burning desire/lust. According to Swancutt, “Verses 24-27 literally scream the language of ...passion-in-excess” (2003:210) but if Countryman is correct, Paul may be purposely baiting his rhetorical trap with ambiguous vocabulary (“uncleanness...strong desire/lust”) which the judgmental reader/listener would assume implies sin, not just cultic uncleanness.

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

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

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

The notable absence of any reference to sexual sins in the vice list of 1:28-32 further supports the interpretation of 1:24 as referring to sexual uncleanness *generally*—a deficiency that the Textus Receptus, followed by the KJV and the Spanish RV, hastened to “correct” by adding the term *porneia* (“fornication”) to the vice list in 1:29.

Jewett notes that virtually all the evils of 1:28-32 also involve the body, but like most (Dunn 1988:62; Moo 1996:111-12; Schreiner 1998:93-94; Wright 2002:403), he understands that the “uncleanness” and “dishonouring of their bodies among themselves” (1:24) refers mainly to sin that is “sexual....perverse sexual relations....sexual irregularities....sexual promiscuity....slaves used for prostitution ” (169 and notes 41, 43, citing Wisdom 14:12, 24-27). Gagnon, however, argues that Rom 1:24 simply anticipates 1:26-27 and refers *only* to same-sex intercourse (2001:252, note 14). Such *eisegesis* (reading into the text his prejudices) serves his polemics well, but obviously distorts the data. As Bernadette Brooten points out, Paul’s vice list in 2:28-32 is *unique* in its omission of any reference to sexual sins (1996:260-61; cf Jewett’s textual note 164 i). If these are not covered generically in 1:24, then the only sexual sins Paul targets are the anal sex practices of 1:26-27. Wisdom of Solomon similarly saw idolatry producing *porneia* generally and only later proceeded to specify “alteration of generation”: “For the intention to make idols is the beginning of sexual immorality, and their invention is the corruption of life” (Wis. 14:12; cf. Sib. Or. 3:8-44; T. Jos 4:5-6).

As **William Countryman** first emphasized, in **1:24** Paul categorizes the sexual practices of 1:24, 26-27, not as “sin” (a category that does not occur until later—2:12 and 3:9), but as *akatharsía* (“**uncleanness, impurity**”), (1988:117; 2003:110-116; Daniel Helminiak 2000:93-94; 2003:161-163; cf Thomas Schmidt 1995:64-85; Robert Gagnon 2001:233). Jewett points out that in the LXX *akatharsía* was used to designate that which is ritually impure (“matter out of place” as Mary Douglas defined it) and to be kept separate from the holy (Temple worship, for instance), but that in Hellenistic Judaism and the NT it came to be used also in a moral sense as sin that excludes humans from fellowship with God, and that Paul uses the ambiguous term in *both* a moral and cultic sense (168, citing Rom 6:19; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; 1 Thess 2:3; 4:7). However Jewett makes no reference to the debate between Countryman and Schmidt and fails to note the significance of the deconstruction in Rom 14:14, 20 for the exegesis of 1:24-27 (cf. Brooten 1996:233-37, note 57). Countryman (1998:114; 2003:196) emphasizes the way Paul’s rhetoric regarding **sexual uncleanness** (1:24) is deconstructed later in the letter (also Daniel Helminiak 1994/2000:80-84). Countryman recently has maintained and strengthened his original basic position: “The language [in 1:24] is certainly pejorative; and yet it stops short of actually saying that this aspect of Gentile culture is intrinsically sinful or deserving of God’s wrath. Paul’s argument is rather that God has ‘handed over’ the Gentiles to their disgusting culture as punishment for another sin, idolatry” (2003:174). *However, even if Countryman and Helminiak err by interpreting “uncleanness” and related desire-vocabulary in 1:24, 26-27 as distinct from sinfulness, and if Schmidt, Gagnon and Jewett are correct in arguing for implied sinfulness (coveting, lust, etc., not just strong desire), then what Paul categorized as sinful is same-sex lust, abuse, oppression and violence, not same-sex love between two consenting adults.* Schmidt’s detailed linguistic arguments to prove that “uncleanness” in Romans 1:24 implies sinfulness overlooks the use of language for strong passionate desire in the erotic poetry of Song of Songs (mainly expressed in images and actions, but see 2:3 and 5:16 in the LXX). And of course, since Paul is laying a rhetorical trap for judgmental listeners, employment of ambiguous terms (uncleanness, desire/lust, unnatural) that often imply sinfulness fits perfectly into his game plan.

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

1. Certain human ancestors abandoned their creator and turned to idols (1:18-23, 25);
3. Their descendants now commit all manner of injustice and oppression (vice list, 1:29-31);
2. God abandoned/punished the idolatrous ancestors with “a culture that was disgustingly *unclean* from a Jewish perspective (1:24-28)” (2003:174-75; also Helminiak 2000:96; cf. Moo 1996:118 note 144).

Countryman’s reordering of the chronology in 1:18-32, as implied by the Greek syntax in 1:29, results in a two-fold emphasis on the *sin* of oppression/injustice (*adikía*, 1:18, 29; see 2:8) preceding the reference to the *uncleanness* of the sexual acts in 1:24-27). Such prioritizing of the sin of oppression also occurs in the vice list in 1 Cor 6:9-10, where the references to “softies” (lacking self-control) and “bed-males” (arrogant penetrators of boys) occur as illustrations of the abuse of power (*adikía*) that heads the list of condemned behaviors (Hanks 2000:108). In Biblical literature the idolatry condemned (as in Rom 1:18-23, 25) commonly refers to the religions of cruelly oppressive *empires*, so writers like Paul naturally link the idolatrous worship that

rationalizes the oppressive behavior with sexual abuse (Hanks 1983/82; 1992). These factors would suggest that in so far as the Gentile “unclean” sexual behavior involved acts that were also sinful, the reference would not be to loving consensual sexual acts between adult males, but to abuses of power, as in rape (Sodom), seduction of youth and the sexual exploitation of unwilling slaves. But whether we emphasize the dominant condemnation of idolatry and oppression (1:18-23, 25, 29) and/or accept Countryman’s case for the “bracketing” of sexual practices as “unclean” but *not necessarily sinful* (1:24, 26-27), the Greek syntax in 1:29 and the rhetorical trap (2:1-16) render impossible any effort to extricate from Rom 1:24, 26-27 “ethical absolutes” condemning all homoerotic sex. As Countryman reminds us, “Same-gender sexual acts are treated here [in Rom 1:27] not as sinful but as consequences of a prior sin” (2003:177).

Countryman has shown how the earlier general instruction on believers’ praxis prepares the ground for the later deconstruction of uncleanness: What love commands suffices to satisfy the Law, even if it does not fulfill its letter [13:8-10]. The latter interpretation allows for the fact that Paul is about to *bracket the Torah’s purity requirements*” (2003:201). Concerning 14:14 (“**nothing is unclean in itself**”) he then observes: “It would not be a mistake to call this *the central affirmation of Romans*. I do not say that it is the central affirmation of Paul’s faith; chapters 7-8 may give us a closer view of that. But it is the principle that Paul sees as necessary to any resolution of the conflict over food purity in the church at Rome” (2003:205); cf. Thomas Schmidt (1995:74-75) and Robert Gagnon (2001:273-77) for unsuccessful attempts to refute Countryman and Helminiak). Countryman concludes:

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

Rom 1:18-32 + 2:1-16 thus constitutes the first entrapment where Paul sets up those Jews and others like them who felt themselves superior to the common “unclean” Gentile culture. The trap is set in 1:18-32 in the rhetorical denunciation of the idolatry, injustice and unclean sexual practices, and then sprung in 2:1-16 (actually extending to 8:39). Rom 9:1-29 + 9:30–11:36 constitutes the second entrapment, where Paul sets up those Gentiles and others like them who felt themselves superior to traditional Jews. The trap is set in 9:1-29 (with the concluding reference to Sodom in 9:29 playing a role similar to 1:24-27 in the first entrapment). The trap is then sprung in 9:30–11:36 with the teaching that the branches broken off eventually will be restored. The springing of the trap is then extended to 15:13 with the teaching that all *things* have become clean (14:14, 20). In addition to deconstructing Paul’s rhetoric against “uncleanness” in Gentile sexual behavior (Rom 1:24), his bracketing of Pentateuchal purity requirements (in 14:14, 20) may be perceived as specifically deconstructing the prohibitions of male-male anal sex (Lev 18:22; 20:13, echoed in Rom 1:24-32; Hanks 2000:91; cp Ron Long 2004: viii, 90-94; Bernadette Brooten 1996:283-83). In effect, Paul’s laying of his rhetorical trap in 1:18-32 leads readers to assume he is simply echoing Leviticus, while the springing of the trap (2:1-16) and declaring of all things clean (14:14, 20) make clear his conclusion that Jewish purity legislation was not literally binding on the Roman churches.

Jewett recognizes that **Rom 1:26** simply describes females who had changed the “natural *use*” of a sex partner for a use “beyond/against nature” (*para phusin*), and that Paul does *not* specify that this unnatural use involves another female (176 note 127). Jewett also recognizes that the reference to “*their* females” (1:26) implies

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

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

Rather than commending Paul's reference to women in 1:26 as an effort "to equalize the roles and responsibilities of males and females" (2006:178 and note 146; 2000:231), Jewett would have done better to grapple more seriously with the problem that all other Biblical references in both Testaments refer explicitly only to males (Lev 18:22; 20:13; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10; similarly the Koran), although heterosexist majority propaganda (including Gagnon) continually conceals this fact with prejudiced translations and repeated references to Biblical texts as condemning "homosexuality." Instead of imagining that Paul cleverly pens a new law and thus invents the new sin of lesbianism in Rom 1:26, best follow the Apostle's own advice not to go beyond what is written (1 Cor 4:6) and recognize that in Greco-roman culture "unnatural" was not simply a synonym for "lesbian." It is especially ironic that so many who conclude that "Paul believed that the law had been abrogated in Christ" (Gagnon 2001:241 in an excellent note on the subject), then imagine that in Rom 1:26 the Apostle invents a new law to add to Moses' 613 (see Rom 10:4; 7:2, 6; cf Jewett 2006:619). Few who advocate justice and equality for women would insist that said "equality" should extend to lesbians the death penalty for abusive/incestuous male-male anal sex (Lev 20:13; Rom 1:32)!

Bernadette Brooten points out that the reference to "**their females**" indicates "the group nature of the transgression" (1996:240) and recognizes the patriarchal implications of the phrase (which is not repeated with reference to the males in 1:27): "It is a logical term in male dominated societies, in which women belong to men and are seen in relation to them. This qualifying of women underscores their subordinate status within this culture" (241). Robert Gagnon agrees that the reference in 1:26 to "females of them / their females" implies "that wives belonged to their husbands in a way that husbands did not belong to their wives" (2001:236) and chides prejudiced translators who omit the possessive pronoun (see Spanish NVI) or mistranslate the phrase "among them"). Although denying any attribution of "misogyny," Gagnon acknowledges that "it is impossible to discount an element of chauvinism in Paul's remarks" (2001:302).

Jewett agrees with Brooten and Gagnon and chides the commentaries for not explaining the phrase, which he recognizes may contain "an element of chauvinism or procreational preoccupation" (2006:177 and note 135; Moo, Schreiner and Wright ignore the phrase). The reference to "**their females**," implying female inferiority and status as male sexual property, makes most sense, however, if the women were involved in "unnatural" (non-procreative) intercourse with the males, but would be strange if they had in fact escaped all patriarchal control and oppression to enjoy sex with one another. In addition, interpreters who assume that Rom 1:26 refers to lesbians have struggled to explain why the reference to females should precede the reference to males in 1:27 (Brooten 1996:240 note 73; Gagnon "Excursus" 2001:299-303). Jewett concludes that the order is determined by the rhetoric that seeks to give the most shocking example first (2006:178). However, if we recognize that 1:26 refers only to "unnatural" acts, but not a change of male partners for female, while 1:27

specifies the additional factor of males “leaving the natural use” of females to engage in anal sex with one another, “males in males,” the rhetoric obviously is climactic, ending with a reference to the male-male anal sex (idolatrous, incestuous, abusive?) explicitly condemned in Lev 20:13 with the death penalty. Matthew Kuefler concludes that the females referred to in 1:26 are engaged in cultic prostitution (a possibility Jewett does not consider) and critiques Brooten for saying “incorrectly that the Roman-period sources on homoeroticism do not focus on cult prostitution” (2001:383 note 55; Hanks 2006:594).

Jewett commends Fredrickson, who says scholars have been “remarkably incurious” about the meaning of *chresis* (“use”, Rom 1:26-27), which implies “the instrumentality of the object of sexual desire” (178, citing Fredrickson 2000:199; see BDAG 2000:1089; Brooten 1996:245; Jennings 2009:132). The common translation of *chresis* as “relations” instead of “use” implies a mutuality in sex, which *chresis* implicitly negates (199). BDAG recognizes that the primary meanings are “use” and “usefulness” but then with no basis gives “relations...esp. of sexual intercourse” as the meaning in Rom 1:26-27 (2000:1089; see “relations” in NIV; “intercourse” in NRSV). However, the reader who consults Fredrickson on *chresis* (199-205) may conclude that Jewett also was (uncharacteristically) incurious about the word, since Fredrickson’s study supports his agreement with Miller that Rom 1:26 does *not* refer to female homoeroticism (201). He points out that, although *chresis* is *occasionally* used of a wife’s “use” of her husband, he finds no examples involving other females (201, note 15). Since *chresis* rarely is used with reference to women, the female reference in Rom 1:26 may suggest the mannishness of women who seek to control the sexual act to avoid procreation. Gagnon emphasizes that in 1:26 *chresis* first refers to the females’ “use” of a male sexual partner but argues that the second use (implied but not explicit in the Greek) refers to unnatural relations with a female partner. He then finally manages to conclude that for Paul sex is “first and foremost self-giving rather than self-gratifying” and has its function in “giving pleasure to a complementary sexual ‘other,’” citing 1 Cor 7:3-5 and Christ’s self-emptying in Phlp 2:5-11; 2001:236-37). This final edifying point undoubtedly is true for the texts he cites (1 Cor 7:3-5 and Phlp 2:5-11), but according to Gagnon and Jewett the governing emphasis in each verse in Rom 1:24, 26-27 is on sexual lust, not sacrificial love (2006:178).

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

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

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

One of Jewett’s earlier insights is especially relevant: “On one level, shame is the embarrassment in getting caught. But at another level, **shame** is felt when others demean people on prejudicial grounds, not because of what they have done but because of their identity, whether it be racial, cultural, *sexual* or religious. The most damaging form of shame is internalizing such evaluations, which imply that persons or groups were worthless,

that their lives are without significance (lecture, “Honor and Shame in Pauline Theology: A Preliminary Probe” (ACTS Colleague Presentations, 14 December 1995, p. 1; italics mine).

Neither in treating *para phusin* in 1:26-27 (2006:176-177), nor in his treatment of the identical phrase (its only other use in the NT!) in 11:24, does Jewett recognize as significant that in 11:24 it is God who “against nature” engrafts the gentiles into the Jewish Olive Tree (2006:692-93; see Hanks 2006:587-88, with supporting citations from Eugene Rogers 2003 and Elizabeth Stuart 2003). Bernadette Brooten in a footnote cites Daniel Helminiak’s reference to Romans’ double occurrences of *para phusin* in Romans 1:26 and 11:24, but dismisses its significance as “methodologically problematic...because the two contexts differ so sharply” (1996:246, note 88). The relationship between the two contexts, however, is precisely what gives weight to the deconstruction. As Ted Jennings emphasizes, Paul (like Jesús; Mat 19:12; Lk 14:26; 18:29) counsels disciples to avoid marriage and procreation (1 Cor 7:7-8, 32-35; Jennings 2009:131-38). Instead of “natural” procreative sex (abandoned in Rom 1:26-27 and never practiced or recommended by Paul), the aim of the Apostle to the Gentiles is to “bear much fruit” (John 15:1-17) in winning more Gentiles to the faith, who are then engrafted by God “against nature” into the Olive Tree (God’s people; Rom 11:11-24).

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

For whenever Gentiles who do not *possess* Torah *by nature* (*phusei*) the things of the Torah *do*, these, though not having the Torah, are a law to themselves.

The two recent major evangelical commentators recognize that Paul uses “by nature” in the same sense (“by birth”) in both 2:14 and 27 (Schreiner 1998:123; Wright 2002:441-42; earlier Cranfield; *pace* Gagnon 2001:371, note 32; Swancutt 2004:69). Wright points out that Paul always uses *phusis* in an adjectival phrase (“Gentiles by nature,” 2:14), not adverbially (“by nature *do*”; 1996:145, citing Paul Achtemeier 1985:45). Finally, as Eugene Rogers and Elizabeth Stuart emphasize, in 11:24 Paul deconstructs his rhetoric about sexual acts “against nature,” affirming that God himself acted “in excess of nature” by grafting unclean Gentile branches into the pure olive tree (Israel). Such divine action that transcends “nature” obviously, was to be celebrated (Rom 11:32-36; 15:7-13), not condemned. The significance of God’s acting “against nature” (11:24) for interpreting Paul’s rhetoric in 1:26-27 was clearly emphasized by John Boswell (1980:112; also Countryman 1988:113-114 2007:112-114; Helminiak 2000:80-86) but ignored in the polemics of Thomas Schmidt (see 1995:191 note 41) in his determination to equate “against nature” in 1:26-27 with sin; cf Robert Gagnon (2001:390, note 68). Remarkably, Jewett (2007:175-76, 692-93) also ignores the fact that Paul uses “*para phusin*” both in Romans 1:26 and 11:24 (the only uses of the phrase in the entire New Testament!).

However, Eugene Rogers comments on Paul’s use of “against nature” in Romans 11:24, “Gentiles are so foreign to the God of Israel that Paul can say that God acts ‘contrary to nature,’ *para phusin*, in grafting them in. A phrase more liable to provoke...is difficult to imagine. Does Paul mean to compare God’s activity to homosexual activity?” (1999:64). Elizabeth Stuart adds, “Paul’s use of this phrase in Romans 11:24 is shocking considering his previous use of the phrase earlier in this letter to describe, not homosexual people, but Gentiles who characteristically engage in same-sex activity, a characteristic that distinguishes them, not from

heterosexuals, but from Jews....Paul is making the outrageous claim that God stands in solidarity with these Gentiles; God like them acts against, or more accurately, in excess of nature.” (2003:96).

Rogers concludes that just as God saved flesh by taking it on in Jesus’ incarnation (Rom 8:3), and then defeated death by dying (Rom 8:11), so God saves the Gentiles, who act in excess of nature (Rom 1:26-27), by his own act in excess of nature (Rom 11:24; Rogers 1999:65, cited in Stuart 2003:96). Countryman observes, regarding Rom 11:24:

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

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

And likewise also the males, after they abandoned the natural use (*chresin*) with females, were inflamed (*exekáuthesan*) with their lust (*oréksei*) for one another, males who work up (*katergadzómenoi*) their shameful member (*aschemosúnen*) in [other] males, and receive back for their deception (*plane*, error) the recompense that is tightness (*édei*) in themselves.

Quite possible is Jewett’ understanding that the males “work up (*katergadzómenoi*) their shameful member (*aschemosúnen*) in [other] males” [specifying anal sex]; highly improbable, however, is his interpretation that for their “error” (*plane*) of sexual perversion the passive receptive males receive back the recompense of “tightness (*edei*, from the verb *dei*) in themselves.”

- Jewett points out that *aschemosúne* may either refer to an “unseemly deed” or be a euphemism for sexual organs and concludes that in this case his translation “shameful member” is supported by the singular form of *aschemosúne* that follows the plurals of “males in males” (2006:179; see “indecent acts,” NIV). Although he cites only BAGD (1979:119) in support of his translation, BDAG (2000:147) also provides evidence: “nakedness euphem. = genitals”, citing Ex 20:26; Dt 23:14; Lev 18:6ff and in the NT Rv 16:15), although Danker prefers “shameless deed” in the case of Rom 1:27 BDAG (2000:147).
- For *katergadzomai* Jewett can cite Hippocrates in support of an “explicit sexual sense of ‘work up for use’ or produce juices ‘in the body’ (2006:179), but other Pauline and New Testament uses are commonly general and positive and provide no support for any specialized medical sexual sense (BDAG 2000:531).
- Jewett then concludes that “In the context of anal intercourse, the verb *dei* has a special sense of ‘tighten’” and again cites Hippocrates in support of the translation “tightness” or “soreness” (Jewett 2006:179 and note 156), interpreting the soreness as the “recompense” that [passive] homosexual males purportedly receive.. Neither other commentaries nor BDAG 2000 provides any support for Jewett’s recourse to Hippocrates and the translation “tightness” (2000:213-214). Much more convincing is the conclusion of Diana Swancutt that in Rom 1:27 the requital Paul refers to is what Philo of Alexandria (Paul’s Jewish contemporary) called “the disease of effemination” which commonly was thought to result in the case of males who submitted to anal penetration (2003:193-233; 2004:56; Hanks 2006:596-97). Although Jewett refers to the context of Hippocrates’ reference to “tightness” as being that of “anal intercourse” (2006:179), he then contradictorily concludes that “Paul’s language served to remove any vestige of decency, honor, or friendship from same-sex relations [generally!]. Neither distinguishing seduction of youth from relationships between consenting adult males, nor distinguishing between active and passive partners, as Roman culture was inclined to do, Paul simply follows the line of his Jewish cultural tradition by construing the entire realm of homosexual relations [not just male-male anal sex!] as evidence that divine wrath was active therein” (179). Undoubtedly Jewett is correct that we should take into account Paul’s Jewish cultural tradition, which limited its concern to male-male *anal* intercourse (Lev 18:22; 20:13) and never condemned lesbian relations. But why limit the

punishment to the passive partner? And why deny that the Apostle who penned Rom 12:1-2 may at times transcend both his Jewish and Greco-Roman cultural tradition, rather than being so totally conformed to “the world”? (cf Hanks 2000:91; 2006:594-95).

**1:27e *planes* error, wandering from the path of truth** (cf planet, a wandering body). Most understand the “**error**” (*planes*) in 1:27b to refer to the idolatry of 1:19-23, 25 and the “recompense/payback” to be the sexual uncleanness of 1:24, 26-27 (Schreiner 1998:97; Byrne 1996:77; BDAG 2000:822). Thus, William Countryman concluded that we should “take the ‘error’ as idolatry and the ‘recompense’ as the [sexual] uncleanness of Gentile culture” (1988:115). Similarly, Robert Gagnon translates: “receiving in themselves the payback which was necessitated by their straying (from the truth about God)” (2001:260). He also interprets: “The ‘straying’ or ‘error’ (*plane*) is that of not acknowledging the true God (i.e., idolatry)”, which he calls “the consensus view” (2001:260 and note 19; see Calvin, Hodge, Godet, Murray, Cranfield 126-27, Wilckens, Dunn 165, Countryman 115-16, Schmidt 83-84, Nissinen 109, Byrne 1996:77, Helminiak 2000:98-99; Schreiner 1998:97; TDNT). As Gagnon says, both Countryman and Schmidt point out “that Paul consistently used *plane* ...of wrong belief rather than wrong conduct” (2001:260 note 19). BDAG also backs them up, defining *plane* in Rom 1:27 as “an erroneous view of God, as exhibited in polytheism, resulting in moral degradation” (2000:822, citing Wisdom12:24).

Jewett, however, is among those who oppose this interpretation and rather interprets *plane* in 1:27b as the error of sexual misconduct (1:24, 26-27a) and the payback, recompense or penalty (1:27b) as the tightness or soreness suffered as a result of being anally penetrated (2006:180), thus implicitly limiting the sexual misconduct to male-male *anal* sex but with the penalty suffered only by the penetrated male. Others similarly designate the “error” to be excessive passion or homosexual activity (Schmithals, Fredrickson 215-217, Moo 116, Fitzmyer 288, Wright 434, Talbert 68, Swancutt 2003:212) while, Brooten leaves the question open (1996:257-58). Countryman argues that if we depart from the meaning of *plane* as a reference to idolatry we are left with a mysterious “recompense/ payback/requital” that is undesignated in the context, while the sexual uncleanness is clearly indicated in 1:24, 26-27 as God’s punishment for idolatry. However, with Jewett’s interpretation we can discern a certain coherent development in 1:27: leaving (“abandoned”) → lusting → anal penetration → punishment. Preferable, however, to Jewett’s definition of the punishment as anal “tightness/soreness” would be Swancutt’s “disease of effemination” that would affect both penetrator and penetrated. Jewett recognizes that the antecedents in 1:27 refer the punishment only to the males (2006:180), even though the purportedly “lesbian” behaviour of 1:26 was supposed to be the worst offense.

**2:1-16** Bernadette Brooten concludes her interpretation of Romans 1:18-32 by referring to Paul as trying “to *persuade* his readers” with his purported “condemnation of homoeroticism” (1996:302). More wisely, Jewett concludes that regarding homoerotic acts *no persuasion* would have been *necessary*, and that Paul would have counted on the audience in Roman house and tenement churches in 57 AD to agree with the negative rhetoric (2006:173), but that the text did have “persuasive power” to make its case “that the human race was involved in a consciously vicious campaign to suppress the truth” (2006:191). Wisest of all, however, is the conclusion of **Diana Swancutt** that *Paul’s aim* in 1:18-32 is *not to persuade*, but to **entrap**, and that to interpret 1:18-32 correctly we must recognize that the rhetoric reaches its climax only when the trap is sprung in 2:1-16 and the judgmental members of the audience tumble in (Hanks 2006:596-598; Swancutt 2003:193-233; 2004:42-73).

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

note 91). There Paul exhorts them to refrain from judging one another regarding diverse lifestyles and welcome one another in order to unite in support of his mission project. Paul's rhetorical entrapment of hypocrites (both Gentiles and Jews, 2:1-29) who are judgmental of others thus fits perfectly with Jewett's understanding of the letter's purpose in uniting the strong and the weak in the five tenement and house churches in support of the Apostle's prospective mission to the barbarians in Spain.

Although thus Jewett captures better than anyone the complexity of Paul's trap, especially its relation to Rom 14, he cites only Stowers' earlier work on Diatribe (1981), but not the later one (1994; emphasizing the relationship of 2:1-16 with 1:18-32), nor does he refer to Diana Swancutt's development of this point (2004). Thus, although commentators may now recognize that in Rom 1:18-32 Paul lays a rhetorical trap that is then sprung in 2:1-16 (and then applied more fully in Rom 14), the question has not been faced as to what, if any, "ethical weight" should be given to the elements in the rhetorical trap that coincide with common Jewish prejudices (Hanks 2006:598 raises the question). Obviously, Paul would want the Roman house churches to avoid impiety and idolatry and the 21 items in his vice list (1:18-23, 25, 28-32), but why does he bracket 1:24, 26-27 with the description "uncleanness" (1:24)?

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

**Three Hermeneutical Horizons: (1) Holy War against homosexuality (Gagnon) vs Paul's mission to Spain (Jewett):** To understand Paul's purpose in 1:16-2:16 we must recall (1) the nature of the house churches as consisting largely of the poor (slaves and freed persons), sexual minorities and led mainly by women (Rom 16), (2) the divisions in these churches between the strong, mainly gentiles, and weak, mainly Jews (14:1-15:13) and (3) the Apostle's effort involve these feuding Roman churches to help launch his mission to Spain (15:14-33) and thus usher in Jesus' return and earthly rule. The complex situation Paul addressed resulted in a subtle use of rhetoric in 1:16-2:16 that easily confuses modern readers, unaware of the variety of listeners, Paul's multiple intentions and purposeful baiting of his rhetorical trap with ambiguous language. Jewett's focus on Paul's goal of securing Roman tenement house-church collaboration in his projected mission to evangelize Spain with his liberating Gospel reinforces the recognition that Paul's concern in Rom 1:16-2:16 is not with modern heterosexist concepts of sexual complementarity but on the religious idolatry of the Empire used to rationalize arrogant abuses of power in oppression and violence (1:18-23, 25, 28-32), also expressed in abusive sexual relations (1:24, 26-27).

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

Traditional interpreters commonly place great emphasis on the significance for us of Paul's rhetorical structure with the 2d "God gave them up" (1:26; cf 1:24 and 28) and the related "exchange" (26) and "leaving" (27; cf

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

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

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

Jewett’s reminder about slavery raises the question whether commentators do well when they try to squeeze an ethical absolute out of a perplexing mythico-historical “decline of civilization” narrative loaded with ambiguous terms. However, if we allow Rom 1:19-32 to be interpreted within the framework of the proclamation of the Gospel of liberating justice (1:16-17) and the description of God’s wrath as targeting oppression (1:18, 29), we can agree with Jewett when he suggests that “Paul’s rhetoric may provide entrée into the similarly unhappy experience of Christian slaves and former slaves who had experienced and resented sexual exploitation both for themselves and for their children, in a culture marked by aggressive bisexuality” (181, citing Cantarella, *Bisexuality*, 156-64). Jewett himself, however, then concludes that Paul intends a “moral condemnation of same-sex and extra-marital relations *of all kinds*” (181) implying a “damnation” that would provoke terror rather than comfort for slaves! Best recognize, then, that Paul targets only those same-sex acts that were acts of oppression (1:18, 29). Moreover, if we hesitate to make a flying leap from Jesus’ parable about the shrewd but dishonest steward to an ethical absolute approving dishonest stewards (Luke 16:18; Harrill 2006:66-83), Paul’s employment in Romans 1:19-32 of a puzzling “decline of civilization narrative” should give us similar pause, especially given the Apostle’s deconstruction in the course of the letter of four of his five basic descriptions of the sexual practices referred to (Hanks 2000:91-94) and the limited, coherent norms provided later (Rom 13:8-13), where the hyperbolic rhetoric of sermon illustration aiming to entrap gives way to sober instruction.

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

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

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

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

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

having the devil as their father (John 8:44). But though humility and apologies for anti-Semitism are in vogue since the Holocaust, cruel homophobic caricatures of homoerotic relations are still often applauded.

However, the wisdom of a balanced alternative approach that takes seriously not only the inspiration and value but also the scientific *limitations* of Rom 1:26-27 for dealing with the problems of homophobia and abusive homoerotic practices today are already evident even in Paul's own sober guidelines for Christian sexual practices later in Rom 13:8-13. There the Apostle refrains from any sweeping condemnation or prohibition of homoerotic practices and draws on the Hebrew Bible commandment to love one's neighbour with its implication to avoid anything that would harm the neighbour, including covetous sexual lust (*koitais*, "beds" 13:13 + *epithumía*, 13:14) and excesses (*aselgeiais*, 13:13)—wisdom applicable to persons of all sexual orientations (Jewett 2006:826).

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

Convinced that heterosexuality was part of the divinely created order for humankind [1 Cor 7 and 11] and that sexual desire is essential to humans as *soma* [body], he [Paul] presents deviations from traditionally Judaic role definitions as indications of an arrogant assault on the Creator and as a sign of current and forthcoming wrath.... [In 1:27] the aorist participle *aphentes* ("abandoning") is the rough equivalent of the term "exchange" in v. 26b. It implies a departure from a divine intended, originally heterosexual relationship between males and females (2006:177-178).

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

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

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

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

In his controversial Australian doctoral thesis, gay theologian and astrologist Rollan McCleary (2004:328-336) correctly concludes that “astrology...must be perceived for what it is: a leading form of gay spirituality” (328—and not just gay!). Although recognizing that the study of astrology is “academically forbidden,” McCleary commends Brooten’s chapter on astrology as providing a near approach to modern “essentialist justification” (329; see the works of John Boswell on homosexuality as biologically innate). According to Jewett, Paul differs from Brooten’s ancient astrologists in explaining what we would call a variety of sexual “orientations” as a *result*, not some configuration of the stars, but of divine wrath (not the *cause* of wrath; Rom 1:18; 2006:173; additional categories, such as “active” or “passive” dominated ancient descriptions of sexual behavior). Jewett cites Brooten’s astrological and medical sources (177, note 131), but concludes:

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

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

**Jewett clearly expects modern readers to transcend Paul’s limitations and prejudices**, whatever they may have been: “The depiction of a particularly unpopular example for the sake of an effective argument leads Paul to highly prejudicial language, particularly to the modern ear” (2006:173). Earlier Jewett had warned that in Paul’s categorizing unclean sexual acts as “unnatural”, he is “actually raising a *cultural* norm to the level of a ‘natural’ and thus biological principle, which would probably have to be formulated differently today” (2000:234, citing Margaret Davies, “New Testament Ethics and Ours: homosexuality and Sexuality in Romans 1:26-27,” *Biblical Interpretation* 3 (1995:323-30). Davies concludes that we can no longer accept Paul’s view on homosexuality because of the limitations in his understanding of it (also cited but rejected by Schreiner 1998:97; Brooten 1996:302 reaches a conclusion similar to that of Jewett and Davies; see her treatment of nature/unnatural 262-80).

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

- 1 Romans 1:18-32 does not provide an explanation of how modern *individuals* become “homosexual” but recounts rather how ancient humanity as a whole abandoned the worship of the one true God for idolatry and were punished by being given over to unclean sexual desires and practices (Jewett 177, following Morna Hooker in relating this ancient apostasy to Adam’s “fall”; Schreiner 1997:81-82; cf. Gagnon 2001:286; Wright 2002:435). Hence, Rom 1:27 does not refer to individual males characterized by a “homosexual orientation” but to ancient humanity as a whole, its option for idolatry and being given over to unclean sexual acts.
- 2 In Rom 1 sexual uncleanness (v. 24, 26-27) does *not cause* God’s wrath but is the *result* of God’s wrath against idolatry (Käsemann, Romans 47; similarly Hays 8-9; Schreiner 1997:91; Jewett 173 and note 101).
- 3 Rom 1:18-32 echoes Lev 18:22 and 20:13, which refer only to male-male anal sex [abusive/incestuous?], not just any manifestation of homoeroticism, as worthy of death (Brooten; Gagnon; Jewett).
- 4 Rom 2:1-16 completes a sting operation aimed to entrap hypocritical readers who judge and condemn those described in 1:18-32, while practicing the same (Gagnon; Jewett; Swanson).

### **Jewett = Gagnon**

- 1 1:24 implies that the “unclean” sexual acts further detailed in 1:26-27 are *sinful*.
- 2 1:26 refers to female homoeroticism (lesbian sex).
- 3 1:26-27 condemns *all* same-sex acts as sinful (Paul’s mistaken view; see Jewett 2006:181).
- 4 References to “change” (Rom 1:23, 25-27) imply that for males to “leave” female partners in 1:27 is sinful.

### **Jewett not = Gagnon**

- 1 Paul has a prescientific (limited/mistaken) understanding of what we call “homosexuality” (also Furnish 1985:79-80; Margaret Davis 1995, whose article Jewett recommends).
- 2 Paul in 1:26-27 only describes and condemns homoerotic acts that are covetous/lustful and hence harmful to neighbour and destructive of communities; Gagnon believes that Rom 1:24 anticipates 1:26-27 and refers *only* to same-sex intercourse; 2001:252, note 14).
- 3 Paul’s rhetoric provides entrée into the “unhappy experience of Christian slaves and former slaves who had experienced and resented sexual exploitation” (Jewett 2006:181).
- 4 Male-female sexual relations embody hierarchical relations, not “complementarity” (2006:176).
- 5 Rom 1:24-27 constitutes a theological analysis of homoeroticism unique in antiquity but, due to Paul’s limited understanding of what we call “homosexuality,” should not be accepted as normative today

### **Neither Jewett nor Gagnon recognize that**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 Paul refers to an **ancient corporate experience** involving all humanity, who at some unspecified point rejected the true God and opted for idolatry (a “Decline of Civilization Narrative”); hence the text provides no explanation of why today certain *individual* humans or animals (observed in 450+ species; Bruce Bagemihl, 1999) are hetero-, bi- or homosexual in orientation (perspectives and questions apparently off Paul’s map).

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

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

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

5 Paul inserts a reference to idolatry (1:25) in the midst of the unclean sexual practices (1:24....26-27) to emphasize the idolatry associated with empires. Pagan idolatry does not represent just a silly mathematical error, but the religious ideologies that rationalize oppression and violence. Idolatrous humanity was thus given over by God to be enslaved to *inordinate (excessive?) desire* (not *disoriented* desire). What moderns commonly view as the “disorientation” of 1:27, ancients understood simply as a further manifestation of *inordinate* desire (the text says nothing about any lack of “complementarity”; Hanks:2006:585; Martin 342).

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

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

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

**Note: The Four Deconstructions.** In addition to the setting (1:18-32) and springing (2:1-16) of his rhetorical trap, Paul’s explicit double deconstruction of his rhetoric in 1:18-32 regarding sexual practices that are “unclean” (1:24 → 14:14, 20) and “against nature” (1:26-27 → 11:21, 24) should be taken as intentional and fundamental for the interpretation of 1:24-27. Otherwise it would be difficult to explain the choice of the divinely ordained “uncleanness” instead of human chosen “sinfulness” in 1:24 and Paul’s only uses of the phrase “against/beyond nature” in 1:26 and 11:24. This explicit double deconstruction should alert us to the intentionality of a third implicit deconstruction, wherein the Apostle’s *pride* in his liberating gospel centered on a *crucified*-resurrected Messiah both anticipates and deconstructs his 3-fold references about sexual practices that are “dishonourable/shameful” (1:24, 26-27“ → not ashamed” 1:16-17 → boasting, 5:2-3, 11; 3:21-26).

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

(13:8-14, love replacing lust, avoiding harm to the neighbor) makes such a leap highly questionable. Paul's later development of such trajectories in the letter suggest that the reader's leap to judgmental conclusions simply hastens his tumble into Paul's carefully laid rhetorical trap (2:1-16).

**Appendix 1: Romans 1:26.** "Therefore God gave them up to dishonorable passions, for even *their* females have turned from the natural use (*chresin*) to that *against nature*." Paul does not speak of "changing" male sexual companions for female (cf. 1:27), but only of acts that are termed "unnatural," that is, according to the sexual ideology of the day, *acts that avoid procreation*. Most probably Romans 1:26 speaks of Gentile women who offer themselves to men for anal sex, to avoid procreation (James E. Miller 1995:1-11; David Fredrickson in David Balch 2000:201; Hanks 1997; 2000:90-91; 2006:591-93 Christopher Bryan 2000:86-87; Mathew Kuefler 2001:283-84; Francis Schaeffer 1998:42-43; cf. Bernedette Brooten 1983:287-90; 1985:61-87; 1996:248-53; Martti Nissinen 1998:108; Robert Gagnon 2001:297-299; Stephen Moore 2001:143-144; Robert Goss 2002:200-202).

## 1.2 The understanding of Romans 1:26 as referring to heterosexual anal sex is the *only* one attested in the *patristic sources* until almost 400 AD and even afterwards still in Augustine (354-430 AD)!

(a) **Clement of Alexandria (ca. 250 AD)**, the church's first significant theologian of sexuality, followed his citation of Romans 1:26-27 with this comment: "Nature has not even permitted the most unclean animals to procreate by means of *the passage of evacuation!*" (*Paidagogus*, II, 87.1). Clement thus revealed that he viewed *both* verses to refer to anal sex (women with men, 1:26; males with males, 1:27). What links the two verses (1:27, *homoios*, "similarly"), therefore, is not our modern *concept* of "homosexuality" but the ancient *practice* of anal sex.

(b) A medieval scribe's marginal notes (scholia) in two manuscripts of Clements *Paidagogus* refer to the interpretation of Romans 1:26 by **Anastasios**, an earlier Christian writer, as follows: "Clearly they do not go into one another, but rather *offer themselves to the men*." Anastasios thus confirms Clement's interpretation that both 1:26 and 1:27 refer to anal penetration, and, as Brooten recognizes, seems to deny even the possibility of sexual relations between women (1983:287, 337-38).

(c) Even **St. Augustine (354-430)**, the greatest and most influential theologian in the area of sexuality in church history, clearly taught that Romans 1:26 speaks of women in relations "against nature," but in anal sex *with men* to avoid procreation. As Bernadette Brooten recognizes: "In spite of Augustine's awareness of female romantic friendship, he interpreted Rom 1:26 as referring to unnatural sexual relations between a female and a male rather than to female homoeroticism. For him 'unnatural' means that which does not allow for procreation, such as anal intercourse. He defines anal intercourse between a husband and a wife as 'unnatural and grossly wicked,' since it is nonprocreative" (1996:353). Brooten also corrects Joseph Fitzmyer's misinterpretation of Augustine in his Anchor Bible Commentary, 1993, insisting that "In both *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 20:35 and *De bono coniugali* 11f, Augustine quite explicitly connects Rom 1:26 with anal intercourse (Brooten 1996:353, note 207). Brooten spells out in some detail Augustine's preoccupation with and strong opposition to lesbian relationships especially as evidenced in his instructions to nuns in a convent (*Epistles* 211.14 and 211.13, dated 423 AD and cited in Brooten 1996:351 notes 203-204): "He tells the nuns to go to the public baths only once a month and then only in groups of three or more," in fact always in groups of three when they left the convent and never with only one other nun of their choosing (1996:351). Yet Augustine never cited Rom 1:26 to bolster his opposition to lesbian temptation. Amazingly, then, as late as 423, the church's greatest sexual theologian evidences *no awareness* that in Romans 1:26 Paul might be condemning lesbianism! Like Clement of Alexander two centuries earlier he takes for granted that Paul was referring to females submitting themselves to anal sex with males ("unnatural" because non-procreative). Nevertheless, Schreiner, arguing against Miller's resurrection of the universal patristic interpretation, labels it "creative" instead of recognizing that the post-patristic interpretation of 1:26 as referring to lesbians is the real innovation (1997:94 note 5).

(d) Brooten refers to **Ambrosiaster (Pseudo-Ambrose, ca. 366-84 AD)**, an obscure pseudonymous Latin commentary writer, apparently the first patristic source to take Rom 1:26 as "referring to sexual relations

between women” (1996:356, note 213; Kuefler 2001:384). James Miller (2006/7), however, points out the significant shift that occurred in Ambrosiaster’s interpretation as follows:

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

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

## 1.2 Rom 1:26 Bernadette Brooten and Stephen Moore on *linguistic usage*: “against nature”

Stephen Moore agrees with Brooten that Romans 1:26 must refer to female homoeroticism, arguing that “As for the women’s unnatural intercourse being anal or oral sex with men, explicit castigations of either activity as being contrary to nature are lacking in Greco-Roman sources (even including Jewish sources, whereas sexual relations between women are *denounced as unnatural* by an impressive array of authors over a long span of time....” (2001:143-144; citing Brooten, 1996:241-53; **Bold Face** = roughly contemporary with Paul):

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

Brooten’s (1-7) and Moore’s (+ 8-12) twelve references span a period of more than 800 years with only four even roughly contemporaneous with Paul, two of whom were elite Latin authors. Only one (Pseudo-Phocylides) was Jewish and the only other who wrote in Greek was the astrologist, Dorotheos, None represented Paul’s own peculiar Hellenistic-Jewish-Christian cultural-linguistic mix. That Paul in Romans 1:26 should provide us with our only example of male-female anal sex being categorized as “against nature” may be of interest to linguists, but hardly significant exegetically or for establishing Pauline behaviour norms. For

centuries (since Plato's *Laws*) Greco-Roman authors commonly denounced as “*against nature*” all sexual relations that were *non-procreative*. Only penis in vagina sex for procreation was categorized as “natural” (Ward 1997:263-84; Kuefler 2001:383, note 55; Swancutt 2003:196, 209-10, note 36; Hanks 2006:591-593). Hence, were we to interrogate the seven authors cited by Brooten (or Stephen Moore's dozen) whether male-female anal/oral sex is “against nature,” their answer would be an unqualified “obviously!” (it would not be a question to debate, but a dumb question).

Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Paul, gives only three examples of sexual relations *para physin* : (1) relations of man and woman during her menstrual period; (2) relations between different species of animals; (3) relations between a man and a boy, all indicating concern for *procreation* (Brooten 247), but he does not so describe relations between women. If we then scrutinize the sources to discern *why*, in our very limited (elite male) literary data base, sex between two women is referred to as “against nature” (once or twice per century) but male-female anal/oral sex is never explicitly so described, we may observe that:

- As Jewett and others recognize, **references to women are few** in the works of the **elite males** who did almost all the writing, references to female eroticism are even fewer, so references by such authors to anything as specific as oral or anal sex, not surprisingly, are very rare (Brooten 1996: 25 and 44 recognizes the peculiarities of her “elite” Latin male sources).
- Literary references are much more likely to refer to **public** characteristics and relationships than **private** sexual practices (Brooten 1996:10). Our elite Greco-Roman males mainly refer to heterosexual procreative sex or male-male pederasty and rarely refer to female-female sex, much less anal/oral sex of either male-female or same-sex variety (Thomas Hubbard 2003:16-17 and index).
- Lacking our common modern categories of homo/heterosexual orientation, ancient elite male authors rarely referred to male and female same-sex relations in the same context but overwhelmingly tended to refer to focus on **sexual acts** (of the penetrator, the penetrated, etc.; Brooten 248, note 99; Gagnon 2001:299). Hence the “likewise/similarly” linking 1:26 to 1:27 more likely would refer to the common unnatural (nonprocreative) *act* of anal sex, **not** to our modern **concept** of a common (homo)sexual orientation.
- As in the Bible and modern cultures, Greco-Roman sexual references tend to be **euphemistic**, making any precise legal/ethical conclusions exceedingly tentative. That a dozen such references scattered over almost a millennium of sources refer only to female eroticism as “against nature” and nowhere describe heterosexual anal or oral sex with this philosophical term is hardly surprising—when ordinary people (such as the slaves Paul addressed in Romans) refer to sex they commonly employ vague euphemisms, not philosophical jargon (see Paul's “beds” in Rom 13:13, the many references to *porneia*, etc.).
- This isolated linguistic phenomenon in Paul is of little or no weight when compared with **other factors significant for exegesis**, such as (1) the absence of any description/denunciation of same-sex female relations in the Hebrew Bible, Jesus' teaching and other New Testament literature; (2) the unanimous patristic tradition interpreting Romans 1:26 as referring to non-procreative (anal) male-female sex until around 400 CE.
- To suppose that Paul decided to invent a new ethical absolute condemning lesbians as a positive gesture manifesting equality for women, as both Gagnon and Jewett suggest, is grotesque when we recall that most women so condemned would have been slaves with no option of refusing the sexual demands of their owners.

As Diana Swancutt says of Brooten's position: “Her main argument, that ‘ancient sources depict sexual relations between women as unnatural’ (250) works only if ancient sources *only* depicted sexual relations between women as unnatural. But the bottom line is that they do not (and when they do discuss same-sex intercourse, it is the psychic and/or physical manliness of one of the women that is deemed unnatural” (2003:209, note 36). Paul's description of male-female anal sex as “against nature” requires no more

explanation than Philo's unparalleled reference to relations during female menstrual periods as *para physin* (see Brooten's citation from Paul's Jewish contemporary, 247).

Recent studies of "homosexuality" in the Bible commonly begin with 1:27 and then anachronistically read backwards to impose our modern concept of homosexuality into 1:26. However, for Paul's readers, following Paul's order, the female's partner was obviously male, but the apostle must then in 1:27 specify that the *males* abandoned the natural partner for an unnatural one (Miller 1995:2). Brooten (1996:249, note 99) critiques Miller for not taking into account all the ancient sources she cites in her earlier articles, but Bryan (86-87) cites Brooten's 1983 article as supporting the conclusion that 1:26 does not refer to female homoeroticism (attributing to Brooten the conclusion of Miller, whom he does not cite). Significantly for evangelicals, already in lectures taped in the 1960's, the late Francis A Schaeffer recognized that Romans 1:26 "does not speak of homosexuality" (1998:42-43).

A survey of the evidence, both exegetical and historical thus leads us to conclude that the New Testament, just like the Hebrew Bible and the Koran, contains no mention nor prohibition of sexual relations between women ("lesbians"). Furthermore, although traditional apologists tend to forget that women exist and that "homosexuals" include lesbians, once Romans 1:26 is properly interpreted, it becomes clear that **the Bible nowhere condemns "homosexuals"**: all other relevant texts refer only to males and the condemnations have in view some specific male sexual *act* (anal sex, in contexts indicating idolatry and/or abuse/exploitation/oppression/violence)—not *persons* of a certain sexual orientation (Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:12; cp the attempt to rape angels in Gen 19 and Jude 7).

Mathew Kuefler aptly comments "In her otherwise superlative book on sexual activity between women in antiquity, Brooten (*Love Between Women*, 195-302), is mistaken in her assertion that Paul condemned sex between women in this passage" (2001:383, note 55). Perhaps the fact that James Miller's article on Romans 1:26 (1995) was published shortly before Brooten's work (1996) contributed to her rather hasty response in a lengthy footnote (99, pp. 248-250, which was followed by Stephen Moore (2001:143-44), Robert Gagnon (2001:297-99), Tom Wright (2002:403) and Robert Jewett (2006:176) amongst many others. Citing Roy Bowen Ward (1997:263-84), Kuefler points out that "unnatural" implied "all types of nonprocreative sex".

Following Simon Jan Ridderbos (1963), Kuefler also argues that both Romans 1:26 and 27 refer specifically to **cultic prostitution** and thus considers Brooten mistaken when she says "Roman-period sources on homoeroticism do not focus on cultic prostitution" (1996:253, note 106). Against some recent scholarly denials, Kuefler argues that the cultic prostitution and male cultic prostitutes (*qadesh/qedishim*, "holy ones"; *kelebh/im*, "dogs") referred to in biblical texts *really existed* and were not just the literary invention of late biblical authors (2001:255-56, 381, notes 44-50; see "holy ones" in Deut 23:17-18; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 2:47; 2 Kings 23:7; Job 36:14). He concludes that various biblical texts reflect common elements of cultic prostitution related to fertility cults: (1) castration of priests (Deut 23:1); (2) sexual penetration of males (Lev 18:22; 20:13); (3) transvestism (Deut 22:5); and (4) the prohibition of wearing mixed cloth of linen and wool, the type worn by cultic prostitutes (Deut 22:11; Lev 19:19). Kuefler also argues that Rom 1:26-27 refer to cultic prostitution in the puzzling climactic reference to the males as having "received in themselves the due penalty for their error" (1:27e). Some have seen a reference to venereal disease (Craig Williams 1999:180-181), while others conclude that the "error" is the idolatry denounced (1:23, 25) with the penalty being enslavement to unclean sexual practices (1:24, 26-27; Robin Scroggs 1983:115-16). Kuefler concludes that the penalty is rather the self-castration practiced by the eunuch priests: "since the priests of the goddess acted like women they deserved the castration that turned them into women (257; see above on being given over to unclean sexual practices themselves as constituting the penalty).

Although Kuefler correctly credits Adventist scholar James E. Miller (1995) for reopening the case for the patristic interpretation of 1:26 as heterosexual, he mistakenly describes Miller as "the *only* scholar to recognize the phrase does not refer to sex between women" (2001:384, note 55; see Fredrickson, Hanks and Bryan, cited above). Kuefler refers to Brooten's citation of the *Apocalypse of Peter* (ca. 135) in the earliest version (Ethiopic): "These are they who cut their flesh [castration], sodomites and the women who were with *them*", which refers only to *male* homoeroticism and castration (see *New Testament Apocrypha*, Wilhelm

Schneemilcher, ed., 2:631). He finds additional support in Brooten's perplexity that the *Apocalypse of Paul* (ca. 200-300) also refers *only* to male homoeroticism: "the iniquity of Sodom and Gomorrah, men with men [anal sex]" (Brooten 314; Schneemilcher, ed. 2:733).

**Appendix 2: Robert Gagnon (2001; 2003; [www.robagnon.net](http://www.robagnon.net)),** Presbyterian New Testament professor (Pittsburgh Seminary) who defends traditional views on the Bible and homosexuality.

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

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

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

4 In his prodigious efforts to defend traditional views on homosexuality, Gagnon ends up referring to just about everything the Bible has to say and all our modern questions related to sexuality: adultery, divorce, remarriage, polygamy, concubines, incest, zoophilia/bestiality, eunuchs, pedophilia, masturbation, etc. etc., etc. Traditionally gay advocates have sought to keep the focus of the debate *limited* to homosexuality, lesbian soldiers, gay marriage, gay ordination, etc. and vociferously objected when opponents sought to inject other controversial subjects into the debate as if they were intrinsically linked with homosexuality. However, decades ago we learned that the problem in the churches is not that people don't want to think about or talk about homosexuality—given our western neo-platonic heritage most people in the churches don't want to talk about anything related to sexuality but keep the church focused on what they understand as "spirituality," which—Jesus' incarnation and resurrection notwithstanding—never seems to have anything to do with the body, much less sex. Gagnon's frequent reference to texts dealing with all sorts of sexual expressions and values, if studied seriously, can force the churches to restudy and rethink the whole area of human sexuality in the light of related biblical texts and current scientific insights. Since the shelving of the Augustinian paradigm (sex only within marriage for

the purpose of procreation), churches have been in crisis regarding sexuality, but unable to talk about it. Gagnon encourages everyone to think and talk about the whole area of human sexuality and attempts to correlate biblical and scientific data (an effort vitiated, since his scientific expertise is sadly inferior to his capacity as exegete).

### **Appendix 3: Heterosexism/Homophobia in recent studies of Romans**

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

Commentators who exegete Rom 1:26-27 as condemning all homoerotic acts and believe such teaching should be normative for the church today include:

Leon Morris 1988  
James Dunn 1988  
Joseph Fitzmyer AB 1993:269-95  
John Stott 1994  
Thomas Schmidt 1995  
Douglas Moo 1996:113-117  
Thomas Schreiner 1998:97  
Robert Gagnon, 2001-07  
Tom Wright 2002:433-35, citing Richard Hays (1996) and Robert Gagnon (2001)  
Charles Talbert 2002, following Gagnon  
Craig S. Keener 2009

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

John Boswell 1980  
William Countryman 1988  
James E. Miller 1995  
David Fredrickson 2000  
Daniel Helminiak 1995/2000  
Matthew Kuefler 2001  
Diana Swancutt 2003, 2004  
Tom Hanks 2000, 2006  
Theodore Jennings, 2009

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

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

Bernadette Brooten 1996:215-302  
Christopher Bryan 2000:84-89  
Brendan Byrne 1996:70, 76  
Troels Engberg-Pedersen 2000:209-212, 362, notes 52 and 53  
Beverly Gaventa 1998.  
Katherine Grieb 2002:30-31  
Stephen Moore 2001  
Martti Nissinen 1998  
Robert Jewett 2006  
Russell Pregeant 2008. The best treatment of hermeneutical issues.

**Note** Even in recent decades, standard commentaries on Romans tend to become exceedingly superficial and thin when grappling with 1:24-27, neglecting the voluminous special studies of these verses and related controversies dividing churches. On the other hand, the voluminous specialized studies on ‘homosexuality’ and 1:24-27 tend to specialize in the Greco-Roman background and become exceedingly superficial and thin in

treating the relationship of the text to the epistle and Pauline theology as a whole. Few are the authors who show competence both in the specialized studies as well as the epistle as a whole—not surprising since commentators are finite and the two disciplines immense and complex.

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**Chapter 10. When in Rome: The Interpretation of Romans 1:26-27 (129-)155.** From the time Paul wrote (50-58 AD) for nearly 350 years none of the Pauline texts commonly cited today (1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10; Rom 1:26-27) were appropriated by patristic writers into any homophobic discourse. Eventually, however, two related moves facilitated a homophobic reading (1) “to isolate these verses from their context in Paul’s letters” and (2) “to separate them from the social-political context within which Paul is writing” (2009:129).

Regarding Romans 1:26-27, “Paul leaves complete unspecified what it is that the females do that is against natural ‘use.’” Moreover, “the term that the NRSV has translated as intercourse [*chreisin*] is normally used in Greek to mean the use or serviceableness of an object or a person. It almost never has the meaning of sexual use....The males however do not *change* natural use but are said to ‘*abandon* the natural use of the female’ in order to do whatever it is that they do with other males” (132). Clement of Alexandria (ca. 250 AD) introduced into Christian thought the platonic-stoic notion that what is unnatural refers to nonprocreative sexuality generally. However, in 1 Corinthians, where Paul writes extensively on sexuality, he never refers to procreation as the purpose of sexual activity between male and female, but instead indicates that “sex has the purpose of giving pleasure and comfort to the partner, of assuaging desire and expressing delight” [1 Cor 7:3-4; Genesis 2:23-24]...At no point does Paul suppose that the rationale for marriage has to do with procreation” (133).

What does Paul then mean when he refers to acts “against nature” [*para physin*]? Later in the same letter, in describing God’s people with the extended metaphor of an olive tree, the Apostle refers to the activity of God as “against nature” (Rom 11:24) in the grafting of wild shoots (the Gentiles) into the domestic trunk (Israel). “If going against nature were such an obviously terrible thing then one would hardly use this as an expression of what God is doing, especially since this activity is the very activity that Paul has devoted his life to furthering....It is his entire reason for being” (134). However, “what is uncommon is that Paul suggests that *domesticated trunks* have *wild branches* engrafted into them....It is ‘against nature’ because it is exactly the reverse of common horticultural practice, which grafts *domestic branches* into *wild trunks* or uncultivated root stock. What is against nature is not the activity of grafting but rather the reversal of horticultural practice. Against nature is not ‘against biology’ but contrary to (universal) custom. Thus also in Romans 1:26....just as God has acted in such a way as to fly in the face of universal custom (by grafting wild branches into domesticated root stock) so also the females in Romans 1:26 are said to fly in the face of universal custom or expectation....Any behavior that is, from a general cultural standpoint, ‘unwomanly’ could be regarded as in this sense ‘against nature.’ [see Paul’s reference to differing male and female hair lengths in 1 Cor 11:14-15 as “against nature=custom”; p. 135]. Paul thus uses “nature” to refer to gender role expectations within the framework of civilized custom and in both Romans 1:26 and 1 Cor 11:15 what is against nature=custom is also described as *atimia/s* (dishonorable, degrading; p. 136).

“If Paul has anything sexual in mind [in 1:26-27] it is a sexuality that comes to expression in the context of an extreme rapacity of people in relationship to one another [see 1:28-32]....The inclusion of items like ‘insolent, haughty, boastful’ point us toward a certain class of people: those of the ruling elites [as compared with others who behave justly, 2:6-7]...Paul clearly supposes that there are some gentiles who act decently and justly and that these are not the enemies of God to whom he has been referring in the indictment [also in 2:14]....If we are to understand the sort of behavior Paul has in mind in verses 26 and 27 we must identify the behavior of the imperial court in whose name justice is both applied and perverted in the civilization as a whole....Paul is...showing that the authorities in whose name the law is applied to condemn and execute Jesus are themselves corrupt” (142). Paul refers to “the activity of the imperial court from the time of Tiberius (under whose authority Jesus was executed) to the time of Nero (during which time Paul may be writing to a group of people in the capital).” (142). “The women of the emperors played a major role in the tale of terror that characterized the history of this period” [142; see Livia Drusilla, Messalina, and Agrippina the younger, 143-47]. “...people with common sense in Rome would have agreed that ‘their women’ [1:26] had transformed natural service or use into that which was decidedly against nature....the dominant role of women in the corruption of the state and in the reign of terror of this period went against civilized custom. The role of wife and mother exchanged for that of assassin of husband and would be assassin of son; the role of matron for adulteress and prostitute, the role of sister for that of paramour....There is no need to imagine some reference to female same-sex

relationships. Something far more obvious, far more public, far more notorious, is quite adequate to explain how ...Paul can foreground the unnatural behavior of prominent women well known to his readers in Rome. This behavior...is deeply reflective of the violence and violation pervasive in the society as a whole” (147).

“Likewise the males....’ [Rom 1:27]. The behavior of imperial women is reflected in the behavior of imperial males...”(147; see 147-552 on Tiberius, Caligula, Nero [Neil Elliott 2008:78-83 argues similarly]). Even though Romans 1:26 does not seem to refer to female same-sex relationships, I have agreed that 1:27 does include reference to some male same-sex behavior [but is not] “a blanket condemnation of all same-sex behavior” (154). “In short, though Paul may have been personally homophobic, we can’t tell this from what he says in Romans 1:26-27. We know that Paul does not apply Leviticus to gentiles, as a matter of principle. We do know that he does not buy the Stoic argument (accepted by Jews like Philo and Pseudo-Phocylides) that sex is for procreation” (155).

**Chapter 11: The Corruption of Youths (159-169).** In second-century Christian literature the texts of *Barnabas* and the *Didiche* (written between 70 and 135 C.E. introduce a new technical term, *paidophthoreo*, the corruption or seduction of boys or youths or children, which is linked to the prohibition of adultery (*Barnabas* 19.4), sometimes as an expansion on the Ten Commandments. Thus, “you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery; you shall not corrupt boys (*Didiche* 2:2). By the mid-third century, Clement of Alexandria generally cites the Decalogue as if it contained the prohibition of corruption of boys (161). Of course in no known version of the Bible does such a commandment anywhere appear. The placement of such a commandment in the context of Mosaic legislation appears to have arisen as a way of updating that law so as to conform to the philosophical wisdom of certain strands of Hellenistic discourse” (162). Tatian (110-70 C.E.) makes a disparaging reference to Zeus and apparently refers to the abduction (rape) of Ganymede as an example of a “corrupter of youth” (164). In the same period, Theophilus of Antioch (115-168/81) adds to his version of the commandments “do not corrupt boys” (164). The habit of introducing a prohibition of corruption of youths into the Decalogue apparently did not survive the second century C.E.. However, the prohibition by itself survives into the first attempt in a church council to legislate sexual morality. “The Synod of Elvira in Spain around 306 (or 324) C.E. contains a number of provisions related to sexual practices of the laity and the clergy. One of its provisions declares that those who corrupt youths (*strupratoribus puerorum*) shall not be given communion, even at the end (that is as they are dying)” (169).

**Chapter 12. The Case of Antinous (170-182).** “The second-century Christian discourse on same-sex love differs from previous Greco-Roman and Hellenistic homophobia on account of attention that is given to the strange case of Antinous (the beloved of the emperor Hadrian), whose deification in 131 brought with it the rise of the last pagan cult to rival the emergent Christianities of the period” (170). “Antinous was a Bithynian youth, who, when he was about seventeen, became the beloved of the emperor Hadrian about 127 C.E.” (172). In the course of Hadrian’s campaign in Egypt “Antinous was drowned in the river Nile (about 130 C.E.)...In the event astrologers reassured the grief-stricken emperor that they had seen a shooting star that signed the resurrection of Antinous to the realm of the immortals. The grief of the emperor shook the very foundations of the empire. And the word of the astrologers set him upon the course of deifying the beautiful and beloved youth. This was the first time a ‘commoner’ had been deified by an emperor” (173). At least as soon as Hadrian had died (eight years after Antinous, 138 C.E.), Christian apologists went after Antinous as a false God. And it was his life as boy toy of Hadrian that gave them the most grist for their mill” (174). Examples are then given from Justin Martyr, Tatian, Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome (174-181). “Thus late into the fourth century Christian intellectuals are clearly stung by the comparison of their faith with the cult of the rival Antinous” (181). Moreover, such testimonies make clear “the strong felt necessity of distinguishing, as far as possible, the Christian worship of Jesus from the cult of Antinous. This, together with the pederastic relation between Hadrian and Antinous...would seem to make Christian rhetoric more disposed to separate itself from any association with pederastic practices” (180).

**Chapter 13 Clement on Nature (183-89).** In Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-213 C.E.) the execration of rival imperial cult of the boy-god Antinous together with the “Hellenistic notion of sex according to nature aiming at procreation come together in ways that will influence subsequent Christian discourse about sexuality generally and about same-sex love in particular” (183). “In *The Instructor*, Clement indicates his indebtedness

to Platonic and Hellenistic traditions....This comes in his discussion of sexual relations focused on the question of marriage....That is, the Mosaic restrictions are understood as having to do with restricting sexual activity to that which will procreate progeny” (183). “Eva Cantarella is correct to recall: ‘The Christians...did not make the world ascetic. Rather it was the world in which Christianity found itself at work which made Christianity ascetic.’ The tide of sexual asceticism in the Greco-Roman world...made a renunciation of sex attractive also to Christians” (186). Moreover, “we cannot but be struck at how mild the homophobia of Clement is, compared to those whom he frequently cites with approval: Platon Musonius, or Philo. Even at the end of two centuries of Christianity we have yet to encounter any discourse that takes advantage of the resources for homophobic discourse that are already widely available within the culture of the Greco-Roman world.”(188). “Even though Clement combines a number of elements that might be deployed for homophobic purposes, we are still a long way from discovering a specifically Christian homophobia. In order for this to arise still more work will be necessary to Christianize the Hellenistic homophobia that remains better attested in pagan than in Christian circles at the end of the second century” (189).

**Chapter 14 The Emergence of Homophobic Hermeneutics: Origen to Chrysostom (190-205).** In the third and fourth centuries most significant is “the emergence of a homophobic hermeneutics that reads biblical texts in ways that stigmatize same-sex relations....In the material to which we turn our attention now we will see the very gradual appropriation of the Sodom story into homophobic discourse as well as a slow process of interpreting Paul’s references in Romans 1:26-27 in a similar way....It is only with Chrysostom at the end of the fourth century that we will find several of these threads coming together in order to produce a denunciation of same-sex eroticism” (190). [TH Note. “Clement of Alexandria (ca. 250 AD), the church’s first significant theologian of sexuality, followed his citation of Romans 1:26-27 with this comment: “Nature has not even permitted the most unclean animals to procreate by means of *the passage of evacuation!*” (*Paidagogus*, II, 87.1). Clement thus revealed that he viewed *both* verses to refer to anal sex (women with men, 1:26; males with males, 1:27). What links the two verses (1:27, *homoios*, “similarly”), therefore, is not our modern *concept* of “homosexuality” but the ancient *practice* of anal sex.” See above under Rom 1:26]

] **Sodom (190-98).** In the discussion of Hellenistic homophobia we noted in the reading of Philo and Josephus, the innovation of a homophobic interpretation of the story of Sodom that contrasted with the tendencies of biblical and Hellenistic Judaism to understand the story as exhibiting the consequences of avarice, arrogance, and violence against the vulnerable....Despite his reliance in other matters upon Philo (and Plato), Clement does not appropriate this reading of the account of Sodom. Clement’s near contemporary, Tertullian, does make reference on several occasions to the story of Sodom. At no point does he connect the fate of Sodom to same-sex sexual practices of any kind. In fact the only sexual practice to which he associates the destruction of Sodom is that of (heterosexual) marriage!....Tertullian’s main contribution to the interpretation of the story of Sodom is to link the spectacular punishment of the city to the rather carefree undertaking of (heterosexual) marriage” (191). “There is then no evidence yet of an attempt to appropriate the Philonic interpretation of Sodom into a homophobic discourse....Tertullian’s somewhat younger contemporary Origen, in his *Commentary on Romans*, makes reference to the Sodomites, who were ‘endeavoring to commit lewdness even against angels’ (5.6.2). Here the sin of Sodom lies in an attempted rape, not of (other) males but of angels. In the third century Hippolytus makes passing reference to Sodom ...However, Hippolytus connects the sin of Sodom with threatening ‘violence to strangers,’ a view that seems entirely consistent with the story in Genesis” (192). “With Ambrose, however, we do get discussions of Sodom that underline its sin. Yet the sin here, as in Hippolytus a century earlier, is the crime against hospitality....Jerome makes many passing references to the story of Sodom but never uses the story to condemn or even mention same-sex sexual practices of any kind. He even repeats the warning of Tertullian against too much marrying” (193). “For the first time in Latin Christian literature, Augustine does also identify the crime of Sodom with something like same-sex lust, or perhaps rather rape” (194; see *To Consentius, Against Lying, par 10*, 44). In the *City of God* (Book 16, Chap 39) Augustine refers to Sodom as guilty of *stupra in masculos*, probably referring to same-sex harassment or rape, where the stronger party imposes his will upon another (195). Also in the *Confessions* (Book 3, chap 8, par. 15) Augustine refers to Sodom as guilty of “offenses...contrary to nature” involving sexual “abuse” (=rape), evidently “linking Sodom with male-male sex (as nonprocreative) with or without the attendant violence” (196). Thus, “we are moving in the direction of a homophobic appropriation of the story of Sodom. But we again must remind ourselves that it has taken nearly four centuries for the homophobic reading invented by Philo to become a part of Christian discourse” (196). Also, in the *Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions*,

perhaps from Syria in the fourth century, but unknown in the West until early modern times, we find “a curious blending” of the story of Sodom with the crime of corruption of boys (*paidophthoria*) involving interpretative moves that anticipate developments of later centuries (197-98).

• **The Appropriation of Romans (198-205).** In his extensive commentary on Romans Origen “shows no interest in developing [the words of Rom 1:26-27] in the direction of a diatribe concerning the evils of same-sex sexual practice” (198). In Origen’s *Against Celsus* he cites Romans 1:27 as an extreme and uncustomary example of corruption of youth, evidently a form of *paidophthoria*. Jerome refers to acts done against nature as sometimes positive, a manifestation of God’s power and might (perhaps referring to miracles) in a way that “recalls Paul’s suggestion in Romans 11 that God acts ‘against nature.’ ...Jerome can even suppose that it is the duty of the Christian to act contrary to nature in preferring celibacy to marriage” (*Letter 130, par 10*) Augustine, however, “contends that nature is good while evil is that which is against nature” (201). This leads Augustine to conclude that “sex with a prostitute or adultery is according o nature (though a sin), whereas nonprocreative sex with one’s wife is against nature. Thus, presumably oral or anal sex with one’s wife is ‘more unclean and criminal’ than adultery or prostitution” (202, citing *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, book 2, chap. 35 and *Good of Marriage*, par. 11-12).

In eastern Christianity, however, with John Chrysostom, the greatest preacher of antiquity (d. 497), we find the most fully developed homophobic appropriation of Paul’s text in Romans 1:26-27 (203). Chrysostom’s “Homily on Romans 1:26-27 “concludes with an excoriation of luxury and wealth, which he takes to be the chief cause of sin, including that which he takes to be the subject of Paul’s references in the Romans verses” (202). In this homily, preached around 391 C.E., Chrysostom refers seven times to the idea that same-sex love is “contrary to nature,” and adds Plato’s mistaken notion that such behavior is not found even in irrational creatures such as dogs. “Chrysostom also supposes (with Plato) that same-sex passion is the result of an excess of passion (not a deficiency in heterosexual desire)...going so far as to maintain ‘there surely is not a more grievous evil than this insolent dealing’” (204). “In this sermon...we have the coming together of Platonic and Hellenistic, and especially Philonic, homophobic discourse in a way that appropriates both Paul in Romans and the Sodom story from genesis to great rhetorical effect. In this case we are no longer dealing with an issue of violence among males but with the symbolic violence that any same-sex relationship is imagined to entail....Homophobic hermeneutics reaches this point in Greek ...much earlier than in Latin....” (205).

“The very fact that it takes several centuries for Paul to be read in this way and for that reading to be linked up with the homophobic interpretation of Genesis suggests that this was by no means a natural and necessary consequence of the reading of either biblical text, but that this reading was made plausible within the context of a preexisting Platonic and Hellenistic homophobic project. Once again it is not the Bible that produces Christian homophobia. Instead over a long and torturous path the Bible is conscripted for homophobic purposes in order to bring it into conformity with an already existent Platonic homophobic project. Even here we should not suppose that Chrysostom’s views are all representative of late fourth-century Christianity. Chrysostom himself gives testimony that his views with respect to same-sex sexual practices ran very much against the grain even of Christianity in Antioch. Indeed his own words suggest that the great majority of Christians not only accepted same-sex love but were enthusiastic practitioners” (205). Moreover, it will take nearly a millennium for Chrysostom’s homophobic views to become typical of Christianity (234 n. 8).

**Chapter 15 Homophobic Christian Law (206-19).** “Modern Western homophobia has appealed not only to the natural law and to Scripture but also to the legal precedents attributed to the Christian emperors of the early church. When Constantine promulgated the edict of Milan that gave legal protection to Christianity in 313 C.E., a process was launched by which Roman imperial ideologies and Christian perspectives began to mutually transform one another (206)....

• **Gender Troubles.** The two ambiguous fourth-century edicts (1, of Constantius and Constans in 342; 2 of Theodosius in 390) have in common “an obvious concern about the feminization of the male. Whether this was understood to have to do with emasculation for transgendering purposes, castration for the preservation of ersatz youthful beauty or more symbolic forms of feminization, what comes to expression is a horror of the transgendering or feminization of the male” (209). Moreover, the ‘exquisite punishment’ of 342 has become burning in 390 (209). “Studies of Roman sexual ideology have regularly remarked upon the rather extreme forms of Roman ‘machismo.’ The policing of proper masculine demeanor and comportment seems to have been something of an obsession throughout the Roman period. The concern about the way a man walked an

spoke, as well as the ways proper to a man to relate to other males, fills many pages of ancient moral and medical advice. Many have suggested that this concern for rigid gender dichotomization and fastidious gender performance has a good deal to do the vocation of The Roman male to rule, that is, to impose his will upon others, whether women, slaves, barbarians, or even other Romans. Masculinity was the gender of domination.....Christianity does a good deal to subvert this gender culture....Early Christian men were forbidden the manly pursuits of the military and the magistracy as well as athletic competition....Meanwhile the women were encouraged to have a certain independence of men by living together as widows and virgins in all-female communities even if these were their own households” (210-11) [TH note: Matthew Kuefler, traces how in the early centuries the new Christian masculinity sought to replace the Roman warrior with the pacifist, sexual exploits with abstinence, and political status with ecclesiastical office]. The Roman imposition of the death penalty was quite ferocious in its application (see the crucifixion of Jesus and countless others). “In the fourth century Christian bishops and theologians were still averse to the death penalty” (212, citing Augustine; [moreover, despite Leviticus 20:13, Biblical and Jewish history provide us no examples of the death penalty being carried out for same-sex relations, as became common in later Christian tradition]). However, with the imposition of death by burning in the imperial edict of 390 we have “the irony that a penalty...that had so recently been the punishment of Christians is now imposed by a Christian emperor upon those whose sex-related practices he found abhorrent” (212). “The statute of Theodosius [in 390] with its combination of a horror of male gender deviance and its extreme interest in the death penalty clearly has roots more in Roman than in Christian perspective....When conditions changed it would be possible to cite this code as authoritative grounds for the burning of sodomites and catamites, in the late medieval period and for other forms of the death penalty in the early modern period” (213).

• **Justinian (527-565 C.E.).** Famous for the rational reorganization of imperial law into an enormous legal corpus that would serve as the basis for law in all nations that were to be influenced by Christianity. To this corpus Justinian added two new statutes that for the first time indicate a specifically Christian foundation for homophobic law: (1) Novella 77, issued in 538, which attributed to the practice of lusts contrary to nature the divine destruction of cities [Sodom]. “The risk of depopulation occasioned by the forsaking of ‘natural’ intercourse goes back as far as Plato and was certainly insisted upon by Philo. Of course for Christians this warning could not have anything like the same force as it did for Jewish or pagan sensibilities since Christians extolled the virtues of permanent virginity for both men and women, certainly a far greater threat to population than occasional or habitual practice of same-sex love....This will later serve as a pretext for launching a crusade against practitioners of same-sex love in the late medieval and Renaissance periods....The connection between sexual transgression and national calamity is one that has been curiously revived in our own time with the suggestion made by the religious right that disasters like the events of September 11, 2001 or the hurricane that devastated New Orleans could be attributed to the existence of significant gay communities in New York as well as New Orleans” (215). (2) Novella issued after a devastating plague, as a call to repentance during Lent, on March 15, 544, where it becomes “self-evident that Sodom is punished for same-sex sexual practices rather than...as a representative of all sorts of public sin and injustice....After five hundred years Philo’s interpretation of this story is becoming a standard of imperial hermeneutics....Thus legislation against same-sex sexual practices is connected quite explicitly with the need to protect the empire from the wrath of God....Thus two elements of biblical authorization for homophobia [Sodom and Romans 1:26-27] come together here....Still lacking in this homophobic discourse, however, is the appropriation of Leviticus. The time is not yet ripe for Christians to cite the Mosaic Law in this respect....Indeed, Justinian’s concern seems to be entirely with repentance in the holy season of Lent. The sword is sheathed....Thus the ferocity of imperial law is ameliorated by the Christian proclamation of a good and merciful God. Hence the odd mutual transformation of Christianity and empire. The much more severed responses of Christian Europe to same-sex sexuality in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance may also owe to the sense of divine wrath occasioned by the appearance of the ‘Black Death’ that wiped out large sectors of the European population....It is important, however, not to read these later developments back into the period we have been surveying....with Justinian we have seen the coming together of the results of an incipient homophobic hermeneutics with the responsibilities of the Roman State and its actual or potential power of the sword” (218-19). [Note TH. Contrary to contemporary homophobic propaganda frequently voiced in the media, which denounces “revisionist/liberal” interpretations of Scripture, modern homophobic interpretations obviously reflect the revisionist/modernist interpretations of the later church fathers, which replaced the original non-homophobic interpretations of the first 350 years].

**5 Neil Elliott, “The Letter to the Romans (194-219). Fernando F. Segovia y R. S. Sugirtharajah. *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*. New York/London: T&T Clark / Continuum, 2007.** Con la posible excepción del → Apocalipsis, ningún escrito del NT ofrece un desafío más fuerte a la ideología imperial romana que la carta de San Pablo a los Romanos. Contra las pretensiones del emperador de encarnar la justicia del nuevo orden mundial, Pablo proclama que la justicia de Dios se revela en el anuncio triunfal de las Buenas Nuevas de otro ‘Hijo de Dios’, descendiente de la casa de David (citando a Georgi 1991:85-87 y a Stowers 1994:1-41).

**1 Bloques Hermenéuticos en el Camino.** (1.1) la tendencia de tratar Romanos como un compendio de teología sistemática (Melancthon; cp Bultmann, 1951; Segundo 1986; Dunn 1998); (1.2) el contenido de la carga teológica se enfoca en una de tres lecturas dogmáticas-apologéticas: (a) según la lectura soteriológica Romanos presenta la acción salvífica divina frente a la pecaminosidad universal humana; (b) después de Sanders, muchos leen Romanos como un documento de universalismo teológico que se opone al particularismo, etnocentrismo o privilegio nacional de Israel; (c) según la lectura sociológica Romanos defiende su misión a los gentiles con un evangelio libre de la Ley, oponiéndose a las presiones judaizantes/legalistas del movimiento cristiano; (1.3) estas lecturas tienden a aislar el argumento teológico de Romanos de la arena de la lucha política concreta y malinterpretan Rom 13:1-7, el único texto explícitamente político de la carta. Mas bien debemos interpretar Rom 13:1-7 en el contexto de la praxis revolucionaria de Pablo que resultó en detenciones, acusaciones, encarcelamientos y eventualmente la pena de muerte. Solamente así evitamos las falsas ideas de Pablo como “conservador social” o abogado de un “patriarcado de amor” (detalles en Elliott 1994:3-90).

**2 Desenmascarando el Imperio.** La lectura parte de dos percepciones exegéticas cruciales: (2.1) La carta se dirige explícitamente a los cristianos gentiles en Roma (1:5-6, 13, 14-15); (2.2) La carta alcanza su clímax retórico en los caps. 9-11, culminando con la admonición a los cristianos gentiles de no jactarse sobre Israel (11:13-32). Por lo tanto, en vez de leer la carta como una refutación de una teología judía legalista, debemos leerla como una refutación del naciente anti-judaísmo entre las congregaciones mayormente gentiles de Roma. Estas dos percepciones exegéticas reflejan el contexto histórico de la política imperial hacia los judíos como la minoría despreciada (ver el edicto contra los judíos del emperador Claudio en 49 dC). Pablo reconoció que Israel había “tropezado” (3:3, 5; 9:6; 11:11) pero insistió que “no cayeron por completo” (11:11).

**3 Una Opción Preferencial por los Débiles (Powerless).** Lejos de combatir un etnocentrismo judío en Romanos, Pablo se opone al etnocentrismo romano entre los miembros elite de las iglesias. En toda la carta la preocupación de Pablo es de animar a los ‘fuertes’ seguir una ética de ‘obligación’ hacia los ‘débiles’ (15:1-2), exhortándolos ‘solidarizarse con los oprimidos’ (*tois tapeinois sunapagomenoi*, 12:16). Como demostró Victor Paul Furnish, en Rom 12 Pablo exhorta a una praxis exactamente opuesta de la condenada en Rom 1:18-32 (1968:98-106). La intención de Pablo en Rom 1:18-3:20 no es demostrar la pecaminosidad de cada ser humano, sino advertir a los cristianos gentiles. Por amor a ellos Pablo no denuncia la presunción judía, sino distingue la triste situación presente de ciertos judíos con la permanencia del pacto de Dios con Israel.

**4 La Justicia de Dios y las Pretensiones del Imperio.** Desde el principio de la carta, Pablo presenta su praxis apostólica como la antítesis de la ideología imperial (Rom 1:1-4). Además, el alcance de la comisión apostólica de Pablo (15:19-20; ver 1:5-6, 13, 15-16; 15:18; 16:26) refleja la amplitud de la visión imperial bajo César Augusto (citando a White 1999) y bajo Nerón los temas de la grandeza y bondad de Roma florecieron. La ira de Dios (1:18) se revela ahora y en una situación obvia en la casa imperial donde la paradoja de una concentración de idolatría y perversión sexual (1:24-27), con abusos y violencia (1:28-32), fue visible en gente que se jactaron de su sabiduría (1:22) pero se mostraron insolentes (1:30). Estos versículos no constituyen una expresión paradigmática de la pecaminosidad humana, sino que representan una inversión de las pretensiones ideológicas del imperio.

**5 Genealogía y Esperanza.** Pablo declara su obligación a todas las naciones/gentiles (1:5, 13, 14-15; 15:15-16, 18-21). Sin embargo, Stanley (1996:105-06) señala que no hubo tal cosa como un “gentil” en la antigüedad, es decir una categoría ‘genérica’, pues las personas se identificaron como miembros individuales de una nación. Hablar de “conflictos entre judíos y gentiles” es confundir análisis social con ideología. Contra la propaganda imperial sobre la superioridad de Roma (‘hecho para gobernar’), Pablo insiste que Israel mantiene su preeminencia en las promesas del pacto divino.

**6 Resurrección y Perseverancia.** Para Pablo el poder de Dios (Rom 1:16) no se revela en la capacidad de Roma de destruir sino en el poder que resucitó a Jesús de entre los muertos (1:4; 4:17, 24). El gran error y pecado de las ideologías imperiales es confundir el alcance hegemónico con el destino histórico (poder con justicia, ‘might with right’). La lucha entre ricos y pobres frecuentemente es ‘una lucha sobre la apropiación de símbolos, una lucha sobre la manera de comprender el pasado y el presente y sobre las etiquetas que los describen’. Así John Dominic Crossan describe a Jesús como un ‘campesino de Galilea’. En el caso de Pablo el texto controvertido es Rom 13:1-7 que yo leo como parte de una estrategia *ad hoc* para sobrevivir en una situación imposible. Al reconocer los mecanismos y la legitimación de la dominación imperial hoy, la carta de Pablo a los Romanos nos ofrece líneas directrices para el discernimiento y la resistencia en nuestra lucha para alcanzar ‘la gloriosa libertad de los hijos de Dios’.

**1:16-17 (-18) The Theme (thesis, basic contention) of Romans (Jewett 135-47 with my clarifying insertions)**

**1:16-17, 18 *Jesus' Good News for the oppressed* 16 For I am not ashamed of the Good News [to the weak, the oppressed, the poor], for it is God's power for integral liberation to everyone believing, both to the Jew first and then to the Greek. 17 For in it God's liberating justice is being revealed from faith to faith, as it has been written: "Now the just man will live by faith" [Hab 2:4]. 1:18 *Bad news for idolatrous oppressors* 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all idolatry and oppression of men, who with their oppression even suppress the truth**

"On rhetorical as well as thematic grounds, I contend that all of the material through 15:13 carries out this proposition, and that...15:14-16:24 takes up its practical enactment....Despite the complexity of the argument, there is a single theme in Romans, the gospel" (Jewett 2006:135).

"...the subject of Romans is clearly Paul's gospel concerning [God's liberating justice] revealed in the Christ event and conveyed by the early Christian mission" (136).

**16** "The reference to not being 'ashamed of the gospel' (1:16) sets the tone for the entire letter....this letter is addressed to believers who for the most part belonged to the social class of 'uneducated' and 'barbarians'....For Paul, the shameful issue of the letter is the gospel itself, which proclaimed Christ crucified and resurrected....it is clear from 1 Cor 2:2 that Paul assumed the gospel was the message about 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' [see Rom 6:6; 1 Cor 1:18]....the words 'gospel' and 'apostle' are correlates...both are missionary terms....The gospel that Paul hopes to proclaim in Rome and thereafter in Spain was innately shameful as far as Mediterranean cultures were concerned...(1 Cor 1:23)...A divine self-revelation on an obscene cross seemed to demean god and overlook the honor and propriety of established religious traditions, both Jewish and Greco-Roman. Rather than appealing to the honorable and righteous members of society, such a gospel seemed designed to appeal to the despised and powerless...(1 Cor 1:27-29) [see note 29 on "the obscenity of helpless, naked victims" disguised by Christian art that always supplies a loincloth]....At the center of the thesis of Romans in 1:16-17 is the paradox of power, that in this shameful gospel that would seem to lack the capacity to prevail, the power of God is in fact revealed in a compelling manner" (136-37). Allusions to the power of God appear frequently in Jewish sources, for example, to the "strength" of God's hand in the exodus (Exod 15:6; 32:11; Deut 9:26, 29; 26:8)....The major point in the thesis statement, that the gospel is God's means of restoring [just] control over a disobedient creation, dovetails with Paul's understanding of his mission to extend that reign....'for salvation' ....Deliverance from the present evil age and the restoration of wholeness are implied along with preservation from the wrath to come and the fulfillment of salvation when the new age is fully present" (138). "Over against this politico-religious context [of the Roman empire], Paul contends that salvation is manifest now in the seemingly powerless communities of faith established by the gospel....All who place their faith in this gospel will be set [just], that is placed in the [just] relation to the most significant arena in which honor is dispensed: divine judgment. Thus the triumph of the divine [justice] through the gospel of Christ crucified and resurrected is achieved by transforming the system in which shame and honor are dispensed. The thesis of Romans therefore effectively turns the social value system of the Roman empire upside down [note 47 to Georgi 148-57].... [to everyone believing] Paul selects a present participle...focuses attention on faith as a continuing orientation and motivation for life....refers to those who respond to the gospel by participating in faith communities. The inclusive emphasis, with the word *pas*—'to all who have faith' is characteristic of Romans [75 times]....The Roman context required particular emphasis because of the tendency for house and tenement churches to delegitimize one another....['to everyone believing', Rom 3:22; 4:11; 10:4, 11, "always in the context of tensions between Jewish and Gentile groups", see Moo 68] (139). [Paul prefers 'Greeks' to 'Gentiles' to avoid the pejorative, disparaging sense of term gentiles...not second class non-Jews] (140). "Evangelical persuasion rather than political and military power is thus the means whereby the [integral liberation] of the world is now occurring" (141)

**17** "...the expression, 'the [liberating justice] of God' has a rather wide semantic range, it is best understood within the missional context already established in the first sixteen verses of this letter....Hermann Cremer...primarily relational, associated with covenant loyalty....Käsemann...emphasized the apocalyptic understanding....[in] 1:17 this phrase 'speaks of the God who brings back the fallen world into the sphere of his

legitimate claim.’ The gift of [liberating justice] brings the believer in obedience under the lordship of Christ....The idea that the gospel is the means by which God establishes his [just] rule stands at the end of a long development. The early phases of OT faith conceived of Yahweh as demonstrating his [liberating justice] by defending Israel and oppressed individuals (141) (Deut 33:21; Judg 5:11; 1 Sam 12:7; Pss 35:24; 50:6; 98:1-3; Mic 6:5, punishing evildoers...and vindicating the [just]....Jewish writings...linked the triumphant [justice] of God with the fulfillment of messianic hopes....a divinely appointed [liberator] will bring God’s [liberation and justice] to the earth [Isa 46:13; 51:5, 6, 8; 62: Jer 23:5-6]....Käsemann...did not take account of the establishment of new forms of communalism in faith communities....It is the inclusive gospel of Christ that equalizes the status of Greeks and barbarians, wise and uneducated, Jews and Gentiles, which offers new relationships in communal settings to all on precisely the same terms. The early Christian mission is thus viewed as a decisive phase in the revelation of God’s [liberating justice], restoring individuals, establishing new communities of faith, and ultimately restoring the whole creation...[Thus] *dikaiosisune theou* should be taken as a subjective genitive referring to God’s activity in this process of global transformation [see similarly God’s power and God’s wrath, 1:16, 18; the triumphant spread of the gospel, 15:15-28; Ps 98:2] (142). “The goal of divine [justice] is to establish [integral liberation], which in the context of the expression ‘to all who have faith,’ implies the establishment of faith communities where [just] relationships are maintained. It is essential at this point to recapture the social context of Paul’s mission....**The stunning feature** of Paul’s thesis...is its contention that preaching the gospel to establish faith communities, rather than force of arms or apocalyptic military miracles, is the means by which such [justice] is restored....It is the conversion of tenement churches and house churches that will provide the beachheads of the new creation. Paul’s hope in writing this letter is that this inclusive and restorative [justice] will be allowed to heal the divisions between the Roman groups of converts and thus enable them to participate in the campaign to missionize to the end of the known world...in Spain, thus contributing to a nonimperialistic redemption of the world....[God’s liberating justice] that is revealed in the gospel as the power of God ushering in the time of [integral liberation] manifests itself in a progressive manner... (‘from faith to faith’). The parallels to this sequence of prepositions make clear that a progression, transformation, or movement is intended” (143)...[Ps 83:8; Jer 9:2; 2 Cor 2:16; cf 3:18]....In view of Paul’s use of ‘faith’ in 1:5, 8, 12 and 16 as appropriation of the gospel that allows cultural variations to stand side by side with equal validity, it is most likely that the progression in this verse refers to missionary expansion of the gospel, which relies on the contagion of faith” (144)...As scriptural confirmation of the principle ‘from faith to faith’....Paul cites Hab 2:4 in a form that differs in significant ways from the Hebrew original, the LXX versions, and the parallel in Hebrews....[“The just one shall live by faith”, Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11] (144)...In contrast to ... efforts to construe faith in Hab 2:4 as ‘faithfulness,’....the word *pistis* appears.... with the connotation of acceptance of the gospel and subsequent participation in the community of believers (145). “The question of life should be understood as a matter of living together in faith communities rather than in the traditional theological sense of gaining eternal life on an individualistic basis. The proper question to be posed on the basis of Paul’s argument in Romans is not, ‘Are you [sg.] saved?’ but, ‘Are you all living together [justly] in faith communities?’....**The stunning feature** of Paul’s thesis...is its contention that preaching the gospel to establish faith communities, rather than force of arms or apocalyptic military miracle, is the means by which...[justice] is restored” (146-47).

### Problem areas

- 1 Uncleaness (1:24) = sinful? (Countryman, Helminiak, Hanks, vs. Schmidt, Gagnon, Jewett).
- 2 Rom 1:26 = lesbian/homoeroticism? (Miller, Hanks, Jennings vs. Brooten, Gagnon, Jewett)
- 3 Unnatural (1:26-27) = nonprocreational? (11:24, misiological fruit bearing; Gagnon, Jewett vs Jennings)
- 2 Rom 3:22,26 on faithfulness of Christ: translations vs. patristic interpretation
- 3 Faith in God, not Jesus
- 4 Jew- Gentile relations and salvation